

Highlights of 2018 Accomplishments and Initiatives for 2019

Dear Colleagues and Friends:

As I sat down to prepare remarks for our holiday luncheon, I was amazed by the numerous achievements we made this past year in assisting our five schools, centers and institutes in advancing our research enterprise. In an organization as large and complex as UT Health San Antonio, it can be difficult to recognize the role the VPR division plays, often behind the scenes, that enable us to accomplish strategic goals we have set. One thing became clear to me, however, if it were not for the leadership and commitment of the [assistant vice presidents](#), [directors](#), and team members in the [division](#), continuing to raise the bar to our aspirational level would be a daunting task.

Rewinding 2018



Allow me to highlight the accomplishments the past twelve months that are significantly advancing our research mission.

Uptick in Public and Private Grants Awarded

In 2018, our office was involved in several areas of mission critical endeavors including: support in the renewal of our CTSA grant, assisting faculty in obtaining funding from the UT System STARs program and the Max and Minnie Tomerlin Voelcker Fund (Voelcker Fund), resulting in eight combined awards and the support of several pilot and proof-of-concept projects through the VPR strategic funds, the San Antonio Life Sciences Institute (SALSI), University Research Council (URC) and the Stella C. Herff Charitable Trust.

Institute for Integration of Medicine and Science

By far, the [successful renewal](#) of the Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA), a **\$24M grant** over 5 years, will continue to be game-changer for our institution and our research partners providing crucial resources to build capacity in translational research, team science, and population health including sustaining our workforce development programs.

Like the CTSA, [The Perry & Ruby Stevens Parkinson's Disease Center of Excellence](#), is under the auspices of the Institute for the Integration of Medicine and Science. In January, we announced the [launch of the Center](#), with a \$1.5M grant funded in 2017 in collaboration with the Office for Institutional Advancement, The Center's mission is to accelerate PD-focused research and provide resources for competitive pilot grants, a mentored career development program and community engagement. This year we sponsored 7 lectures and awarded [5 pilot grants](#).

Infrastructure

Awarded a total of \$3,041,114 from the UT System STARs program, these funds will help purchase state-of-the-art research equipment and make necessary laboratory renovations to recruit and retain nationally-recognized faculty labs.

UT System STARs FY 2018 Awards			
Teppei Fujikawa, Ph.D.	Long School of Medicine	Rising STARs	\$250,000
Xianlin Han, Ph.D.	Long School of Medicine Barshop Institute	STARs	\$300,000
Carolyn Pickering, Ph.D.	School of Nursing Office of Faculty Affairs & Diversity	Rising STARs	\$250,000
Kumar Sharma, M.D.*	Medical Arts & Research Center Nephrology Division	Translational STARs	\$1,400,000

*The \$1.4M Translational STARs award to Kumar Sharma, M.D. facilitated the establishment of the [Center for Renal Precision Medicine](#).

Research

Totaling \$1,450,000, the Max and Minnie Tomerlin Voelcker Fund is [providing support to early career investigators](#).

Voelcker Fund for Young Investigators and Pilot Research FY 2018 Awards			
Myron Ignatius, Ph.D.	Long School of Medicine	Young Investigator Award	\$450,000
April L. Risinger, Ph.D.	Long School of Medicine	Young Investigator Award	\$450,000
Carolina Solis-Herrera, M.D.	Long School of Medicine	Young Investigator Award	\$450,000
David Libich, Ph.D.	Long School of Medicine Greehey Children's Cancer Research Institute	Pilot Research Award	\$100,000

Allocation of funds managed by the VPR (SALSI, Stella C. Herff Charitable Trust (Herff Trust) endowment, UCR) to support pilot and proof of concept awards made by schools/centers/institutes/departments **totaling \$325,000**

Pilot and Proof-of-Concept Awards		
Nathan Shock Center	\$25,000	VPR Strategic Fund
Perry & Ruby Stevens Parkinson's Disease Center of Excellence	\$25,000	VPR Strategic Fund
Claude D. Pepper Older Americans Independence Center	\$75,000	VPR Strategic Fund
Office of Technology Commercialization	\$200,000	Herff Trust and SALSI*

*The \$200,000 allocation funds [the Presidential Translational and Entrepreneurial Fund](#) (PTEF) program.

VPR Divisions

Clinical Trials Office

The CTO grew operations to optimize the clinical trials administrative process. All new clinical trials are now tracked and managed through the ["eResearch"](#) platform. The CTO team also shortened the median time from protocol submission to IRB approval to 33 calendar days (national median is 39 days).

Department of Laboratory Animal Resources

We began the preparation for the accreditation site visit from AAALAC in February 2019. Learn more about the humane treatment of animals and AAALAC [here](#). The renovation of the non-human primate area was completed, and we created a new facility space allocation process. Lastly, a feasibility assessment supported the need to renovate the BSL-2 area.

Institutional Research Cores

In the last bi-monthly newsletter, we covered the [new policy](#) for oversight and management of our Institutional Lab Cores. Two major private gifts have initiated operational plans for a centralized biobanking infrastructure to be developed in 2019.

Office of Postdoctoral Affairs

We facilitated the development of a database with institutional and faculty information needed by directors when preparing NIH training grant applications. A new monthly course covering topics on [Rigor and Reproducibility](#) was launched in collaboration with the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

In collaboration with the [Office of Recruitment & Science Outreach](#) (ORSO), OPA and the [Voelcker Biomedical Research Academy](#) received a vote of confidence from the Voelcker Fund with the renewed grant **totaling \$847,000** to offer a re-designed two-year summer research program for high school students. ORSO collaborated with the Office of Postdoc Affairs to develop training modules for minors engaged in research on campus.

Office of Technology Commercialization

OTC continued to capitalize on the multi-million dollar licensing agreement with the Chinese pharmaceutical group CSPC to develop [therapeutics patented by Jean Jiang, Ph.D.](#) and her collaborators with potential applications in breast cancer metastasis and spinal cord injury. OTC spent the last year refining a business plan for a science accelerator that will launch in the second quarter of 2019. The goal of this new initiative is to support the growing interest for innovation and startups among faculty and students, and what it takes to translate ideas developed in the lab or clinical practice into biomedical products. Finally, we created *Entrepreneurship 101*, a free workshop series on biotech business fundamentals taught by experts from industry and academia.

Research Partnerships

Developed and implemented multiple initiatives to raise global visibility of our research enterprise, including social media platforms, re-designed bi-monthly newsletter, and academia-industry-government engagement. Expanded [Conversations on Science and Art](#) program to include collaboration with the Long School of Medicine Office of Research.

VPR IT

The [Online Research Compliance Assistant](#) (ORCA V2) and [ORCA IRB](#) platforms were expanded with new features and enhancements (management of personnel training, requests for DLAR space, connections to eVelos) with the goal of streamlining processes, improving efficiencies, and reducing the administrative burden for investigators and industry partners

We have a very promising year ahead! I count on your participation and support in 2019 as we mark and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the creation of our [schools of medicine and nursing](#) by the Texas legislature. I wish you and your families a wonderful holiday season. I am fortunate and find it extremely rewarding to have the opportunity to be part of an institution whose mission allows us to offer hope for a healthier and more vital community.

Best wishes,

Andrea Giuffrida, Ph.D.
Vice President for Research