Commencement Exercises

The University of Texas
Southwestern Medical Center
Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health

Wednesday, May 13
Two Thousand Twenty-Six
Ten a.m.
Tom and Lula Gooch Auditorium
Dallas, Texas


THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER
PRAESIDIUM
DISCIPLINA
CIVITATIS

THE VERNIE A. STEMBRIDGE, M.D. ACADEMIC MACE

UT Southwestern's Vernie A. Stembridge, M.D., Academic Mace is carried in processions and displayed on ceremonial occasions. This symbol of the authority of the faculty to grant degrees, like much of our current academic pageantry, dates from the Middle Ages. The Stembridge Mace was designed by a UT Southwestern alumnus in memory of Vernie A. Stembridge, M.D., a much admired and respected member of UT Southwestern's faculty from 1959 to 2000. The execution of the design was by the Wm. B. Schieffer Studio; the work was completed in 2003.

At the top of the Stembridge Mace sits a Grecian amethyst. The amethyst is traditionally associated with healing of mind, body, and spirit; and service and humility. Some of this amethyst's crystalline facets remain rough and natural while others are smooth and polished to suggest the effect of education upon human attributes.

The Stembridge Mace exhibits a head with seven *bas-relief* cameos: the Aesculapian staff represents the healing arts; the interwoven star indicates the close relationship of the health care professions, the health care team, and the Lone Star State; the dawn offers the promise of a new beginning, or "commencement;" the pyramid symbolizes the creative intellect; the silhouette of Texas (with Dallas indicated) stands for our State and city commitment to education, and the concurrent responsibility of students and faculty to serve our city and State; the double helix (DNA molecule) exemplifies modern biomedical discovery; and the scroll symbolizes the passing of knowledge from teacher to student over the generations.

The overall configuration of the Stembridge Mace suggests the torch of learning. The wooden shaft is made of American Black Walnut, turned and shaped to a classical fluted columnar form.

MACE BEARER

The Mace is carried by Tammy Leonard, Ph.D., the recipient of the Excellence in Teaching Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to education at the UT Southwestern Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health.

Dr. Leonard is a distinguished researcher and dedicated educator whose work examines the intersections of housing, economic stability, and community health. Her interdisciplinary research explores how housing markets, neighborhood dynamics, and public policy shape the well-being of low-income populations, with a focus on identifying and dismantling barriers to health equity.

Equally central to her work is her reputation as an impactful and innovative teacher. Dr. Leonard creates highly engaging, discussion-driven classrooms that blend Socratic methods with applied learning, helping students connect theory to real-world challenges. Her courses emphasize critical thinking, active participation, and immediate application of concepts, often through creative tools and experiential activities that make complex material accessible and memorable. Students consistently describe her teaching as immersive and transformative, and her mentorship, both in and beyond the classroom, plays a significant role in shaping their academic paths and professional development.

ORDER OF EXERCISES

ACADEMIC PROCESSION

The audience is requested to stand, as they are able, as the procession enters and to remain standing for the National Anthem. Please remove hats and caps for the National Anthem.

Welcoming Remarks & Introductions ..... Saad Omer, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.B.S.
Dean and Professor
Lyda Hill Deanship of the School of Public Health
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center

Commencement Address ..... Ellen J. MacKenzie, Ph.D., Sc.M.
Bloomberg Distinguished Professor and Dean Emeritus
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Presentation of Awards ..... Ellen J. MacKenzie, Ph.D., Sc.M.

Conferring of Degrees ..... Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.
President
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center

PRESENTATION OF GRADUATES

The audience is requested to delay applause until all candidates have received diplomas.

Administration of Oath ..... W. P. Andrew Lee, M.D.
Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center

Closing Remarks ..... Saad Omer, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.B.S.

RECESSIONAL

The audience is requested to stand, as they are able, during the recessional and to remain standing in place until the graduates have exited the auditorium.

The graduates will join their families after class photos have been taken.

DEGREE CANDIDATES

MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Degree Awarded
August 8, 2025

Eyad Bassam Alrabbat
Juliana Dixon

Degree Awarded
December 12, 2025

Khawar Nawaz

Degree Awarded
May 8, 2026

Ada Valrene Abaragu
Isaac Osafo Akyeampong
Victor Frank Basil
Brice Morgan Brannon
Yusif Salaam Conn
Joyane B. Eriom
Asmita Ghimire
Prisha Goyal
Nilam Kandel
Claire Maxwell
Gabrielle Nichole McCraw
Mohamad Moussa
Alondra Olmos
Robin Brandom Pena Bojorges
Roberta Akosua Sarkodee-Adoo
Kahmryn Elizabeth Williams
Carol Xu
Yueshuang Xu
Baihui Zhao

MASTER OF SCIENCE
CLINICAL INVESTIGATION

Degree Awarded
May 8, 2026

Dimitrios Angelis
Published Manuscript: "*Improved Linear Growth after Routine Zinc Supplementation in Preterm Very Low Birth Weight Infants*"

Emily Ila Levy Kamugisha
Published Manuscript: "*Perspectives on a Proposed Contraceptive Decision-aid: A Community Needs Assessment Survey of Sexual and Gender Diverse Adults*"

Lakshmi Raman
Published Manuscript: "*Neurologic Injury in Pediatric ECMO: A Multicenter Neuroimaging Cohort*"

MASTER OF SCIENCE
HEALTH INFORMATICS

Degree Awarded
May 8, 2026

Lakshmi ChandraBhanu
Neha Hussain
Josepha Ronnie Komeka Jeugue
Yishak Abraham Leka
Mengeng Lu
Felipe Monroy
Oluwole Adekunle Oke
Sharvinee Ragunatha Rao
Isabelle Zhu

PETER O'DONNELL JR. SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Hoffman Endowed Scholarship
Eyad Bassam Alrabbat
Mohamad Moussa

Alumni Memorial Scholar Award
Victor Frank Basil

Community Engagement Award
Ada Valrene Abaragu

Excellence for Impact Award
Carol Xu

Excellence in Teaching Award
Tammy Leonard, Ph.D.

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH OATH

Health is a human right, and the public health community exists to safeguard that right. Public health represents the individual and collective actions necessary to protect the health of all people. As a public health professional guided by these principles, I declare the following:

- I will work to ensure that all people have the chance to live full and productive lives, free from avoidable disease, injury, and disability, and are supported in their pursuit of physical, mental, and social well-being.

- I will hold myself to the highest ethics, standards, values, and responsibilities as I move forward the science and practice of public health.

- I will work in partnership with communities and uphold the rights, values, beliefs, and cultures of those individuals and populations with whom I work.

- I will continuously seek new information, foster innovation, and be open to ideas that can better promote the health of populations.

- I will use the best available evidence to promote policies and practices that promote health while respecting individual rights and freedoms.

- With this oath, I commit to the ideals and mission of public health.

PETER O'DONNELL JR. SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

LEADERSHIP

Dean

Saad B. Omer, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.B.S.
Dean and Professor, Lyda Hill Deanship of the School of Public Health

Associate Deans

Romaine F. Johnson, M.D., M.P.H., *Associate Dean of Student Affairs*
Sarah E. Messiah, Ph.D., M.P.H., *Associate Dean of Research*
Trish M. Perl, M.D., M.Sc., *Associate Dean of Faculty Affairs*
L. Joseph Su, Ph.D., M.P.H., *Associate Dean of Academic Affairs*

Department Chairs

Jiang He, M.D., M.S., Ph.D., *Epidemiology*
George Jackson, Ph.D., M.H.A., *Health Economics, Systems, & Policy*
Carolyn Smith-Morris, Ph.D., *Social & Behavioral Sciences*
Yang Xie, Ph.D., *Health Data Science & Biostatistics*

Academic Program Directors

Tami Gurley, Ph.D., *Ph.D. Program*
Heidi Jacobe, M.D., *M.S.C.I. Program*
Jonathan Reeder, M.D., *M.S.H.I. Program*

Marshals

David S. Lopez, Dr.PH., M.P.H., M.S.
Kevin Lutz, Ph.D.
Zachary S. Sturman, J.D., Ph.D.
Revathy Surya Narayana, Ph.D., M.Sc.

Mace Bearer

Tammy Leonard, Ph.D.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Ellen J. MacKenzie, Ph.D., Sc.M.

Dr. MacKenzie is an internationally recognized public health practitioner. From 2017-2025, she served as dean of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the world's first and largest graduate school of public health. She spent five decades at the Bloomberg School, beginning as a biostatistics doctoral student and joining the faculty in 1980, going on to lead initiatives that strengthened applied practice, built a core policy curriculum, and created a model faculty development program. She chaired the Department of Health Policy and Management from 2005 until 2016 before becoming the Bloomberg School's 11th dean in October 2017. Under her guidance, the Bloomberg School became a leading and trusted resource of expertise and information related to the COVID-19 pandemic, offering informed analysis, launching critical research initiatives, and ensuring that evidence-based practices and policies were at the forefront of the global discourse.

She is an expert on trauma care systems and policy, and her election to the National Academy of Medicine in 2018 recognized her role in shaping the field of trauma services and outcomes research, leading to improved quality of life for trauma survivors. In 2012, she was named one of 20 leaders and visionaries who have had a transformative effect on the field of violence and injury prevention.

ACADEMIC BIOGRAPHIES

President

Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D., *President, Professor of Internal Medicine,* is holder of the Philip O'Bryan Montgomery Jr., MD, Distinguished Presidential Chair in Academic Administration and the Charles Cameron Sprague Distinguished Chair in Biomedical Science. Dr. Podolsky became President of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in September 2008. He oversees the institution's strategic priorities; its academic, clinical, and administrative operations; and its interactions with the Dallas community, the UT System Board of Regents, and the Texas State Legislature. Since arriving at UT Southwestern, Dr. Podolsky's agenda has focused on keeping UT Southwestern at the frontiers of science by enhancing its faculty and activities in basic, translational, and clinical research and on promoting clinical transformation through a commitment to excellence and innovation in patient care. His priorities also include ensuring that UT Southwestern educates and trains future physicians, scientists, and allied health care professionals in programs that optimally prepare them for the changing landscape in scientific research and health care delivery, and he has launched important new initiatives in global health and faculty development. Dr. Podolsky earned his undergraduate degree from Harvard College and medical degree from Harvard Medical School. His previous association with Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital included 20 years of service as Chief of Gastroenterology and as Chief Academic Officer of Partners HealthCare. He is internationally renowned for his contributions to the understanding of intestinal inflammatory diseases. Dr. Podolsky is an elected member of the National Academy of Medicine and a former President of the American Gastroenterological Association, from which he received the 2009 Julius Friedenwald Medal for Distinguished Service for his lifelong contributions to the field of gastroenterology.

Provost

W. P. Andrew Lee, M.D., *Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, Provost, and Dean, UT Southwestern Medical School, Professor of Plastic Surgery*, is holder of the Atticus James Gill, M.D. Chair in Medical Science. Dr. Lee joined the UT Southwestern Medical Center in February 2019. He is responsible for advancing the academic mission of UT Southwestern's four degree-granting schools, while leading a faculty of approximately 3,700. He also oversees the more than $761 million in annual biomedical research funding awarded to faculty. Dr. Lee received his undergraduate degree from Harvard College and completed medical school and a general surgery residency at Johns Hopkins, followed by plastic surgery training at Massachusetts General Hospital. Dr. Lee served as Director (Chair) of the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. His research has focused on tolerance strategy for vascularized composite allo-transplantation (VCA) to ameliorate the need for long-term systemic immunosuppression. He established multidisciplinary programs for hand transplantation at Johns Hopkins and University of Pittsburgh using an immunomodulatory protocol based upon his laboratory investigation and led surgical teams that performed the first double hand transplant (2009) and first above-elbow arm transplant (2010) in the United States, as well as the world's first total penis and scrotum transplant (2018). Dr. Lee has served as the President of the American Society for Surgery of the Hand, Chair of the American Board of Plastic Surgery, President of the American Society for Reconstructive Transplantation, President of the American Association for Hand Surgery, and President of the American Association of Plastic Surgeons.

Vice Provosts

Alyssa Hasty, Ph.D., V*ice Provost and Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Career Development*, *Professor of Internal Medicine,* is holder of the George A. and Nancy P. Shutt Professorship in Medical Science. Dr. Hasty joined UT Southwestern in August 2024 and in addition to her vice provost role is a Professor of Internal Medicine and a member of the Touchstone Diabetes Center. She and her team assist departments with procedures related to faculty recruiting, hiring, and promotions. In addition, they work to elevate the faculty experience by identifying needs, researching approaches taken by others, implementing innovative programs, and evaluating results. Dr. Hasty received her doctoral degree in pathology from Vanderbilt University where she emerged as a leader in the field of immunometabolism, determining the role of the immune system in obesity-accelerated diseases. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Tokyo University and her research has been continuously funded by agencies including the National Institutes of Health, the Veterans Affairs, the American Diabetes Association, the American Heart Association, and The Mark Foundation for Cancer Research.

Sherry C. Huang, M.D., *Vice Provost and Senior Associate Dean for Educatio*n, *Professor of Pediatrics*, is responsible for the successful leadership, strategic management and overall quality of education and training within the UT Southwestern campuses of the School of Medicine, the School of Health Professions, the O'Donnell School of Public Health, and the Graduate School for Biomedical Sciences. Dr. Huang, who joined UT Southwestern in February of 2024, also plays a pivotal role as the educational liaison across the clinical partners for UT Southwestern. She has guided the implementation of innovative curricula and training paradigms in the clinical learning environment to ensure alignment with the missions and priorities of the medical school and health system. A graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr. Huang earned her medical degree at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. She completed residency training in pediatrics at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) followed by a fellowship in pediatric gastroenterology, hepatology, and nutrition, and postdoctoral research training with a focus on cancer genetics. Dr. Huang's research employed computational models to predict genetically predisposed colon cancer patients who can benefit from targeted prevention. She joined the faculty of UCSD, pursuing a career as a physician-scientist while promoting medical education in progressive leadership roles. Dr. Huang is nationally recognized as a medical educator and serves as a member of the ACGME Clinical Learning Environment Committee.

Dean

Saad B. Omer, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.B.S., *Founding Dean and Professor, Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health,* is a U.S. National Academy of Medicine member and a globally recognized epidemiologist, public health leader, and vaccine policy expert. As the founding Dean of the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health, Dr. Omer has dedicated his career to advancing high-impact science that informs vaccine policy and clinical recommendations worldwide. Dr. Omer's research has shaped public health strategies on immunization and infectious disease control. His research portfolio includes clinical trials on immunization for diseases such as pertussis, polio, measles, and pneumococcal infections, as well as studies on respiratory viruses like influenza, RSV, and COVID-19. He has advised global health organizations and served on advisory boards, including the WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Vaccines and the National Vaccine Advisory Committee. Dr. Omer earned his Ph.D. in Global Disease Epidemiology and Control and his M.P.H. from Johns Hopkins University, following his medical degree from The Aga Khan University. Through his leadership and research, Dr. Omer continues to drive impactful public health initiatives worldwide, shaping policies that enhance vaccine uptake, prevent infectious diseases, and improve health outcomes in the United States and globally.

Associate Deans

Romaine F. Johnson, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.S., *Associate Dean of Student Affairs*, is the Beth and Marvin C. "Cub" Culbertson Professorship in Pediatric Otolaryngology and the Director of Quality and Safety for the Department of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery at UT Southwestern Medical Center. He also serves as Program Director of the M.D./M.P.H. Program and Professor in the Department of Health Data Science and Biostatistics at the O'Donnell School of Public Health. Dr. Johnson is the Editor-in-Chief of Laryngoscope Investigative Otolaryngology, the Triological Society's open-access journal. Dr. Johnson earned his medical degree at the Drexel University School of Medicine (formerly MCP Hahnemann School of Medicine). He completed an otolaryngology residency at the Baylor College of Medicine and a pediatric otolaryngology fellowship at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. Dr. Johnson received a Bachelor of Science in biology from Lincoln University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Public Health from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. He is board certified by the American Board of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery with sub-certification in Complex Pediatric Otolaryngology.

Sarah E. Messiah, Ph.D., M.P.H., *Associate Dean for Research*, is a Professor of Epidemiology and Professor of Pediatrics. She is also the inaugural Director of the Child and Adolescent Population Health Program, a collaboration between UT Southwestern and Children's Health System of Texas. Dr. Messiah and her team are responsible for supporting the overall research mission and efforts of the O'Donnell School of Public Health. Dr. Messiah earned her Ph.D. in Epidemiology from the University of Miami, her M.P.H. in Maternal and Child Health from Florida International University, and her B.A. in Psychology from Skidmore College. Dr. Messiah's federally-funded research focuses on childhood obesity prevention and treatment, cardiometabolic health, and the implementation of evidence-based interventions in clinical and community settings.

Trish M. Perl, M.D., M.Sc., *Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs,* is a Professor in the Department of Internal Medicine. An internationally recognized expert in infectious diseases and health care epidemiology, she previously served as Chief of Infectious Diseases and Geographic Medicine and holds the H. Ben and Isabelle T. Decherd Chair in Internal Medicine in Honor of Henry M. Winans, Sr., M.D. Her work focuses on health care–associated infections, antimicrobial resistance, respiratory infections, and infection prevention. She earned her medical degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and completed her residency and fellowship in internal medicine at McGill University's Royal Victoria Hospital, followed by fellowship training in infectious diseases and clinical epidemiology at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. She also holds a Master of Science in Epidemiology and Biostatistics from McGill University. She has served on numerous national and international advisory committees, including those for the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Institutes of Health. Her work has been widely recognized through national and international lectures, influential publications, and honors including the Senior Scholar Award from the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA).

Joseph Su, Ph.D., M.P.H., *Associate Dean for Academic Affairs,* is a Professor of Epidemiology and a co-director of the Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center Office of Training and Education. He received his Ph.D. in Nutritional Epidemiology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and his M.P.H. in Public Health Nutrition at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. He had his undergraduate training in Nutritional Sciences at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul, and in Chemistry at Chung-Yuan University in Taiwan. Dr. Su's career has spanned both academic medical centers and public services at the federal government. Previously, he served as a Branch Chief at the Division of Epidemiologic Research of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Medical Devices and Radiological Health. Prior to the FDA, he was a Program Director at the Epidemiology and Genomic Research Program, Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences, National Cancer Institute (NCI). As a cancer epidemiologist, Dr. Su's research integrates advanced analytical methods to examine how diet, environmental contaminants, and metabolic pathways influence cancer risk and long-term health outcomes.

ACADEMIC HERALDRY AND REGALIA

Although the people, the places, and the styles have changed, you are about to participate in a reenactment of a ceremony, which has existed for nearly nine centuries: the recognition of academic achievement.

The tradition of recognizing academic accomplishment with ceremony, bright color, and distinctive dress is an exercise, which has existed through the ages. Although the commencement ceremony and academic costume of most colleges and universities in the United States today is guided by a twentieth century standard, their roots are found in the development of the universities during the Middle Ages. The medieval universities of Western Europe, such as Paris, Bologna, Cambridge, and Oxford, have provided us with an institutional format – the university structure; a measure of progress – degrees; and a ceremony of achievement – commencement.

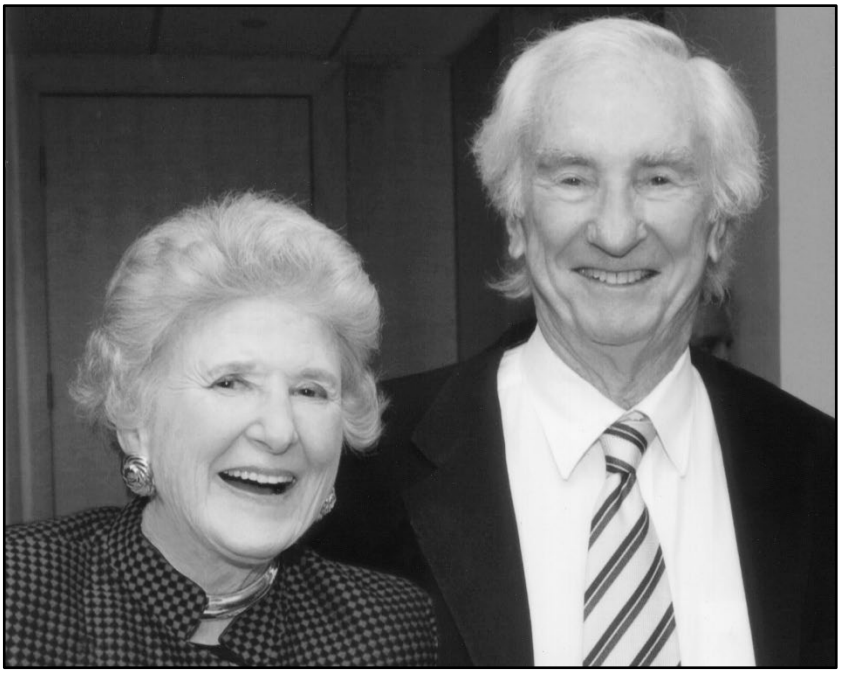
For centuries, students have withstood the preliminary academic trials where they attended classes, heard lectures, and engaged in debate. After passing these preliminary trials, the candidate would don a special gown and assume a seat with the *bachalari*, or bachelors. This ceremony was often followed by a feast, with wine provided by the successful candidate. The candidates presented today now become part of this long-standing tradition.

The academic hood worn by the faculty and platform participants and received by graduates at the Master's level and above is derived from the cloak worn in medieval times over the gown. Attached to the cloak at the back of the neck was a cowl hood, which hung down or could be pulled over the head for warmth. After time, this hood became a separate article worn over the shoulders and hanging down the wearer's back. With the coming into fashion of caps and hats during the fifteenth century, the hoods soon became more ornamental than functional.

Whereas it is generally understood that in Europe gowns were necessary for warmth and hoods covered the academic clerics' tonsured heads, today the American tradition has evolved toward individual expression of the institution. Although the style of the hood is not unique to each institution, the combinations of colors and chevrons have been standardized in the United States for more than 100 years. The satin colors of the hood lining represent the institution conferring the degree. The academic colors for component institutions of The University of Texas System are orange and white. The color of the academic hood's velvet trim is distinctive of the degree earned, as is the tassel on the cap. Historical associations of color continue to signify the various faculties and generally carry the traditions established by their early English counterparts. The green of medicinal herbs immediately identifies a medically related degree. Philosophy is signified by dark blue, the traditional color of truth and wisdom. The wealth of information earned through research in science is represented by golden yellow.

Cords worn with academic regalia:

Copper cord – Doctor of Philosophy
Light Blue cord – Master of Public Health
Lavendar cord – Master of Science in Clinical Investigation
Seafoam cord – Master of Science in Health Informatics
Salmon cord – O'Donnell School of Public Health Faculty
Red, white, and blue – US Armed Forces, Active Duty and Veterans
Green and gold – Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society
Light blue stole – Southwestern Academy of Teachers
Medals – The University of Texas Academy of Health Science Education and UT System Regents' Outstanding Teacher Award



Peter and Edith O'Donnell

The Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health was founded through the transformative gift of the O'Donnell Foundation, a philanthropic organization founded by the school's namesake, Peter O'Donnell Jr., and his wife, Edith O'Donnell.

Since 1957, the O'Donnell Foundation has supported education, medicine, and scientific research across Texas. The Foundation's ongoing support for UT Southwestern Medical Center, particularly at the Medical School, the Peter O'Donnell Jr. Brain Institute, and the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health, has helped transform UT Southwestern into a world-class institution.

Degrees will be officially conferred to Candidates for Graduation identified in this Commencement Booklet who have met all requirements on the recommendation of the Faculty of the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health and by virtue of the authority vested in the Faculty and Dean by the Regents of The University of Texas.