

# VIDYA



Renaissance  
School of Medicine  
Stony Brook University

UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

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## DEAN'S MESSAGE

### William Wertheim, MD, MBA, FACP

Interim Dean, Renaissance School of Medicine  
Professor of Clinical Medicine



We have had an eventful spring. There is, as always, a lot going on around the Renaissance School of Medicine, and I want to share a few bits of news with you.

Match Day is the biggest event to discuss, and we were all thrilled to have a real-life, in-person Match Day for the first time since 2019. Using the Student Activities Center (since the Galleria is used for COVID surveillance testing) was perhaps a more comfortable and festive setting, if requiring a longer walk. We occupied time with a couple of opening remarks, and some comedy

courtesy of two of our graduating students. But most importantly, our students of the class of 2022 did superlatively well—matching in programs of their choice, and representing Renaissance School of Medicine (RSOM) both at Stony Brook University Hospital and at other prestigious programs across the country. I am delighted that so many are staying here—the largest group in my memory—and also delighted at the programs where students matched overall. It is a testament to the esteem in which RSOM students are held across the nation and to the hard work and dedication of

*(continued on page 2)*

## UPDATE FROM THE OFFICE OF UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

### Andrew Wackett, MD

Vice Dean, Undergraduate Medical Education  
Director, Clinical Simulation Center  
Clinical Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine



Congratulations to the class of 2022 on their graduation from the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University. They have done very well academically, continuing to excel at all the national standardized exams, and have successfully matched into very competitive residency programs. We have no doubt that many of them will end up as chief residents and future leaders in medicine.

During our students' training, their world was turned upside down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On a personal level,

the pandemic temporarily interrupted their clerkship training. On a national level, the pandemic exposed our healthcare system for the disparities of care that are endemic. Our students rose to the occasion. They returned to their clinical responsibilities and fearlessly treated their patients, never questioning the risks they might be taking. Despite their busy schedules, they volunteered to help patients, faculty and staff cope throughout this difficult time. In fact, they were instrumental in vaccinating our community. They challenged our healthcare system and our medical school

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**Dean's Message** *continued from cover*

RSOM students to their studies, community, and selected specialties. It also reflects the hard work and wisdom of the whole UGME office, both with the rigor of its preparation and in the insight of its counseling.

Graduation will also be in person, and we continue to ease back into a set of ceremonies that more resembles past years. I know it will be a moment of great pride and joy for the graduates and their families, and I am excited to see everyone in person. I think it is important to note that the class of 2022's experience in medical school was marked and affected by COVID, but it was not hindered by COVID. Some of their experiences were altered and made remote, but we have learned so much since the spring of 2020 (and much of that learning

about how to best treat COVID occurred right here at RSOM!) and are able to provide the kinds of experiences our students need to be able to thrive in their careers going forward. As I mentioned in my Match Day remarks, while COVID has been a disruption, it has also created opportunities for students to witness the advances of science and how they are incorporated into practice, for the speed with which recognition of new conditions gets incorporated into medical care, and for some of the impediments to adopting those new advances. These are excellent lessons that will serve us throughout all our careers.

Finally, I want to mention again our 50th anniversary as a medical school. In the 1971–72 academic year, a small group of

intrepid students and faculty set out on a pioneering journey to learn medicine in an innovative environment. We've since graduated thousands of students, creating education and scholarship where none existed before, growing and expanding a hospital that provides services found nowhere else in the county and an enormous clinical ambulatory footprint throughout Suffolk County, and fostered within our walls, countless discoveries and advances in both basic and clinical science. Our celebrations of these amazing achievements have already begun, but they will culminate on May 14 at the RSOM 50th anniversary Evening of the Arts. It will be a night to remember! •

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**Update from the Office of Undergraduate Medical Education** *continued from cover*

curriculum, and pointed us in the direction to eliminate healthcare disparities. We listened and implemented many changes to our curriculum. Finally, despite the challenging virtual interview season, they secured residency training among the most competitive specialties, and at the most competitive programs. Congratulations, we are so proud of you all!

Our faculty has served as beacons of hope throughout this challenging time. They rose to the challenge of delivering a hybrid

education, including both outstanding remote education and safe in-person face-to-face clinical training. The administration also stepped up their game when it came to maintaining open lines of communication, and they have gone out of their way to serve the needs of our students.

Our resilience was tested, our resolve tried, but we remained strong and steady. Now after more than two years of darkness and despair, we are finally reaching a hopeful

place. We are transitioning from a pandemic to a disease that is endemic.

Our 2022 graduates have had a unique medical education, one that has emphasized the importance of the collaboration between medicine and public health. They will be ready to lead us through the next healthcare crisis as they start their residency training. We wish them great success in their journeys ahead. We will miss their outstanding energy and commitment. •



VIDYA, the name chosen for this newsletter, is a Sanskrit word meaning knowledge.

Since the newsletter is devoted to covering the educational aspects of the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, this name is especially meaningful. Part of a student's education during medical school is the pursuit of knowledge and learning. Published twice a year in May and August, VIDYA is available as a printed piece and can be viewed online.

# CAROLING EVENT



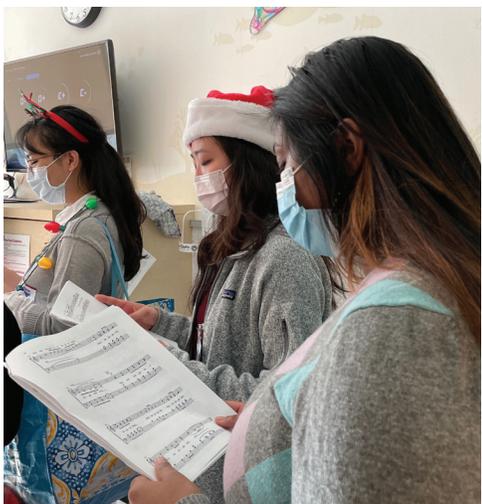
Mahesh Tiwari,  
Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, Class of 2024

Christina Mazza,  
Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

Jennifer Yang,  
Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

**With another year almost behind us, the Lymph Nodes, the Visual Arts in Medicine Club, and Smile Buddies of the Renaissance School of Medicine came together to bring holiday cheer to Stony Brook University Hospital through caroling, a joyous event.**

You couldn't help but smile as you heard familiar songs such as "Jingle Bell Rock" and "Silent Night" fill the lobby. As they traveled through the pediatric floors, the students also handed out toys to all of the children! While each year can bring unexpected struggles, we know there are a few things—like singing and toys—that can always bring us together with a smile. •

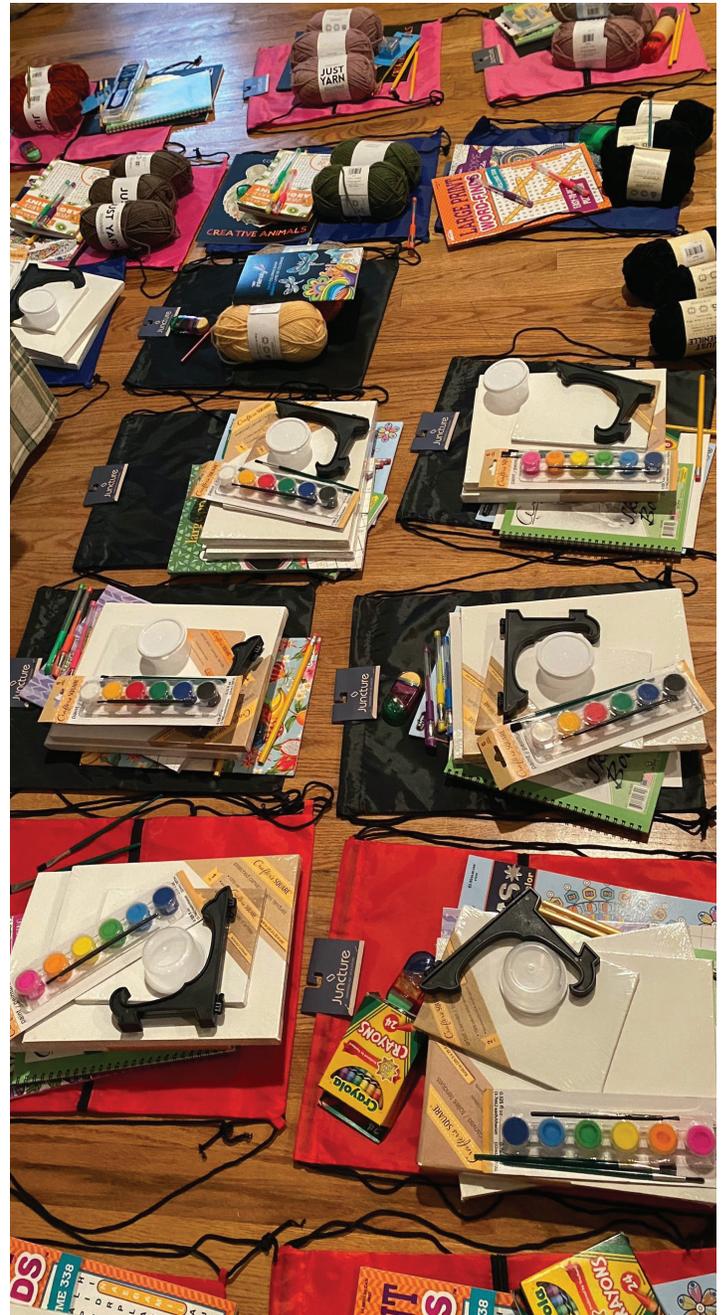


# ART BAG FUNDRAISER

The Visual Arts in Medicine Club, founded in 2018, strongly believes in the integration of art into medicine and healing.

Before COVID-19, members of the club and the student body would visit the 19th floor to collaborate on different art projects with the patients receiving chemotherapy treatment, under the guidance of Taylor Andrews, Nurse Manager of the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, volunteering on the floor has been temporarily suspended in order to protect the health of a vulnerable patient population.

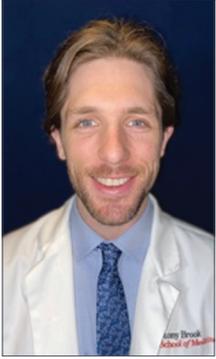
Initially, the Visual Arts in Medicine Club tried to maintain contact with patients through a phone system, where patients could speak directly to the volunteer medical students who once visited their rooms. In an effort to bring art back onto the floor, the current e-board came up with the idea of creating art bags that each patient could keep. Money fundraised through the student body was used to buy art supplies, such as coloring books, painting supplies, molding clay, journals and yarn. Although they are not able to be with the patients in person, the Visual Arts in Medicine Club hopes that these packages can help bring the patients a little bit of joy and aid in their healing process through art. •



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# STUDENT REFLECTIONS

## Reflections on the Stony Brook Medical Scientist Training Program



By Michael Tyler Guinn

Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

The idea of becoming a physician, let alone getting a research doctorate degree, was an idea that developed quite late in life for me. In high school, I worked as a store clerk in a little town (Rowlett, Texas) and medicine was not even on my radar. At the end of high school, however, a chance opportunity opened up for a pharmacy technician job, I accepted,

and the course of my life was forever changed. In this job, I found myself really enjoying the interactions I had with patients and after a few months, I decided to pursue a medical track. As I started this journey, I also had an interest in engineering, which led me to join a bioengineering lab, again morphing my life trajectory as I discovered MD-PhD programs and began pursuing a new course. I started looking for programs with both a strong medical and engineering presence, ultimately leading me across the country to Stony Brook University.

Toward the end of the medical school interview season, an acceptance letter came from Stony Brook and I had a mix of joy, disbelief and nervousness for the near-decade-long journey ahead. The summer before medical school approached, so I packed my car with a few clothes, books and a guitar, and made the trip across the country with the sounds of the radio to keep me company, hardly knowing anyone in New York. However, there was a researcher I had the great fortune to meet during a visit to Stony Brook, Dr. Gábor Balázs, who changed the course of my life. He was a physicist by training who used synthetic biology (a subdiscipline of bioengineering) to study cancer and cell engineering. I ultimately rotated in his lab before the start of medical school, which reaffirmed my desire to study bioengineering for my PhD.

After the rotation, I transitioned into medical school, going through the age-old experiences of anatomy lab and long hours of studying, which became one of the most instrumental times of my life. In addition, having Medical Scientist Training Program (MSTP) meetings like clinician-scientist dinners, research days and journal clubs during this time gave me early exposure to skills needed for balancing both research and medicine. This became crucial as I found myself contacting Dr. Balázs to discuss completing my PhD in his lab after finishing the first half of medical school. I thought the lab's focus on using bioengineering tools to study cancer applications would align nicely with pursuing a medical oncology career. But serendipity struck again, pushing me toward a new path that ultimately led to surgery.

The first event pushing me toward surgery was an experience that allowed Stony Brook PhD students into the operating room to inspire multidisciplinary projects. This was my first OR visit, and I was immediately captivated by the complexity, team dynamics, innovation, technology and problem-solving used in this environment to treat patients. The second event leading me to surgery was my thesis project, which, despite being designed for cancer purposes, became scalable to tissue engineering for transplantation applications when I got a research grant from the Department of Defense (National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate Fellowship). This new research avenue led me to explore organ transplantation and the crucial roles transplant surgeons have played over the past decades in innovation. My last experience solidifying a surgical path was a technical aspect of my PhD requiring me to solder electrical equipment with a high level of dexterity to avoid circuit board destruction. This reminded me of the surgeons I had watched and the technical aspects I could foresee enjoying as a surgeon. As I approached the end of my PhD, the idea of becoming a surgeon-scientist solidified in my mind to leverage my bioengineering training to build artificial organs for transplant surgery.

As I returned to the wards for the last leg of the "MSTP race," I found the analytical skills I developed during graduate school aligned with clinical judgment I saw in many of my surgeon role models. Dr. Samer Sbayi, Dr. Allison McLarty, Dr. Helen Hsieh, and Dr. Henry Tannous were some of the most instrumental surgeons I got to work with who reaffirmed my surgical aspirations and illustrated the richness of surgical research. More specifically, I had the chance to participate in a left ventricular assist device (LVAD) operation with Dr. McLarty, which convinced me cardiothoracic surgery was the area I could bring my engineering and medical background together to innovate in the lab for heart and lung transplant research. These experiences and the Stony Brook MSTP mentorship even made it possible to start a transplant immunology research sabbatical at Massachusetts General Hospital during my last year of medical school, which gave me new perspectives on cardiothoracic organ transplantation.

With my MSTP journey now coming to a close, I have the extraordinary opportunity to take my Stony Brook training to one of the most storied places in cardiothoracic surgery, Baylor College of Medicine's Michael E. DeBakey Department of Surgery. On one hand, I have tremendous joy that this program found me well aligned with their goals and mission of creating surgeon-scientists, maintaining the culture of innovation in surgery, and upholding excellence in

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# MATCH DAY CELEBRATION 2022



# This year's Match Day Celebration was held on Friday, March 18, 2022 in the Student Activity Center Ballroom.

**We had another successful Match this year, with 98 percent of the class matching to a residency program (131 students).**

Thirty-one percent of students matched to Primary Care residencies (medicine, pediatrics, family medicine, med/peds), while others matched in other specialties such as anesthesiology, dermatology, emergency medicine, general surgery, neurological surgery, neurology, OB/Gyn, ophthalmology, orthopaedic surgery, otolaryngology, PM&R, plastic surgery, psychiatry, radiology-diagnostic and urology.

A record number of students matched in neurological surgery, including four women. •



# MATCH DAY CELEBRATION 2022 (CONTINUED)



## MATCH DAY CATEGORICAL LIST

SPECIALTY	# STUDENTS	LOCATIONS
Anesthesiology	14	Ohio State University Med Ctr, Brown Univ/Rhode Island Hosp, Cleveland Clinic Fdn, Lahey Clinic, Loma Linda University, Loyola Univ Med Ctr, Nuvance Health, Stony Brook Teach Hosps, Thomas Jefferson Univ, U Miami/Jackson Health System, UMass Chan Medical School, Westchester Medical Ctr, U Washington Affil Hosps, NYU Grossman School Of Medicine
Dermatology	1	SUNY HSC Brooklyn
Emergency Medicine	15	ISMMS Mount Sinai Morningside-West, Johns Hopkins Hosp, Riverside Community Hospital, Stony Brook Teach Hosps, U Texas Med Sch-Houston, UMass Chan Medical School, UPMC Medical Education, Yale-New Haven Hosp, Zucker SOM-Northwell NS/LIJ, Zucker SOM-Northwell Staten Island Univ
Family Medicine	6	ISMMS Mount Sinai Hospital, Kaiser Permanente-San Jose, UHS-Wilson Med Ctr, Univ of Vermont Medical Center, Zucker SOM-Northwell Glen Cove Hosp, Brown Univ/Kent Hospital
General Surgery	7	New York-Presbyterian/Queens, Rutgers-R W Johnson Medical School, U Miami/Jackson Health System, U North Carolina Hospitals, Baylor Coll Med-Houston, Westchester Medical Ctr
Internal Medicine	20	NYP Hosp-Weill Cornell Med Ctr, U North Carolina Hospitals, Albert Einstein Med Ctr, Cedars-Sinai Med Ctr, CMSRU/Cooper University Hospital, ISMMS Mount Sinai Hospital, Kaiser Permanente-SF, Massachusetts Gen Hosp, NYU Grossman School Of Medicine, Rush University Med Ctr, Rutgers-R W Johnson Medical School, Rutgers-R W Johnson Medical School, Scripps Clinic/Green Hospital, Stony Brook Teach Hosps, Temple Univ Hosp, U Nevada Reno SOM, UC San Diego Med Ctr, Zucker SOM-Northwell NS/LIJ
Med/Peds	2	Stony Brook Teach Hosps-NY
Neurological Surgery	5	Loma Linda University, Stony Brook Teach Hosps, U Washington Affil Hosps, Univ of Chicago Med Ctr, Virginia Commonwealth U Hlth Sys

To watch the entire Renaissance School of Medicine Match Day event, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWSXirpC4g0> or scan QR code.



<b>Neurology</b>	4	B I Deaconess Med Ctr, UC Irvine Med Ctr, Wake Forest Baptist Med Ctr, Stony Brook Teach Hosps
<b>Obstetrics-Gynecology</b>	9	Jamaica Hosp Med Ctr, ISMMS Mount Sinai Hospital, Rutgers-R W Johnson Medical School, Stamford Hospital/Columbia, Stony Brook Teach Hosps, U North Carolina Hospitals, U Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics, Univ of Vermont Medical Center, Zucker SOM-Northwell NS/LIJ
<b>Ophthalmology</b>	2	Case Western/Univ Hosps Cleveland Med Ctr, SUNY HSC Brooklyn
<b>Orthopaedic Surgery</b>	5	Montefiore Med Ctr/Einstein, Stony Brook Teach Hosps, U Miami/Jackson Health System, U Southern California
<b>Otolaryngology</b>	1	Albany Med Ctr
<b>Pediatrics</b>	11	Childrens Hospital-LA, Childrens National Med Ctr-DC, Childrens National Med Ctr-DC, Johns Hopkins Hosp, Stony Brook Teach Hosps, U Texas at Austin Dell Medical School, Wake Forest Baptist Med Ctr, Zucker SOM-Northwell Cohen Childrens, ISMMS Mount Sinai Hospital
<b>Phys Medicine &amp; Rehab</b>	5	Stony Brook Teach Hosps, U Miami/Jackson Health System, U Rochester/Strong Memorial, VA Greater LA Hlth Sys
<b>Plastic Surgery</b>	2	Geisinger Health System, ISMMS Mount Sinai Hospital
<b>Psychiatry</b>	9	ISMMS Mount Sinai Morningside-West, Stony Brook Teach Hosps, Temple Univ Hosp, UC Irvine Med Ctr, Zucker SOM-Northwell Staten Island Univ, Brigham & Womens Hosp, UC San Diego Med Ctr
<b>Radiology</b>	8	Johns Hopkins Hosp-MD, Stony Brook Teach Hosps, U North Carolina Hospitals, Univ of Vermont Medical Center, Virginia Commonwealth U Hlth Sys
<b>Urology</b>	3	Einstein/Montefiore Hospital, Houston Methodist Hospital, Univ of California, San Francisco

# MATCH DAY STUDENT EXPERIENCES



By Theresa Gammel  
Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

Match Day is something that every medical student both excitedly and anxiously awaits. Since I got into medical school, my

sister and I have watched countless YouTube videos about different medical schools' Match Day across the country. Every video had similar tones: excitement and nerves buzzing across the room while an entire medical school class opens a single letter that determines the next 3–7 years of their life. It's a pretty crazy concept.

My own Match Day was a bit different. While I had the opportunity to participate in the classic "Match Day" that I had watched so many times, I chose to sit in my childhood home surrounded by my immediate family and fiancé. With COVID restrictions allowing only two guests at the in-person ceremony, I couldn't imagine not having each member of my family with me during that moment. I applied for a position in a neurosurgery residency, something that had been a dream of mine for a while. Opening that email was something that not only I had long awaited, but my family had as well.

Growing up, I was never pressured to go into any specific career. Neither of my parents

had chosen to pursue education beyond high school. With that said, I was raised by parents who I see as the most successful people I know. They have handled life's challenges with grace and poise. They have worked hard to create a life for me and my siblings that enabled us to each choose whatever career path we wanted. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for being my greatest supporters.

While in high school, my mom was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Her diagnosis is a major reason why I pursued a career in the neurosciences. I majored in cognitive science at the University of Richmond and quickly realized that I had a passion to learn everything about the brain. At the end of my first year of medical school, I joined the Department of Neurosurgery's research lab. I became acquainted with the neurosurgeons and neurosurgery staff who would become my greatest mentors and friends.

Although I knew I loved neurosurgery, I still questioned whether it was the lifestyle I wanted for myself throughout my clerkship year. It is no secret that any surgical specialty comes with major compromises. Having a family, especially as a woman in a historically male-dominated field, was something I worried about. I had yet to meet a single female neurosurgeon, and wondered if it

was simply impossible to have both a family and the career of my dreams. However, after talking with my mom over many different conversations, she reiterated that she has never seen me happier than when I was on my neurosurgery rotation. My boyfriend (now fiancé) reminded me of the excitement I had whenever I told him about the cases I had been in that day. Of course, it was going to be a difficult path, but I had never been one to choose the easy route.

Flash forward to the morning of my Match Day. Four years of medical school, countless hours spent on research, two-step exams, 25 interviews, and a successful Match Monday, all leading up to that moment. The email came in at 11:58 am, two minutes early, which caught me by surprise. I opened the email and couldn't read it fast enough. When I finally saw the last line:

**Program Name: Neurological Surgery**

**Institution Name:**

**Virginia Commonwealth U Hlth Sys**

I was elated to see that I was going back to where it all started, Richmond, Virginia. A hospital 15 minutes away from my undergraduate campus, the place where I met my future husband. I cannot wait to begin this next chapter, grateful is an understatement. •

## Spotlight on Neurological Surgery



By Melissa Janssen  
Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

"Reflect on Match Day," they asked. An easy enough task—I'll write a few sentences about the anxiety inherent to the process, the complexity of the

algorithm and the shared experience of endlessly explaining its "cute little intricacies" to friends and family. ("No, I don't get to choose." "No, I find out via a piece of paper at noon and can't change anything." "No, I know that's how it usually works in the adult realm, but we can't negotiate offers at all.")

I'll talk about what it's like interviewing virtually (it's odd) and about my feelings leading up to the Big Day (pure neuroticism). I'll comment on the relief I felt upon opening my email on Monday to find out I am indeed gainfully employed (bye, loans), and the excitement that followed on Friday when I learned I'm relocating to sunny Southern California (bye, snow). I'll talk about how my experience was slightly different from the norm, being an international student and not having any family with me. I'll credit my best friend and housemate Bella for making the day and those leading up to it as special as possible this far away from home. It'll be easy. A simple reflection.

But how does one write a simple reflection on a giant day? A momentous day. A full-circle, culminating type of day that was not at all possible without the 3,565,826,428 hours that came before it? (Hyperbole, but only a little.) Honestly, I have tried to write sentence after sentence and all of it gets deleted because the only words that feel right and true and big are "I did it." I'm still processing the fact that, indeed, I did it. I believe the reason I keep fixating on those three small words are because of the weight that they carry. Those words mean my anxieties, insecurities and self-doubt did not win. They mean I am not an imposter in this male-dominated field, and I am not delusional for thinking I can succeed in it. They mean the countless hours with our noses in textbooks, our spines painfully hyper-flexed, and our eyeballs scorching from excessive screen time were not for nothing. They mean we're not wrong for dreaming big and that we are, in fact, incredibly consequential and very capable. They mean we can do it because—in case you missed it—we did indeed do it.

As you can tell, Match Day for me was a lesson on self-confidence and self-worth. I'm not sure how long it will take to fully accept the fact that what was once a pipe dream is now a reality. I chose neurosurgery because I wanted to spend my waking hours training to skillfully move within the brain so that

another human can move within their world to their fullest capacity. I want nothing more than to dedicate my hands and my mind to recovering as much lost potential, agency and life-meaning as humanly, medically and surgically possible. To have a piece of paper that very clearly states someone else believes I can do that and is willing to train me for seven years in order to do so is just ... out of this world. And every time I "reflect on Match Day," I'm flooding with the same emotions over and over again: grateful, relieved, honored, noticed, confident, special, lucky.

We spend so much of our time, as med students, seeking validation and approval from those constantly evaluating us. We're endlessly grinding and rarely get to rest comfortably in the successes we have truly earned. Well, friends, let us rest comfortably in our giant success. We did the work, and we deserve to feel rewarded. Happy belated Match Day, classmates! And may we enjoy happy, fulfilling, lifelong careers. We did it. •

# MATCH DAY STUDENT EXPERIENCES



By Racheed Mani  
Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

When I started medical school in 2018, I was already leaning toward neurosurgery, and I am delighted to say that I will stay

on here at Stony Brook as a neurosurgery resident! My early interest arose as I was always fascinated by how the nervous system and its elaborate pathways controlled our thoughts, our movements, and our very experience of the world around us. Even as a college freshman at NYU, I enjoyed learning neuroanatomy out of sheer interest, and knew that I would pursue a career that delved into the nervous system in some way. However, having observed neurosurgeons in action, I was amazed at how they not only knew the nervous system inside and out, but also had the dexterity and skill set to intervene and fix the underlying problem. I realized that I wanted nothing more than to emulate them, and that neurosurgery was the field I truly wanted to pursue. As a medical student, I sought to immerse myself from the beginning, joining Drs. Mikell and Mofakham in their neurosurgery laboratory, collaborating with Dr. Egnor in his exciting research, and, with the help of my classmates, establishing Stony Brook's American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) medical student chapter in 2019.

That said, even with this clear interest, I must admit that there were intermittent feelings of self-doubt as to whether or not I was "cut out" for such a rigorous surgical field. Over the years, many often envisioned me as more of a bookworm academic than someone with the hands-on, technical skills required for surgery. I mention this to assuage the apprehension that medical students may have about pursuing neurosurgery. That self-doubt abated thanks to my mentors here at Stony Brook, who were terrific in guiding me and providing positive reinforcement to further invigorate my interest in the field.

However, I would say that my personal *annus mirabilis*, in which I proved to myself that I could do this, was just last year in 2021 (just a few months before I applied to residency programs). To put this into broader context, earlier in medical school, I had to overcome many personal obstacles, most of all, the loss of my father. My goal at that time was merely to survive and get through medical school; becoming a competitive neurosurgery applicant was not even an afterthought. In many respects, this worked to my benefit: I developed a mental fortitude that I did not know that I had, and I learned how to take one day at a time, to focus on the processes of learning and practicing, while not thinking too far ahead about the end result and putting undue pressure on myself. This paid dividends in the end; through adopting this mindset, I

was able to exceed my own expectations in the OR when I was a subintern here in 2021. More importantly, I forged an even greater relationship with our faculty and house staff, particularly Drs. Egnor and Mikell, whose tutelage and vision for the department played a massive role in my decision to rank Stony Brook as highly as I did.

I really wish to show younger students that they should never be dissuaded or let anything stop them from pursuing this wonderful field. Moreover, through taking each day or endeavor as it comes, as opposed to needlessly stressing over the future, things have a way of serendipitously falling into place (*vis-à-vis* success as a medical student) better than one could ever imagine. I must also say that our current crop of first-, second-, and third-year medical students interested in neurosurgery are exceptionally talented and outstanding, much more so than I was at that point in medical school. Seeing the interest in neurosurgery grow the way it has in recent years is testimony to our wonderful faculty and department. All I can say is that it is a privilege to continue to be a part of Stony Brook's growth for years to come. Furthermore, I wish the very best of luck to my other phenomenal classmates who will be starting their neurosurgery residencies in a few months; we have enabled our class to pull off something unprecedented for our medical school: a whopping FIVE Stony Brook students matching into neurosurgery! •



By Zhe Wang  
Renaissance School of Medicine  
at Stony Brook University,  
Class of 2022

On Monday, March 14, 2022, I received an email from the National Resident

Matching Program at 9 am. The bold text said, "Congratulations, you have matched!" Exhilarated by the great news, I immediately dialed my family, who lived 7,500 miles away in Hangzhou, China. "Finally, this day has come, after almost ten years of hard work in the United States by yourself!" My family broke into joyful tears.

At the age of eighteen, I came to the United States alone to pursue higher education. I also wanted to explore the world after living in various cities in China and Japan to satisfy my intellectual curiosity. As an undergrad, I majored in neuroscience and economics. These two seemingly unrelated majors shared common ground: to discover the underlying mechanism of human behaviors, biologically and sociologically. I wanted to learn everything about the human brain.

In medical school, my fascination with neuroscience led me to dive deeper into the field by conducting research with Drs. Charles Mikell and Sima Mofakham in the Consciousness Lab. I started with helping to gather magnetic resonance imaging data for a project characterizing the association between thalamocortical integrity and return of consciousness in patients who suffered severe traumatic brain injury (sTBI). Later, I was given more responsibility to independently conduct a clinical study investigating agitated behaviors in sTBI patients and their correlation with recovery of consciousness. During clinical clerkship, I had a strong interest in neurosurgery, but I kept an open mind. The intellectual challenge of surgical planning for

complex brain and spine conditions deeply intrigued me. In the operating room, the intricate manipulation of delicate nervous tissues with maximum preservation of eloquent areas exhibited the elegance of neurosurgical procedures. Furthermore, to surgically treat patients, it requires tremendous teamwork among surgeon, anesthesiologist, nurses and other ancillary staff. I enjoyed the work intensity and vigorous collaboration of neurosurgery and eventually decided to pursue this path.

For me, the largest barrier in pursuing this career was to match to a program that could support a legal work visa. Neurosurgery match is competitive, and adding more filters only increases the difficulty. Knowing that reality, I was determined to give my best effort and went "all in." I followed a highly disciplined study schedule for board exams. I spent numerous weekends and holidays working on research projects. I strongly believe that the hunger to achieve goals is the key to accomplishing the seemingly impossible. Where there is a will, there is a way.

On Friday, March 18, 2022, I received the program name in which I will spend the next seven years for training. I was thrilled to find out that I matched to University of Chicago. I am grateful for all the support I received from Stony Brook University, especially the close mentorship from Drs. Michael Egnor and Charles Mikell throughout this journey. Stony Brook has prepared me very well to be a physician. In the future, I envision myself participating in global neurosurgery. I aspire to support low- and middle-income countries to build necessary healthcare infrastructures, which can deliver safe, affordable neurosurgical care to fill the unmet needs. •



By Zirun Zhao  
Renaissance School  
of Medicine at  
Stony Brook University,  
Class of 2022

I grew up in Beijing, China, with parents who are both physicians. As

a child, I would listen to the dinner table talks about their day, which often included patient stories. One of them was a patient of my father's, a woman in her thirties with a history of seizures since childhood. But in the rural village she came from, she was deemed crazy because of her seizures and suffered from domestic violence. However, after she underwent epilepsy surgery, she became seizure-free and regained control of her life. Uplifting stories like this drew me to the empowering changes of neurosurgery on patients' lives.

As I entered clinical rotations in medical school, I encountered the gravity of the field where diseases could not be cured by surgery. I saw patients who had end-stage cancer with brain metastasis, or brain tumors in unresectable regions. I found myself humbled in moments of setbacks and triumphs, because it is the privilege of neurosurgeons to care for some of the sickest patients. It is those cases, where outcomes are not entirely satisfactory, which motivates the research to find new cures, that I would like to be involved with in the years to come.

Finally, as I reflect on Match Day, I want to thank my parents for their unwavering support, my husband Victor who has always believed in me, my mentors at Stony Brook who have made Match Day possible, and my friends who made this journey so much fun. I am so excited to begin the next chapter! •



# SCHOLARLY CONCENTRATIONS PROGRAM

Howard B. Fleit, PhD  
Assistant Dean for Curriculum, Associate Professor and Vice Chair for Education  
Department of Pathology, Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University

## STUDENT REFLECTIONS

### The Scholarly Concentration Program Experience



#### Medical Humanities Track

By Liam Butchart  
Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

My path to medical school was both traditional and different. I went straight through from undergrad to medical school, but I majored in music and minored in philosophy and chemistry at Colby College, my undergraduate institution. As such, the bulk of my intellectual background is in the humanities—philosophy, literature, art—

rather than the sciences.

During medical school, I have been in the dual-degree MD/MA program between the School of Medicine and the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care and Bioethics, one of two students in the class to pursue this dual degree. As part of the program, I have taken courses ranging from feminist bioethics to altruism to film and bioethics and how they intersect with medical practice. My scholarly publications during medical school have been heavily influenced by my medical humanities experience; the medical humanities Scholarly Concentrations Program (SCP) track is effectively the scholarly requirement for the MD/MA program, taking the place of a thesis.

Under the auspices of the SCP program, I have developed a project that investigates literary conceptions of human development and the response to death across the life cycle. I have analyzed works by Faulkner, Camus, Lloyd Alexander and others, examining these phenomena that form the core of the human experience.

The medical humanities track of the SCP is notable for its capacity for individualization and change. My project has grown and developed over the course of the four years of medical school; furthermore, the intellectual and institutional security provided by the SCP has allowed me to pursue research beyond this project: my work has grown to sit at the intersection of mental health, the humanities, and medical education, as well as bioethics and the philosophy of medicine; I have published in high-quality journals like *JAMA*, the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, and *Academic Psychiatry*.

Now post-Match Day, I will be pursuing a career in psychiatry, where I hope to continue to work at the intersection of mental health and the human experience, taking my knowledge of humanistic disciplines like literature and philosophy and applying them to patient care in a syncretic fashion that has been fostered by my time in the SCP. •

The Scholarly Concentrations Program (SCP) Annual Research Day was held as a hybrid event this year. Our graduating medical students prepared voiceover PowerPoint presentations summarizing their work. These presentations were available for viewing asynchronously by students, faculty and staff during a two-week period. SCP track leaders selected representative students to give oral presentations at our Scholarly Concentrations Program Annual Research Day event, which was held on April 28 in the MART Auditorium. •

## AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

Alex Freedenberg  
Nigel Zhang  
Foysal Daian  
Liam Butchart  
Irene Tsai  
Leah Ibrahim Puri

**Award for Excellence in Clinical Science Research**  
**Award for Excellence in Translational Science Research**  
**Award for Excellence in Basic Science Research**  
**Award for Excellence in Humanistic Studies**  
**Award for Excellence in Global Health Research**  
**Award for Excellence in Medical Education Research**



### Global Health Track

By Eve Ameen

Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, Class of 2022

Floating Through the Amazon

"Joven, mis pollitos!" was followed by a soft thump as the young man slung the woman's chickens across the water onto the roof of our boat. We were just leaving the mercado de productores on a long wooden vessel packed with farmers and merchants, about to float down the muddy waters of the

Amazon River. Pressed beside me, a young woman was holding her baby, and as I tried unsuccessfully to make it laugh, I thought, "How in the world did I get here?"

A few months prior, my classmate Simon Nin Zhu and I met with Dr. Luis Marcos, a brilliant infectious diseases attending at Stony Brook who was strongly recommended by Dr. Mark Sedler, director of the Global Health Scholarly Concentrations Program. Together we drafted our project: determine the prevalence of soil-transmitted helminthiasis before and after mass drug administration and teach community health workers to use novel smartphone-attached microscopy to visualize parasite eggs directly on a smartphone screen, improving healthcare access in rural communities within the Peruvian Amazon rainforest. We sought the guidance of Drs. Graciela Meza and Stalin Vilcarromero, clinician scientists from Peru who warmly welcomed us into their fields of expertise, and César, a motivated medical student from Peru who would soon become a close colleague and friend. We obtained IRB approval, methodically planned out our fieldwork itinerary, and received grants from the New York Academy of Medicine, American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, Infectious Diseases Society of America, and Stony Brook University. My first time in South America and Simon's first time doing research, we never imagined the adventure we were about to embark on when we flew to Peru in 2019.

First stop: Lima, where we bought materials and trained with the incredible parasitologists Carmen and Marco at the Alexander von Humboldt Instituto de Medicina Tropical. From there, we and our

seven suitcases of supplies flew to Iquitos, a town only accessible by boat or plane that sits in the northern Peruvian Amazon rainforest. Lovingly embraced by the warm humid air and the kindheartedness of locals, we spent the next two months executing the project. We assembled supplies from our bedrooms and walked to imprentas to print flyers, questionnaires, and consent forms. We led dozens of students from the Universidad Nacional de la Medicina Peruana by boat, foot, and motocar to communities in Iquitos and the surrounding rainforest, enrolling participants door-to-door and ultimately collecting 250+ fecal samples. We spent nights at the lab analyzing samples for parasite eggs and led a training session on helminthiasis and smartphone-attached microscopy for 45 community health workers. We realized two essential skills of field research: adaptability and humility. We were empowered by the leadership and experience of our Peruvian colleagues, and I found myself often stepping back and following their direction. They knew local dialects, customs, and reassured us on days cut short by torrential storm flooding and muddy road closures. They reminded us that many people couldn't access soap or water for handwashing after defecating, that certain neighborhoods would be empty as people were out working in the daytime, that we needed to get comfortable reading consent forms out loud as many participants were illiterate.

I have endless gratitude to my colleagues in Peru and New York for warmly welcoming me into the world of global health research, to Dr. Marcos, Dr. Sedler, and the Scholarly Concentration Program (SCP) for providing us the means to do so, and to the lifelong relationships built along the way. The day that the barco pulled us from the shore, the baby sleeping peacefully in his mother's arms to my left and an impenetrable wall of green jungle to my right, I reflected on the chaotic, fun, sticky, unpredictable, sometimes disappointing, always inspiring reality of fieldwork, and I can confidently say that there's nothing else I would have rather been doing. I am forever grateful for what I learned and the experiences I had the summer I lived in the Amazon rainforest. •

# CLASS OF 2022 HONOR SOCIETIES

## ALPHA OMEGA ALPHA (AOA) HONOR SOCIETY

Maeva Adoumie  
Verdah Ahmad  
Aidan Aicher  
Lara Ambrosi  
Talia Arcieri  
Justin Cheung  
Kristen Clark  
Katherine Godfrey  
Michael Guinn  
Joshua Helali

David Howard  
Leah Ibrahim Puri  
Kevin Kashanchi  
Rachel Kery  
Kenneth King  
Haarika Korlipara  
Racheed Mani  
William Marmor  
Kaitlin Monroig  
Mohammad Noubani

Rushil Patel  
Leslie Peralta  
Hunter Rogoff  
Susan Wang  
Zachary Warheit  
Michael Wolek  
Brian Wollocko  
Priscilla Yong  
Zirun Zhao

## GOLD FOUNDATION HUMANISM HONOR SOCIETY

Joshua Abata  
Verdah Ahmad  
Dimitri Alexis  
A Eve Ameen  
Talia Arcieri  
Konrad Ben  
Nicholas Browne

Liam Butchart  
Joshua Helali  
David Howard  
Leah Ibrahim Puri  
Christopher McKiever  
Krisha Mehta  
Leslie Peralta

Elizabeth Pine  
Irene Tsai  
Zachary Warheit  
Mark Williams  
Emelio Woodstock  
Simon Zhu

## Reflections on the Stony Brook Medical Scientist Training Program

*continued from page 5*

patient care. On the other hand, I also know this is the start of a great responsibility, perhaps more than I have ever been granted, and I need to strive for the ideals that Dr. DeBakey himself set in the department.

I came into this program hoping to gain skills to run a basic science lab and use that knowledge to improve the lives of patients. Stony Brook MSTP expanded this dream, gave clarity to the area of medicine I hope to dedicate myself to, and equipped me with the tools to transition into a surgeon-scientist residency. I have spent seven years at Stony Brook and, as I transition to Baylor, another seven years lay in front of me. I have learned that this journey is not a sprint, like many things in life, but a marathon. As I prepare a return trip across the U.S. to Texas, I find myself with more blessings than I could have possibly asked for while at Stony Brook, including meeting my wife, making lifelong friendships, developing my surgical interest and giving me the ultimate privilege to work with patients. I hope to take what Stony Brook has taught me to my patients in Houston and illustrate what the Stony Brook MSTP spirit is about. •

# GIVE BACK

**We thank the Renaissance School of Medicine Alumni  
for their continuous support.**

For further information about the Alumni Association, please visit [stonybrook.edu/SOM-AlumniSupport](http://stonybrook.edu/SOM-AlumniSupport) or to donate, please contact Samantha Nobile, Director of Advancement, at [Samantha.Nobile@stonybrookmedicine.edu](mailto:Samantha.Nobile@stonybrookmedicine.edu)

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