

IDEA NEWSLETTER

Focused on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Advancement

IDEA Mission

The IDEA Committee was added to the Executive Board of the Cancer Biology (CB) graduate program in 2020. Given the historical and systemic racism that still exists in the scientific community, the Cancer Biology program has committed to taking a proactive stance in the creation of an academic environment that is inclusive, welcoming, and celebrates the groundbreaking contributions of scientists from underrepresented groups, both nationally and internationally. To this end, the IDEA Committee's specific charges are listed below:

- Building a strong, diverse community in the Cancer Biology Graduate Program
- Building an empathic culture which is responsive to the needs of all students and faculty
- Promoting more diverse representation at CB events and seminar series
- Implementation of aggressive recruiting strategies aimed at recruiting the most competitive students from varied backgrounds nationally and internationally
- Development of innovative infrastructure to support underrepresented minority and international students in the CB Program
- Investment into recruitment of local talent to our program starting at middle school and continuing through college
- Increasing knowledge of the current CB faculty and students of scientists not traditionally recognized or appreciated by the scientific community using in-person and social media platforms

We look forward to creating an atmosphere where we utilize the talents of every individual who shares our passion of curing cancer. Importantly, the IDEA committee will work hard to ensure that we pursue our goals of celebrating humanity through our actions at the bench and how we interact with each other.

Meet the Committee Faculty



Curtis J. Henry, PhD, hails from Lamar, South Carolina. He is a humanitarian at his core and an advocate for academic equity, particularly for historically marginalized individuals and those lacking sufficient access to academic resources for intellectual growth. Dr. Henry started his research laboratory at Emory University in 2016 where he became a faculty member in the Cancer Biology Graduate Program. He is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Emory School of Medicine. Dr. Henry has served on the Cancer Biology Executive Board since 2019, where he has held positions including the Chair of the Faculty Recruitment Committee and he currently serves as the Chair of the IDEA Committee.



Anna M. Kenney, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Emory School of Medicine. Dr. Kenney is a member of the Cell and Molecular Biology Research Program at Winship Cancer Institute and Recruitment Chair for the Cancer Biology Graduate Program. Dr. Kenney's research focuses on cell cycle control in cerebellar development and medulloblastoma.



Andrew L. Hong, MD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Emory University School of Medicine. Dr. Hong is a board certified pediatric oncologist at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. Dr. Hong's work uses functional genomic and sequencing technologies to identify new therapeutics and mechanisms in pediatric cancers.

Meet the Committee Graduate Students



Ewelina Sobierajska received her B.S. in Biotechnology from the University of Lodz in Poland, where she continued on to obtain her master's degree in the Medical Biotechnology program. She worked on two projects studying the delivery potential of dendrimers and silsesquioxanes in targeted therapies for breast cancer during this time. Subsequently, Sobierajska received a Visiting Research Graduate Traineeship administered by the Polish-U.S Fulbright Commission, which allowed her to train as a graduate research assistant in the lab of Dr. Anindya Dutta at the University of Virginia. Currently, she is a Ph.D. student in the lab of Dr. Haydn Kissick at Emory University, where she investigates how cancer cells evade the anti-tumor immune response in kidney cancer. In her free time, she likes to play volleyball and workout.



Lenore Monterroza is a first-generation American born and raised in El Paso, Texas, border city with Mexico. During her undergraduate education at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) she was a scholar in several programs including the Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement Program (RISE). She is currently a 3rd year PhD student in the lab of Dr. Periasamy Selvaraj, studying the effect of an autologous tumor tissue-based vaccine as a personalized treatment to elicit anti-cancer immune response and protection from triple negative breast cancer (TNBC) pathogenesis. She serves as the CB representative of the Division Student Advisory Council (DSAC), media liaison of the Latinx Graduate Student Association (LGSA) and Latinx representative of the Laney Graduate Student Council (LGSC) Task Force. During her free time, Lenore loves to travel, salsa dance and visit the theater.



Rae Hunter is passionate about cancer research and also science education. She received a B.S. in Psychology and a minor in Chemistry from Georgia State University. After obtaining her bachelor's degree she was a Teach for America corps member, earning a M.A.T. in Secondary Science Education during this time. Hunter also obtained a M.S. in Biology from the same institution. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the lab of Dr. Christopher Porter. Her research focuses on investigating the role of the innate immune system in eliciting effective leukemia clearance. Hunter has served in various roles at Emory including as an Emory Diversifying Graduate Education (EDGE) Ambassador, advocating for diversity and inclusion on the Emory University campus and greater Atlanta community. In her downtime she enjoys painting and writing.

In the Pipeline for 2021

Please be aware of the following upcoming initiatives and events that the IDEA Committee is currently working on executing this upcoming year.



- **International Students Day** - An event to both learn and also celebrate all the different cultures represented in our program
- **IDEA Team Building Outings** - To build camaraderie and also educate one another on diversity topics/issues
- **CB Research Database and Internships for URM Students** - Create a database for both faculty and underrepresented minority student matching for CB research opportunities



Unsung Heroes in Cancer Research

Dr. Jane Cooke Wright (1919 - 2013) was a pioneering cancer researcher and a surgeon, breaking multiple gender and racial barriers. Wright was born in 1919 to Corinne Cooke, a school teacher, and Louis T. Wright, one of the first African-American graduates from Harvard Medical School. Following in her father's footsteps, she graduated with honors from New York Medical College in 1945. One of her most significant research contributions was exhibiting the efficacy of methotrexate in treating breast cancer, a chemotherapy drug still used today in various types of cancers. Wright is also credited with treating primary patient tumor tissue with various chemotherapeutic agents to examine its efficacy instead of using mice. In 1964, Wright was the only woman founder of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO). In 1967, she became the first African-American woman appointed associate dean of a nationally recognized medical institution. She held numerous other prominent positions including the New York Cancer Society and appointee of the National Cancer Advisory Board. Describing her significant research in chemotherapy she stated, "There's lots of fun in exploring the unknown. There's no greater thrill than in having an experiment turn out in such a way that you make a positive contribution."



Dr. Charlotte Friend (1921 - 1987) received her Ph.D. at Yale and performed her post-doc at Sloan Kettering Institute. Following her post-doc, she accepted a position as professor at The Mount Sinai Hospital where she went on to publish over 100 papers and receive numerous accolades, including becoming the first female president of the New York Academy of Sciences. Friend was one of the first scientists to propose the concept of 'oncovirus,' the idea that viruses could lead to cancer. Her initial findings that spurred the idea was an interesting observation she made with Cecily Selby. They observed that some tumor cells looked similar to cells that have been infected with virus. Her theories were first taken with some skepticism, but her perseverance and continued efforts in describing how viral infection can lead to cancer opened up an entire new area of cancer research. Her research still influences science today as it is used to help develop HIV vaccines and her work on a leukemia virus, now called the Friend virus, is still used for mouse models in laboratories. Apart from her scientific advancements she was and continues to be a role model for women in science.



IDEA to You: Holiday Traditions Around the World

The holidays are a special time where the world pauses for a second and comes together, providing a special opportunity to value and count our blessings. In the case of many of us, it is a good time to pack our bags and travel back home to visit familia and recharge before welcoming the new year. The perfect occasion to eat a lot of homemade Mexican tamales, enjoy a big plate of Polish borscht, or a delicious slice of Greek Christopsomo cake. We prepare to celebrate the holidays this 2020 like many other families around the world by lighting up candles like "Día de las Velitas" in Colombia, attending "Misa do Gallo" (midnight mass service) as they do in Brazil, sending our wish lists to "das Christkind" (Christ child) like in Germany, decorating our homes with "Shen Dan Lao Ren" (Santa Claus) like in China, or organize "Presepe Napoletano" (Neapolitan Nativity/cribs scenes) as they do in Italy. Whether you commemorate Hanukkah, Pancha Ganapati, night vigils or visit a temple, we feel the same desire to express affection for one another, and feel joy and piece before starting over. 2020 was a challenging year that placed a pause on us from traveling, but gave us more time to find ourselves. We couldn't hug or kiss our loved ones, but we learned how to communicate love in other ways. We wore uncomfortable masks in the hot Atlanta summer to breathe, but gave earth an opportunity to breathe again. We wish you all a joyous season and a Happy New Year, hopeful for what is ahead.

