Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth is celebrating its 50-year anniversary as a department.

Louis A. Faillace, MD, was a faculty member at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. He knew eventually he would be given a chair position. Rather than stay at John Hopkins' established psychiatry program, he took a calculated risk in 1971 to start the psychiatry department in Houston at UTHealth.

Faillace said the decision to relocate to Houston came down to the opportunity to build the department the way he wanted to. He knew the difficult task that was in front of him but was determined to build the best psychiatry department in the nation.

When he arrived, Faillace had no facilities or faculty. He immediately got to work, becoming instrumental in UTHealth's affiliations with UTHealth Harris County Psychiatric Center, Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center, and Harris Health's Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital. He also started the residency program in the department.

In the first few years of the department, Faillace only had four faculty members. When he
Robert Guynn, MD, was Faillace’s first official hire in 1973. He played a prominent role in helping the department get off the ground. When Faillace stepped down in 1987, Guynn took over as chair of the department. At that time, UTHealth HCPC was still opening up. Guynn oversaw hiring of new faculty for the hospital as well as establishing new programs and setting up facilities for research.

In his time as chair, Guynn saw UTHealth HCPC as a vital tool to grow the department, with expansion in faculty, residents, and trainees. He was a big advocate of education and took pride in seeing the residency program grow and the quality it produces. Guynn would remain the chair until 2007.

For most of its existence, the department’s outpatient center was located in the UTHealth Mental Sciences Institute, located at 1300 Moursund St., across the street from TIRR Memorial Hermann. However, the department had grown too large for the building by the early 2000s. With support from the institution, the Behavioral and Biomedical Sciences Building (BBSB) was born. This attracted the third and current chair, Jair Soares, MD, PhD.

Soares joined the department in 2009 and quickly transitioned over to BBSB. He immediately emphasized research, education, and serving the community as top priorities, saying the new facility was instrumental to take the department to the next level.

Soares shared the same enthusiasm laid by his predecessors to build the best psychiatry department in the country. About 10 years after opening up BBSB, the department is getting ready to expand once again.

Recently, a transformative gift from the John S. Dunn Foundation created the John S. Dunn Behavioral Sciences Center to support innovative behavioral health research, education, and patient care.

In gratitude for that gift, the home for a new hospital funded by the state government with support from the Texas Medical Center, will carry the name of the John S. Dunn Behavioral Sciences Center. The Dunn Center Building, combined with UTHealth HCPC, will become the largest academic psychiatric hospital in the country.

Soares says this will not only help the department continue to expand and conduct cutting-edge research to understand mental health better, it connects the department to the community as a whole and will allow for better service to patients.

In 2018, the department recognized Faillace by officially naming the department the Louis A. Faillace, MD, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth. Faillace is humbled to have the department named after him.

“It’s an honor,” Faillace said. “My son and Dr. Soares had been working on this for about six months. I had no idea. I was completely shocked.”

From no office space in 1971 to becoming the largest academic psychiatric hospital in the nation shows just how far the department has come in the last 50 years. Soares is grateful to have the support of both former chairs.

“They’re very committed to our place and our people,” Soares said. “They’ve been very generous with their advice. The more I’ve gotten to know them, the more I admire them.”
Faculty Spotlight: Kan joins telehealth team

Lisa Kan, PhD, assistant professor in the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, is a clinical psychologist who works with the telehealth team, conducting evaluations of competency to stand trial for defendants committed to the North Texas State Hospital system.

Kan is in her second stint at UTHealth, where she previously served as a research assistant in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at McGovern Medical School in the early 2000s. Prior to her return, she earned her PhD in clinical psychology from Sam Houston State University. She received the Texas State University Fellowship, which offered her financial support during her graduate education.

Kan entered a postdoctoral fellowship in forensic psychology at the University of Virginia. She returned to Sam Houston as an assistant professor, where she taught, provided clinical supervision, and mentored student research. In 2015, Kan joined the Harris Center in Houston, as an analyst and eventually transitioned to the Harris County Community Supervision and Corrections Department as a research director.

Kan’s interest in forensic psychology started when she worked as an administrative assistant in a psychological practice during her undergraduate education. The progress she saw in a particular patient, who struggled with severe depression and suicidal thoughts, inspired her to change her major to psychology. She worked with a sociology professor, exploring racial and disparity in capital sentencing, which sparked her particular interest in the interactions between psychology and the law.

At UTHealth, Kan plans UTHealth to continue her forensic psychology work. She hopes to conduct more research, help the field develop best practices for conducting remote psycho-legal evaluations, serve on committees devoted to diversity and inclusion issues, and mentor students and trainees.

Kan is excited to bring her passion for her work back to UTHealth.

“I find it tremendously rewarding to assist triers of fact in understanding and applying psychological science to their decision-making process,” Kan said. “Mental illness and its potential impact on psycho-legal functioning is often misunderstood, which can lead to unjust outcomes for those involved.”

See Kan’s full profile here.

Sanches and colleagues establish bipolar registry

Marsal Sanches, MD, PhD, associate professor in the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, is one of the investigators involved in the Greater Houston Area Bipolar Registry, an initiative aimed at providing a detailed clinical and
neurobiological longitudinal evaluation of children with bipolar disorder and offspring of parents with bipolar disorder.

The registry is based on the idea that pediatric patients with bipolar disorder, or those at genetic risk to develop the condition, may have certain patterns in their brains that could potentially help researchers better understand the clinical and neurobiological aspects of bipolar disorder. The researchers hope the results from the registry will identify predictors of eventual development of bipolar disorder, as well as other mental health issues, for healthy children whose parents have bipolar disorder.

The concept for the registry came from Jair Soares, MD, PhD, and the Pat R. Rutherford, Jr. Chair in the department, who is also the leading investigator of the study. Upon enrolling, participants undergo an initial evaluation and are followed annually over several years. To take part in the study, participants need to be between the ages of 6 and 17. They must meet the research criteria for bipolar disorder or be the offspring of a parent who does qualify. Healthy controls, those without personal or family history of psychiatric conditions, are eligible as well.

Sanches hopes this research will be able to catch bipolar disorder early and even prevent it.

“This is an exciting study,” Sanches said. “This has the potential to provide valuable contributions for our understanding of bipolar disorder.”

Those interested in participating or learning more about the registry can contact Cordelia Collins, research assistant, at 713-486-2527.

Fries receives prestigious award

Gabriel Fries, PhD, assistant professor in the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, was recently awarded the prestigious two-year, $90,000 Young Investigator Grant from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) that will assist him in his research focusing on the biology of suicide and bipolar disorder.

Fries and his team will study postmortem brains of patients with bipolar disorder who died due to suicide, and compare them to patients who died of other causes. Specifically, he will investigate how genes are being expressed in the prefrontal cortex, a region of the brain known to be associated with suicide and impulsive behavior. Fries will investigate how much the changes are related to a genetic risk for bipolar disorder and suicide attempts.

The grant from the AFSP will also allow Fries to complement analyses currently ongoing as part of his K01 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. This will allow for a deeper characterization of suicide in bipolar disorder.

Fries' initial research has shown molecular changes in patients' brains who died of suicide, including neuronal mechanisms related to DNA methylation. He hopes that his study can paint a complete picture of the biological underpinnings of suicide and bipolar disorder, eventually providing new targets for the development of treatments and allowing for a better screening of patients at high risk for suicide.
Fries feels grateful to have received this grant from the AFSP.

“There are lots of research groups conducting amazing research on suicide, so I knew the chances of attaining this grant were very small given the fierce competition,” Fries said. “The AFSP is the world’s largest private funder of suicide prevention research, and it is a huge honor to receive a grant from them.”

Read more about the AFSP grant [here](#).

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**Findley named assistant dean**

J. Chase Findley, MD, was recently named Assistant Dean for Accreditation and Educational Quality Improvement at McGovern Medical School. In his new role he will work in the medical school’s Office of Educational Programs to broadly create efforts to improve the curriculum and educational experience for medical students.

Findley became involved in accreditation and educational quality improvement activities at the medical school level in 2017. This became a major focus of Findley’s administrative work over time. He enjoys the challenges involved and the opportunity to work with faculty and staff throughout the medical school.

Patricia Butler, MD, Vice Dean for Educational Programs, recognized Findley’s increasing responsibilities in this work and offered Findley the assistant dean position.

“It is a great honor for Dr. Butler and others within the Office of Educational Programs to have confidence in my ability to contribute to the continuous improvement of our medical school.” Findley said.

He will be directing the school’s efforts to uphold the requirements of the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME), which is the section of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) that accredits medical doctorate educational programs.

Findley’s first major projects have been to organize retreats to comprehensively evaluate the medical education curriculum, and to establish a group of faculty focused on better integrating the preclinical and clinical phases of curriculum. His overall goal is to help McGovern Medical School continue to provide the best medical education for students and to continuously improve in each academic year.

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**Scaini recognized at ISBD conference**

Giselli Scaini, PhD, instructor at the Faillace Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, had her research poster recognized at the 2021 International Society for Bipolar Disorders (ISBD) virtual conference in May.

Scaini’s study compares children and diagnosed with bipolar disorder...
to those who undiagnosed but whose parents have bipolar disorder, putting these children in a higher risk category. The goal is to identify common biological markers in each study group to predict risk to developing bipolar disorder, how it will progress, and what treatment options can be effective to treat bipolar disorder.

Scaini hypothesized that the genetics and function of mitochondria, organelles that generate most of the chemical energy for a cell’s biochemical reactions, could influence individual susceptibility to developing bipolar disorder.

In this preliminary study, Scaini and her team investigated differences in the peripheral levels of glycolysis and tricarboxylic acid metabolites in children and adolescents with bipolar disorder, unaffected high-risk offspring of parents with bipolar disorder, and healthy controls – those undiagnosed with bipolar disorder and no family history of the disease.

The poster, titled “Alterations in Bioenergetic Metabolic Pathways in Children and Adolescents with Bipolar Disorder and Unaffected Offspring of Bipolar Parents: A Preliminary Study,” is part of a project that hopes to discover a clinically useful predictive mitochondrial biosignature - defined by clinical and neuropsychological data and mitochondrial blood-based biomarkers of bipolar disorder that will accurately predict susceptibility to bipolar disorder, thus improving overall care for patients suffering from this mental illness.

Scaini, who has regularly participated in other conferences, feels fortunate to present her work to distinguished scientists. This allows her to receive feedback, exchange ideas, and develop new strategies to apply to her research.

“I feel grateful that the research our group is performing is being recognized and that I’m able to work in a very urgent research field,” Scaini said. “I believe that advances in biological psychiatry are key to not only uncovering pathophysiology and developing new therapies but also for reducing the social stigma of mental illness.”

Clinical trials

The following clinical trials are in operation, following all necessary safety guidelines. If you’re interested, contact the appropriate study.

**Neuroimaging and Brain Cell Structure and Function in Substance Abuse (In Vitro and In Vivo Evidence of Neurotoxicity in Substance Abuse)**
Contact: 713-500-DRUG (3784)

**Management of Chronic Pain and PTSD in Veterans with tDCS+Prolonged Exposure**
Contact: Melba A. Hernandez-Tejada, PhD, DHA PI, 713-486-2524

**Candesartan as an Adjunctive Treatment for Bipolar Depression**
Contact: Taya Bockmann, Program Manager, 713-486-2625

To see all open studies, visit our [website](#).
Congratulations graduates!

We celebrated our department's residents, fellows, and interns graduation recently at a dinner. Students were able to share the evening with their mentors, colleagues, and family and friends.

Congratulations to all the graduates! We know you will do great things in each of your careers.

Attendees at the graduation dinner (Photo credit: Aaron Zapata/UTHealth and Verenise Alvarado (UTHealth)

We're hiring!

The following positions are open at our department:

**Faculty – Endowed Chair (Research)**

The Louis A. Faillace, MD, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences of the McGovern Medical School at UTHealth has an extraordinary opportunity for a senior scientist with a funded multidisciplinary program of clinical care research who is at the rank of an Associate or Full Professor.

[Apply Here](#)

**Psychiatrists – Clinical Faculty/Tele-Psychiatry**

The Louis A. Faillace, MD, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences of the McGovern Medical School at UTHealth is currently recruiting for multiple faculty positions based on qualification to include possible rank of Assistant Professor. Our emerging program is currently providing tele-psychiatry services to inpatient psychiatric facilities in Texas. Work in the comfort of your own home or local office, with only one trip per month needed to visit the site.

[Apply Here](#)

**Clinician I/II – Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHATT)**

Days: Flexible

Hours: Flexible
Apply Here

Adult Psychiatrist – Baytown – Outpatient
*Telemed 80%, Onsite 20%*
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
1 Hour New Patient
30 Min Followup
Extra Supplement for location

Adult Psychiatrist – Acres Homes
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
1 Hour New Patient
30 Min Followup

Child and Adult Psychiatrist – Rosenberg – Outpatient
*Telemed 80%, Onsite 20%*
Monday through Friday
8am – 5pm
1 Hour New Patient
30 Min Followup
Extra Supplement for provider to see life span

Child Psychiatrist (Bilingual Spanish/English) – Spring Branch – Outpatient
*Telemed 50%, Onsite 50%*
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
1 Hour New Patient
30 Min Followup

To find out more information about these academically driven positions or to apply, please forward a CV and letter of interest to Jair C. Soares, MD, PhD, Professor and Chair, 1941 East Road, Houston, TX 77054, email: Jair.C.Soares@uth.tmc.edu, phone 713-486-2507, fax 713-486-2553.

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Publications

**Significant reduction in depressive symptoms among patients with moderately-severe to severe depressive symptoms after participation in a therapist-supported, evidence-based mobile health program delivered via a smartphone app - ScienceDirect - June 17, 2021**
Valerie L.Forman-Hoffman; Benjamin W. Nelson; Kristian Ranta; Albert Nazander; OutiHilgert; Joao de Quevedo

**Mini-review: The anti-aging effects of lithium - PubMed.gov - June 14, 2021**

In the news

**Lokesh Shahani, MD, MPH**, spoke to FOX 26 News about a rise in mental health-related visits to emergency rooms among children since the pandemic began and ways parents can check in with their children for signs of anxiety or depression.

**Jennifer Bahrman, PhD**, was quoted in the Daily Citizen-News of Dalton, Georgia, about cognitive dulling, a state of mental fatigue caused by the long-term stress of the pandemic.
A Novel Refractory Mood Disorders and Electroconvulsive Therapy Elective for Medical Students: Fighting Stigma through Experience - Psychiatry Quarterly - June 2021

Bernice N. Yau, Carola Rong, J. Chase Findley, Salih Selek

Melba Hernandez-Tejada, PhD, DHA, spoke with UTHealth news about research that is combining evidence-based psychotherapy via telemedicine with peer support to help veterans complete their treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Deborah Little, PhD, spoke with UTHealth news about looking for ways to help those in an informal caregiver role cope with anxiety and stress.

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