

# ***AWIS GCH Newsletter***

## ***Fall 2018-Spring 2019***



### **Table of Contents**

<i>Letter from the 2018-2019 President</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>2018-2019 Board</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Career Development Events</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>AWIS in the Community</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>OWIS Fall 2018</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>OWIS Spring 2019</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>AWIS GCH Scholarship and Award Winners</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Letter from the 2019-2020 President</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>2019-2020 Board</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Celebrating Present Successes by Taking a Look Back</i>	<i>12</i>

### **2019 SHOOTING STAR AWARD Recipients**



# **AWIS**

**ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE**  
*Gulf Coast Houston*

## Letter from the 2018-2019 AWIS GCH President

Where has the time gone? Over the past 6 years, I have served the Association for Women In Science Gulf Coast Houston Chapter as the Career Development Chair, as the Outstanding Women In Science Chair, as the Vice President, and more recently as the President. No one could have prepared me for the invaluable lessons learned and the priceless relationships formed because of this unique experience. I embraced it with open arms, and little did I know it would have such a significant impact on me both professionally and personally. Now that my time on this board has come to an end, please allow me to reflect upon what was achieved.

This past year we made conscious efforts to connect more with professionals both in industry and in academia. To facilitate this effort and to provide an invaluable new resource to our members, we created two new board positions (Liaison to Industry Chair and Liaison to Academia Chair). Additionally, we held two Networking Boot Camps to help attendees learn and practice their newly acquired networking skills, and we re-instated our monthly 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday Networking event to allow the community to interact on a regular basis. We also committed to give back to the community and increased our outreach activities, determined to help and inspire budding scientists and promote careers in STEM. I am happy to say that AWIS GCH has kept excellent membership and financial status. Last year, AWIS GCH saw a nearly 18% increase in membership, and indicators are showing continued growth for the upcoming year. The finances of the chapter continue to be strong, which allowed us to increase the number of monetary awards we distributed to deserving young scientists.

I want to thank all of the board members who have served by my side over the years. Each one of you have positively impacted my life and propelled my leadership growth to new heights. Lastly, thank you all for your support of AWIS GCH, which continuously encourages us to stay involved and engaged to bring what is needed for women in STEM, and make a positive impact on the changes we've all been waiting for.

In closing, I can only hope that during my service as President I have provided the necessary leadership expected of me, and that I reached my goal of leaving AWIS GCH in even better shape than I found it. I wish the new board and all of you great success in the future.

Thank you!

Delphine Boulbes, AWIS GCH President 2018-2019



Delphine Boulbes, PhD

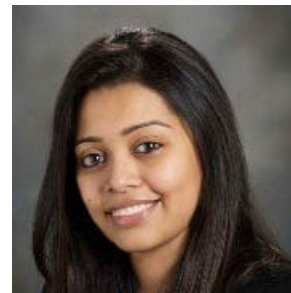
## Board 2018-2019



Delphine Boulbes, PhD  
President



Jeniffer Masi, PhD  
Vice President



Triparna Sen, PhD  
Senior Chapter Trustee



Antje Lindemann, PhD  
Fundraising Chair



Figen Beceren-Braun, PhD  
Career Development Chair



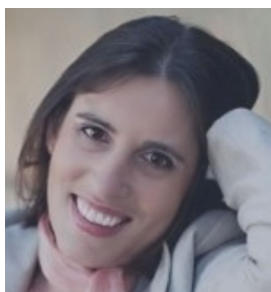
Margo Cain  
Membership Chair



Jessica Brown, PhD  
Science Communication  
Chair



Srujana Lam, MSc  
Outreach Chair



Agathe Bourgogne, PhD  
Liaison to Industry



Kimberly Mankiewicz, PhD  
Public Relations Chair



Ashleigh McWilliams  
Interim Secretary



Efrosini Cuko, PhD  
OWIS Chair



Yong Park, PhD  
Scholarship Chair

Not pictured: Kristen Park, Treasurer

## Career Development Events

Part of the AWIS GCH mission is to increase opportunities for STEM professionals by placing career development opportunities right at your fingertips! Our Career Development Chair, Figen Beceren-Braun, organized the events below for our members and the scientific community.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

During the “Empowering the Leader within You” professional development workshop on Friday, January 18, 2019, Leadership Development Coach Anna McKay spoke to an enthusiastic group about taking ownership of your own leadership trajectory. She offered strategies to overcome the barriers and challenges that emerging leaders often face and focused on questions to address to reach your full leadership potential. Anna McKay is an ACC certified coach through the International Coach Federation, a certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), and a certified Emotional Intelligence (EQi) Practitioner through MHS. AWIS-GCH is very grateful to Anna for taking time to share her experiences and insights on empowering the leader within you!

### MSL PANEL DISCUSSION

On Thursday, February 21, 2019, AWIS-GCH hosted a “How to become a MSL” panel discussion. The two panelists, Erin Lopez, PhD, and Loren Stagg, PhD, spoke candidly about their

experiences in finding, transitioning to, and being successful in their role as a Medical Science Liaison (MSL). Both working as bench scientists in graduate school, Erin and Loren offered advice on steps to land a MSL position (informational interviews are key), along with insights into the varying duties and responsibilities of MSLs. A huge thanks to Erin and Loren for their amazing interactive dialogue with audience members during this panel discussion!

### CAREER IN INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSION

Five panelists were present during the “Career Opportunities in Industry” event on March 14, 2019. The panelists included: Angela Holmes, MS, Director of Product and Customer solutions Oncora Medical; Konrad Gabrusiewicz, PhD, Scientist II at Bellicum Pharmaceuticals Inc.; Tara Karimi, PhD, Co-Founder and Chief Scientist at Cemvita Factory Inc.; Warren Denning, PhD, Medical Science Liaison; Rodrigo Jacamo, PhD, Technical Sales Specialist at IntelliCyt. During the event, the panelists spoke about their experiences transitioning from academia to industry, both as a part of the large group as well as in smaller groups with the attendees to allow for individualized discussion. AWIS GCH thanks all of the panelists for their participation in this event!

### NETWORKING BOOTCAMP

AWIS GCH wrapped up the Spring 2019 edition of our popular Networking Bootcamp in April. The event was led by Dr. Agathe Bourgogne, Associate Director and CMC Project Manager at Bellicum Pharmaceuticals, Inc. Participants learned how to approach and effectively communicate with colleagues and professionals at networking events. Thanks to Dr. Bourgogne and all of the attendees for a great event!

*Are you looking to learn about the many career opportunities available to you as a person in STEM? Would you like to hone your skills and up your chances on landing that amazing job? Then visit [awisgch.org](http://awisgch.org) to find more about upcoming career development events!*



## AWIS in the Community

### Houston Food Bank

On Sunday, November 17th, 7 members of AWIS GCH volunteered at the Houston Food Bank, which is America's largest food bank that serves 18 counties in southeast Texas. The members were part of a larger group of 300 people that worked together to inspect and sort food; total production from the volunteer shift resulted in approximately 17,500 meals for distribution. Special thanks to the members who represented AWIS GCH, and to the Houston Food Bank for allowing us to take part in their fight against hunger!



### McGovern Centennial Gardens

AWIS GCH members gathered at McGovern Centennial Gardens in the heart of Houston on Saturday, October 13, 2018, to help keep the gardens clean and beautiful by pulling weeds and removing invasive plants. Transformed in 2014 from the Houston Garden Center site, the McGovern Centennial Gardens offer eight acres of themed gardens and a spacious central lawn for visitors to explore and enjoy. AWIS GCH was happy to be a part of keeping this bright spot of Houston looking its best!



### Energy Day Festival

Energy Day is a family festival that showcases STEM through interactive demonstrations and exhibits. On Saturday October 20, 2018, AWIS GCH members volunteered at the Energy Day Festival and shared their enthusiasm for science with the community with demonstrations involving magnets. AWIS GCH thanks all of the volunteers that came out to help with this event!



*Part of AWIS GCH's mission is to  
strengthen community  
engagement through scholarship,  
outreach, and mentorship*

## AWIS in the Community (continued)

### Scout Fair

The Sam Houston Area Council invited AWIS GCH to host stimulating, hands-on STEM demonstrations at the 2019 Scout Fair on Saturday, April 6, 2019 at NRG Arena in Houston. AWIS GCH volunteers promoted STEM fields with demonstrations focused on neuroscience. One demonstration used various techniques to show the effect of visual autocorrection, in which the information collected from our eyes is usually directly interpreted to create our perception. The other demonstration highlighted the sense of touch. AWIS GCH appreciated the opportunity to take part in this fun day at the Scout fair!



### Taste Of Science Festival

AWIS GCH was a sponsor of the Taste of Science Festival from April 22-28, 2019 in Houston, TX. The purpose of the Taste of Science Festival, which occurs in cities all over the United States, is to convey science to the community in an attempt to address the widening gulf between what scientists do and what public perception is. Throughout the week, Taste of Science Houston volunteers held events in various locations across the city, which were titled: *Changing the Face of Clinical Trials*, *Meditation for Mental Health*, *Wisdom of Ants*, and *Hands on Science*.

#### Changing the Face of Clinical Trials



#### Meditation for Mental Health



## Outstanding Women in Science Seminar Fall 2018

**O**n October 24, 2017 AWIS GCH honored **Dr. Colleen O'Connor** at the 2018 Fall Outstanding Women in Science (OWIS) Seminar Series for her outstanding contributions in science. Dr. O'Connor got her start in science in the 1st grade when her parents bought her a book on sharks—her curiosity was sparked, and from there she was constantly asking questions and wanting to discover things. Her interest in science and animals took her to the University of Miami where she earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Science and Biology. She later earned her PhD in Toxicology with a Specialization in Immunology from the College of Medicine at the University of Kentucky. During her 3rd year as a graduate student she attended a presentation at a conference that ended with people shouting exuberantly about T-cell therapy; seeing the excitement and the insistent attitude that surrounded the topic of T-cell therapy, Dr. O'Connor knew that is where she needed to be. That's what landed her at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, TX as postdoctoral researcher, and then a research investigator working on CAR T Cell therapy. It was during her time at MD Anderson that she began feeling the pull to start her own company. Dr. O'Connor lost two dogs to cancer, and the lack of new treatment options for them really bothered her. She recalls thinking that “she wanted to do more, to be more than a postdoc.” So, she did just that and founded her own company, CAVU Biotherapies, in 2015. CAVU Biotherapies is a translational onco-biotech company that focuses on providing immune-based solutions to treat cancer and autoimmune diseases for pet dogs. The decision definitely was not as easy as it sounds. Dr. O'Connor had to think about what it would mean to leave the bench behind. Luckily, she found Debra



Dr. Colleen O'Connor with  
OWIS Chair Efrrosini Cuko.

Mansfield with the Houston Technology Center, who Dr. O'Connor describes as “amazing,” and as somebody who knows the biotechnology business “backwards and forwards.” Dr. O'Connor also recalls that although she's a risk-taker, it took a lot of courage to step out into the world of industry on her own. That has been her greatest challenge so far in her career: Starting a business and having to learn an entirely new field. She describes it perfectly: “It's like

running while reading a book. Then, while you're running and reading, you trip and fall down [and have to just pop back up and keep on running and reading].” Fortunately, she had a toolkit from her graduate school and postdoctorate training that she found helpful in the transition. The toolkit contained things such as the ability to learn science and analyze details, all the while being suspicious of those details. Additionally, going through graduate school and getting her PhD was a grueling experience; most of the time there wasn't anybody around to help, and she was forced to learn things on her own. The same circumstance applied to starting her own company, so she knew she had it in her to figure things out on her own when necessary. Perseverance is another trait she took with her into the world of industry. Having the expectation that things won't work the first time and that 99% of the time you might fail, but to keep moving forward—this has been invaluable to her success thus far. As the founder and CEO of a startup, Dr. O'Connor wears many hats during a typical work day. She spends time in the lab and at the bench, but she also has to tend to the 75-80 emails that are in her inbox before 11 AM. Meetings make up a big part of her day, along with talking to customers about their questions and concerns. Add on some work dealing

with regulatory documents, quality operations, and invoices, and the day scurries by for

*Dr. O'Connor urges women to “keep being risk-takers” and follow their passion.*

Dr. O'Connor. She notes that as the CEO of a start-up it's important for her to be able to move from fluidly from one thing to the next. Dr. O'Connor has done just that, leading her company to have therapeutics in 23 different clinics in 15 different states. As a refresher, she founded the company in 2015, which is only 4 years ago! And that's not all; the future of CAVU Biotherapies is bright. Recently, she made a decision to go for it and hit more aggressive marks as a company. This means that they'll be ramping up their production capacity with the goal of being able to treat 25,000 dogs per year within the next 5 years! When asked what advice she'd like to give the young women of today, especially those who want to be entrepreneurs in STEM, Dr. O'Connor said that she wants to urge women to “keep being risk-takers” and keep following their passion. There were people that helped kick open the door for her (like Nancy Chang), and now she's continued to kick that door open to show people that women can be entrepreneurs and CEOs: “The floodgates are open, so we just need people to follow.”



## Outstanding Women in Science Seminar Spring 2019

Cindy Yeilding was honored at the Spring 2019 AWIS GCH OWIS Seminar Series on Tuesday, April 30, 2019. Cindy, a geologist by training, spoke to AWIS GCH and community members about experiences that shaped her journey to becoming a Senior Vice President of BP America. Cindy gave credit to her mom for her initial interest in rocks. She told the audience that her mom was always fascinated with the world around her, and that everywhere they went (the beach, a lake, the park, etc.), they looked for rocks. Unsurprisingly, while attending Southern Methodist University (SMU), Cindy found that she really enjoyed her geology class. Cindy's career began in exploration geology, followed by a role in operations (which was mostly offshore) and a role as a production, appraisal, and exploration geologist. As her career progressed, she found herself being offered leadership roles, as others saw her integrating, collaborating, and facilitating teams to deliver projects.

It was an honor to have Cindy come and talk and AWIS GCH thanks her for sharing her lessons, her time, and her stories with us! Although Cindy has an extremely packed schedule, we were able to catch up with her via telephone and ask her some questions.

*1) As a Senior Vice President of BP America, what is your favorite thing about your job?*

"The role I have right now is really about supporting all of BP's businesses in the US. So I love being able to help the businesses in whatever capacity they need. Probably my favorite thing is that I serve as BP's executive sponsor for Princeton University, and we've been funding climate science research there for almost two decades. In this capacity I get to represent the company in that relationship. It's arms-length research, so we don't direct Princeton as to what they should or shouldn't research, but we benefit from their insights and advice on climate change. So that's probably the coolest part of my job."

*2) What is the greatest challenge you have faced in your career so far and how did you tackle it and work to overcome it?*

"I think my greatest challenge is that I have the gift of seeing a full range of opportunities and outcomes, and then I see really far into the future; being able to share that successfully with people who are more focused on the here and now [is challenging]. I've learned over time to build the relationship and take the time to share the insights and data that are required to really understand where I'm coming from. "



Cindy Yeilding with AWIS GCH President Jeniffer Masi

*3) What was something that you took away from graduate school that has helped you the most in your industry roles?*

"I had a great advisor, John Dennison, and he really believed in his students. He gave us support, but let us run [with our own ideas]; he supported us as a team, too, and encouraged us to collaborate with each other."

*4) You are the executive sponsor of BP's women's network, a member of BP's Million Women Mentors leadership council, a founding member of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG) Women's Committee, the one who initiated the Offshore Technology Conference (OTC) Women's Networking Session, and you created the OTC Energy Challenge. Why do you think it's important to have these programs and why did you get involved with them?*

"For me, I had really supportive parents and I saw lots of opportunities through universities, and with those I found my way to science. I want to make sure that other people see the opportunities, and once they are interested in going that direction, I want to make sure that they have the support. I had the benefit of early exposure to science and I had great mentors through undergrad, graduate school, and industry, and I want to make sure other people have access to that same support network."

*5) Can you please expand on the OTC Energy Challenge?*

"We want to encourage the development of future scientists and engineers. We have students that come to OTC, but *we* talk to them. I thought it would be really fun to create an event where *we listen* to the students and we learn from them how they address and solve problems and tackle challenges. So, we created this to be a formal part of the OTC Technical Program so that people attending OTC come in and see that the presenters are the students. The primary objective is for us to learn what's important to [the students], how they think, how they work together, and how they solve problems. The benefit is that they learn that the energy industry has really great challenges, and also that we have great roles in the energy industry, we provide great mentorship, and that we're a high-tech industry."

*6) What advice would you like to give the young women of today, especially the ones who want to move up the corporate ladder in STEM?*

- 1) To do what you love, because it's hard to have a career when you're just ticking boxes; so make sure you love what you're doing.
- 2) Be really, REALLY good at what you do—this is so important!
- 3) Be flexible, be tenacious; it is not just an uphill trajectory—there are many ups and downs in any career, so accept those, learn from them, and don't let them take you down.



# AWIS GCH Scholarship and Award Winners

## 2018 Fall AWIS GCH Award for Excellence in Communication Scholarship

*The AWIS GCH Awards for Excellence in Communication are given annually. This year, AWIS GCH solicited essays of 1,000 words or less on the following topic:*

*"Underrepresentation of women in STEM: How can individuals and the society change this disparity and what have you done or want to do to improve this issue." The 1st (\$300 prize), 2nd (\$200 prize), and 3rd (\$100 prize) place winners are highlighted below.*

### 1st place: Alessandra Alicea

Alessandra graduated with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Integrative Biology from the University of Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras in 2012. As an undergraduate, she had the opportunity to perform research in various fields of study including genetics. After graduation, she continued her passion for research and obtained a Master of Science degree in Forensic Genetics from the University of North Texas Health Science Center in 2015. Since graduating with her Master's, Alessandra has been a Forensic DNA Analyst in Houston. Her current position has provided invaluable experience and opportunities to continuously grow in her profession. She hopes to use her education, training, and experience to become a leader in the field and advocate for young, aspiring female forensic scientists.

### 2nd place: Dennis Wang

Dennis Wang was born and raised in Houston, Texas. After graduating from the University of Texas with Biology Honors in May 2018, he started researching in the Department of Nanomedicine at the Houston Methodist Research Institute with a focus on localized delivery of therapeutics for future clinical applications. Dennis hopes to soon enroll in medical school and pursue his career goal as a physician.



### 3rd place: Iman Sahnoun

Iman Sahnoun is a graduate student at MD Anderson UTHealth Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. She is pursuing her Ph.D. in Neuroscience and Quantitative Sciences. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Biochemical and Biophysical Sciences and a Master's in Neuroscience, both from the University of Houston. Her current research focuses on radiomics in the context of neuro-oncology. In her free time, Iman enjoys reading and exploring coffee shops around Houston.

**AWIS GCH** was honored to be a part of the Association of Science Communication (ASC) awards at the MD Anderson Cancer Center UT Health Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences event that took place on December 11, 2018. Several graduate students participated in the Elevator Speech competition, which showcased their exciting research. There was also an Essay Writing Competition. For each competition, 1st place was awarded \$150 and 2nd place was awarded \$100. Please see the results of the both competitions below.

### Elevator Pitch Competition

1st Place: Malcolm Moses  
2nd Place: Kyla Gibney

### Essay Writing Competition

1st Place: Vinay Nair  
2nd Place: Nancy Wareing

## Letter from the 2019-2020 AWIS GCH President

First off, I want to say how honored and humbled I am to be elected to serve as the President for the Association for Women in Science Gulf Coast Houston (AWIS GCH) Chapter this year. It is an amazing organization that is committing to advancing Gender Equity, and I will do my best to represent it well.

I want to take this opportunity to mention a few of the areas that I would like our organization to focus on during the next 12 months.

**To be prepared to lead the charge, we need to grow in membership:** For our organization to remain vibrant and active we need to really focus on not only attracting new members, but also keeping the members we already have. I encourage you to remember who recruited you to AWIS GCH and what you've gained as a member – whether it be the kindness of another member providing counsel, the actions of a mentor, something you learned at a Career Development event or through this newsletter. Imagine what we can do for other fellow scientists and how we can contribute to the mentoring of young professionals.

**We do a TON of good work, but I would like to do more and have more involvement:** Scholarships to The Association of Science Communication at the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (GSBS) UT Health - MD Anderson, and to the Science Engineering Fair Houston (SEFH); Promoting STEM fields at the Scout Fair, Energy Day Houston, Sally Ride Festival, Career Night at the Children's Museum of Houston, etc. Those are just a few of the projects & programs that we generously support every year, but I would like to try to support even more if we can.

**Broaden our community by reaching out to the Oil & Gas, & Engineering Sectors:** While we have great representation within the Medicine and Biosciences sector, one of our missions is to champion the interest of Women in STEM across all disciplines and employment sectors. In order to do that I would like to initiate partnerships with organizations such as the Women's Energy Network Houston and the Association for Women Geoscientists, among others, in order to continue growing our community.

I hope you will join with me in this mission. It will happen with the focus and dedication from our members. If you have ideas, suggestions or questions, please contact me at [awis@gmail.com](mailto:awis@gmail.com).

With best regards,  
Jeniffer Masi, PhD  
President, 2019-2020  
Association for Women in Science Gulf Coast Houston Chapter



Jeniffer Masi, PhD  
President



## Board 2019-2020



Jeniffer Masi, PhD  
President



Kristina Stemler, PhD  
Vice President



Delphine Boulbes, PhD  
Senior Chapter Trustee



Antje Lindemann, PhD  
Fundraising Chair



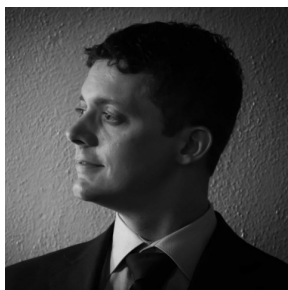
Margo Cain  
Career Development Chair



Garima Vys  
Science Communication Chair



Boomadevi Narendran  
Community Outreach Chair



Jon Flynn, PhD  
Liaison to Academia



Lisa Mustachio, PhD  
Public Relations Chair



Ashleigh McWilliams  
Secretary



Belkys Sanchez  
OWIS Chair



Caroline Cvetkovic, PhD  
Scholarship Chair

Not pictured: Priyadarshani Dharia, Membership Chair; Alyssa Johnston, Liaison to Industry; Dhvani Rupani, Treasurer



## Celebrating Present Successes By Taking A Look Back

**A**WIS GCH was recently awarded the **STAR award for the third year in a row!** (*The STAR award is for chapters that demonstrate strong leadership and well-organized programs to advance women in STEM in all employment sectors.*) Additionally, AWIS GCH was among six chapters in the nation to be honored with an **AWIS Shooting Star Award** this year! (*Chapters that receive this prestigious new award are ones that successfully implement model programs that align with AWIS priorities in the areas of STEM education, professional development, recruitment, advocacy, early career mentoring, and mid-career networking.*) These are amazing accomplishments of which AWIS GCH is most certainly proud; however, it would not be quite right to celebrate these successes without looking back at when, where, and how the AWIS GCH chapter reached this point. Fortunately, we were able to catch up with the amazing women responsible for getting the chapter up and running in 2012.

### Laying A Solid Foundation

While AWIS GCH was one of the first AWIS chapters founded, the activities of the chapter significantly declined prior to 2012. Luckily **Amber Matthews**, a graduate student at the time in the Immunology Department at MD Anderson Cancer Center, was working as a writer for the AWIS magazine. AWIS Nationals reached out to Amber to reactivate the chapter. This was not a small task, and Amber knew it. She had led other organizations in the past, but they were all institutional, not city-wide organizations that served multiple disciplines. However, Amber believed in AWIS, and she saw the importance of bringing it to the Texas Medical Center area; so, she said yes! Amber then

reached out to all of the current AWIS members located in Houston (there were only 16 at the time). **Amy Hurwitz** and **Anne Hart** were the first two to respond.

Amy Hurwitz had come fresh from co-founding Enventure (a student- and young entrepreneur-led nonprofit with an interest in the growth of Houston's medical technology industry) during her first year at Baylor College of Medicine's Translational Biology and Molecular Medicine graduate program. Ready for the next challenge, Amy answered the call and became the Vice President of AWIS GCH.

Anne Hart began her involvement with AWIS as a young chemistry undergraduate searching for female mentorship in a male-dominated field. Through her participation in the AWIS mentorship program, Anne saw firsthand how beneficial a supportive, professional community of women can be. Anne found herself once again searching for these types of relationships during her graduate school years. The local AWIS chapter was not very active in Houston at that time, so she got involved with AWIS at the national level, where she reviewed scholarship applications for young women entering college. When Anne was contacted by Amber, she had graduated and was working as an assistant editor for a scientific journal and as Program Manager for the UTHealth Neuroscience Research Center. She was thrilled to be a part of the movement to reinstate the chapter!

During the summer of 2012, these three women worked together to organize the chapter, which included writing the chapter bylaws and constitution. Essentially, they had to build everything from the ground up, and this meant taking the time to lay a solid

foundation on which the chapter could grow and flourish. As president, Amber thought very carefully about how to structure and organize things so that the officers could transition smoothly into their roles each year—she wanted to make the transition as simple as possible to better ensure chapter continuity. They had heard of the STAR Award given by the national AWIS organization and decided to strategically set up the chapter with this award as a goal and source of milestones. Amy recalls: “We made it a checklist that we should be using to grow [the organization].” Upon reactivation, the chapter’s only source of income was chapter membership dues, so finding sponsors became a top priority. The women reached out to active and past chapter members, along with members of the academic and scientific community in the region. Within a year they had a full board, sponsorships, and official partnerships between AWIS Nationals and local academic institutions, including the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHHealth Graduate School of Biomedical Science, Baylor College of Medicine, and University of Houston. These efforts created a regional presence for the chapter.

### Supporting the Foundation

When **Amanda Chaddee** moved to Houston to begin her postdoctoral fellowship at UTHHealth, she performed an online search for Houston’s professional organizations. After coming across and emailing AWIS Nationals, she was connected with Amber and ultimately became the revived AWIS GCH chapter’s Fundraising Chair. Similarly, **Anna P. Graham** found AWIS GCH upon looking for a STEM-focused organization in Houston after moving from Arizona, and she became the Treasurer. **Lory Santiago-Vazquez** became an Assistant Professor of Biology and Biotechnology at the University of Houston-Clear Lake in 2007. She, too, had

reached out to AWIS Nationals expressing her interest in a local Houston chapter. Lory was contacted by Amber in 2013 and joined the board as Co-Chair of Career Development. **Simran Madan** had started graduate school with Amy at Baylor College of Medicine and, wanting to get involved in Amy’s exciting new venture to reestablish a local AWIS chapter, became Co-Chair of Career Development with Lory.

That first year, the newly complete executive board decided that each committee would be responsible for holding two events. Amanda put together a silent auction for fundraising, which was a great success. Because Amanda taught at Lone Star College, for outreach she organized a booth for AWIS GCH to host during Lone Star College’s Family Day. Anne led their inaugural Outstanding Women in Science (OWIS) event, which has become AWIS GCH’s cornerstone event, honoring Dr. Elizabeth Travis, the Associate Vice President of Women and Minority Faculty Inclusion and the Mattie Allen Fair Professor in Cancer Research at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. Anne remembers that the “large group of attendees lingered for hours, talking and exchanging contact information, and left excited to be a part of this movement.” After the first year and a half of reactivation, the chapter was honored with the **2013 STAR Award!**

*After the first year and a half after reactivation, the chapter was honored with the 2013 STAR award!*

## Impact Of Being A Part Of AWIS GCH

After graduate school, Amber began working as a senior business analyst for a biotech company. Because her involvement in the chapter exposed her to more career possibilities and strengthened her interest in biotech, Amber pursued a business degree from the University of Houston. Her time as President of AWIS GCH from 2012-2014 helped shape her career choice outside of academia. Currently, she works as a consultant while building up to start her own biotech company. For Amber, AWIS was critical in directing the path outside of academia that she took after graduate school. Not only did her role as AWIS GCH President sharpen her skillset, but she also built and expanded her network. Opportunities through chapter activities to talk to fellow board members, event panelists and honorees about various career paths influenced Amber's own outlook for her career, choosing to journey down a non-traditional post-graduate pathway connecting scientific discovery and commercial development with leadership through entrepreneurship.

Lory was promoted to Associate Professor in 2014 and is the Program Chair of the Biotechnology Program at the University of Houston-Clear Lake. She told us that her time in AWIS GCH was critical to the "service component during [her] promotion and tenure package." Additionally, the skills and experience she gained by planning and organizing AWIS GCH events were just as important as what she learned around the career development topics themselves. This knowledge not only helps guide Lory's career but is also helping guide those of her students.

Amy has since relocated to the West Coast and was recently promoted to team leader at Boston Consulting Group (BCG), where she focuses on their healthcare con-

sulting practice. Amy continues to believe strongly in the mission of AWIS, saying that "we [women] have to be intentional in how we structure ourselves to enter the workforce and to be successful as leaders." She references the many studies published by several organizations, including BCG, regarding the leak of female talent in the pipeline towards leadership in STEM professions. To Amy, her participation in AWIS GCH was one way for her to contribute to "patching the pipeline."

During Amanda's time on the AWIS GCH executive board, she joined HIREtech as a senior project manager and assistant director of grants, where she advised businesses on procuring SBIR (small business innovation research) funding. More recently, a job opportunity for Amanda's husband has taken her and her family to Kuwait. There, she has been consulting for various startup companies in Kuwait's innovation ecosystem, teaching them how to develop their businesses and commercialize their products. She also started an Instagram account ([@theartofstartups](https://www.instagram.com/theartofstartups)) highlighting startup case studies across various disciplines and locations around the world.

Anna is currently working as an Applications Analyst/Scientist III for Los Alamos National Laboratory in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

Simran Madan graduated with her PhD in 2017 and moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where she began her dream job as a strategy consultant at Putnam Associates. For her, AWIS GCH, and especially the Outstanding Women in Science series, alerted and educated her about the subtle ways professional women can subconsciously undermine themselves in the workplace and hold themselves back in their careers. She tries to be mindful of these as she pursues her own career.



## Words of Wisdom and Gratitude

**Amber:** *"AWIS is full of leadership opportunities on the Board or leading a committee. Participating in this way gives us the opportunity to practice different leadership styles and methods with minimal risk--you can see which style works best and learn from others. So, if you see yourself in a leadership role in any capacity, whether you've been a member for years or just a day, just jump in! AWIS is a great place to learn through trial and error in a dynamic setting and to try new strategies and methods to achieve a goal. There is much to gain from the experience."*

**Anne:** *"There was a very strong need for the local AWIS Chapter, and I'm so grateful to Amber and Amy for taking the lead."*

**Amanda:** *"My time serving in various leadership roles for AWIS GCH was vital in my current global advocacy for helping women in STEM become successful entrepreneurs."*

**Simran:** *"I recommend taking the opportunity to connect with other female professionals, whether they are your peers or a few steps ahead of you, or behind, in their career, to learn from each other's example. And don't ever underestimate yourself and what you are capable of."*

**Amy:** *"Being involved in AWIS [GCH] for me showed me the potential of growing into new roles and expanding my perspective, while knowing that I have the support of a community."*

**Lory:** *"To me, getting involved with AWIS elevated my career and my network to another level. I also raised my confidence and it made me realize all of the skills that I have that I never thought about as valuable skills. I recommend to everyone to become involved in a similar organization, hopefully AWIS GCH."*

This article was written by Margo Cain and Jessica Brown. The authors would like to thank all of the ladies who took time to answer questions, either on the phone or via email. AWIS GCH would not be where it is today without the effort from the 2012-2013 board to lay such a solid foundation. The current AWIS GCH board thanks each and every one of those board members, and hopes to continue building and growing the chapter by supporting women in STEM!

Margo P. Cain currently serves as the AWIS GCH Career Development Chair after serving as Membership Chair from 2018-2019. She is in her final year of graduate school at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. Storytelling and putting information in a broader context are her favorite aspects of science and of life.

Jessica Hoch Brown, Ph.D. is a scientific technical writer in the Department of Palliative Care, Rehabilitation and Integrative Medicine at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. After moving from Chicago, where she was the Chair of Outreach for 2 years for the AWIS-Chicago Chapter, she got involved with AWIS GCH and served as the Science Communication Chair during the 2018-2019 term. Jessica is thankful for the many ways that AWIS has positively impacted her, both professionally and personally.

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

The work of AWIS GCH would not be possible without the generosity of donors and our many sponsors!

AWIS GCH is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and all donations are tax-deductible as allowed by law.

Individual donations can be made through our online store [HERE](#) or by contacting us at [fundraising@awisgch.org](mailto:fundraising@awisgch.org).

Please contact [fundraising@awisgch.org](mailto:fundraising@awisgch.org) to request sponsorship information.



# *Why Join AWIS GCH?*

AWIS GCH is dedicated to supporting women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in Texas's Gulf Coast and Houston region by providing opportunities to participate in professional networking, mentoring, and leadership activities. AWIS membership provides a portfolio of personal benefits as well as the satisfaction of lending your voice to a multi-disciplinary grassroots movement supporting women in STEM.

To become a member visit <http://awisgch.org/membership/>

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/yyv2265a> to fill out a membership form.

AWIS GCH student members from *AWIS partner institutions\** may join AWIS national for free. Please reach out to AWIS GCH Membership for details.

\*Rice University, University of Houston, University of Houston Clear Lake, and the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

For more details and other membership questions please contact

[awisgch.membership@gmail.com](mailto:awisgch.membership@gmail.com)