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## 2016 - 2017 Candidates

- **Yue Chen**, Cellular & Molecular Biology
  - **Adam Birge**, Anthropology
  - **Stephanie Hernandez**, Applied Demography
  - **Merridee Lefner**, Neurobiology
  - **Matthew Wood**, Neurobiology
  - **Jose Lara-Ruiz**, Psychology
  - **Duc Phan**, Environmental Engineering
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### **Yue Chen**

Yue Chen (Rachel) studied Biology Science and received a Master of Science at The University of Texas at San Antonio in 2014. She is currently researching the causes of, and preventions for, Lyme disease with Dr. Janakiram Seshu while perusing a Ph.D. in Cell and Molecular Biology at UTSA. Yue believes graduate school gives a person the space to be reflective and the time to carefully wade through knowledge. Studying Biology has always been a part of her dream. UTSA is the perfect cradle for anyone who is passionate about science. Yue is excited and ready for any challenge that might come in the future and hopes UTSA will be the place where her dreams come true.



## **Adam Birge**

Adam received a Bachelor's in History and Anthropology from Washington State University in 2010. In 2016, he received his Master's in Anthropology from The University of Texas at San Antonio. Currently, Adam is investigating the Sajama lines in western Bolivia. Adam aspires to teach at a university and to conduct additional archaeological and anthropological research in the Andes Mountains. UTSA provides a diverse academic environment to explore different anthropological perspectives on the environment and human societies, in addition, to the plenty of opportunities to teach and mentor undergraduate anthropology majors.



## **Stephanie Hernandez**

Stephanie attended Florida State University where she received a Bachelor's in Sociology and a Master's in Demography. During her first year at UTSA, Stephanie studies HIV testing in the United States. She is focused on understanding determinants of testing and variation by socioc demographic characteristics. As a graduate research assistant, Stephanie and Dr. Giuseppina Valle Holway explore reproductive health behaviors in young adults. After graduating from UTSA, she plans to continue examining reproductive health issues as a professor or applied researcher at a federal statistical agency. Stephanie chose UTSA because of the faculty in the Demography department and their commitment to mentorship and minority representation. UTSA is a place of excellent training from faculty that truly care about the success of their students.



## **Merridee Lefner**

Merridee Lefner received her Bachelor of Science with a concentration in Neurobiology from The University of Texas at San Antonio. She is currently working in the lab of Dr. Matthew Wanat, where she studies the role of dopamine in motivated behavior. Merridee hopes to become a Principal Investigator after completing her graduate and postdoctoral studies. Merridee chose to pursue a doctoral degree at UTSA due to the outstanding faculty members that specialize in diverse topics, the friendly and collaborative environment, and the strong contributions that UTSA offers to the Neuroscience community.



## **Matthew Wood**

Matt received his Bachelor of Science in Psychology at the University of North Texas. He also received his Master's in Applied Cognition and Neuroscience from The University of Texas at Dallas. Matt currently works in Dr. Nicole Wicha's Lab researching electroencephalogram (EEG) to measure language comprehension. He hopes to complete his Ph.D. and pursue a career in research, becoming a PI at a university. UTSA is one of the fastest growing research universities in Texas. Dr. Wicha, Associate Professor at UTSA, is a direct understudy of Dr. Marta Kutas, one of the pioneers of using EEG to study language processing.



## **Jose Lara-Ruiz**

Jose Lara-Ruiz completed a M.A. in Clinical Psychology at California State University, Northridge and a B.A. in Psychology with a Minor in Biology at California State University, Dominguez Hills. Currently, Jose is a member of the STRONG STAR Research Consortium and the Consortium to Alleviate PTSD at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. Under the mentorship of Dr. Alan L. Peterson, Jose is involved in research involving the detection, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of combat-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in active-duty service members and veterans. He is also involved in examining the contribution of blast injuries to PTSD and traumatic brain injury. Pursuing doctoral studies at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) was the perfect path to follow for the following two reasons. Attending UTSA provided the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with some of the top experts in in the field of military and trauma research. Second, the Psychology Ph.D. program with an emphasis on Military Health at UTSA will result in strengthening his experimental skills to continue conducting research with military populations. Upon earning his doctoral degree, one goal would be to obtain a faculty position at a university, establish a research laboratory, and to mentor students or to possibly seek a career in the military as a military psychologist. Jose's ultimate goal is to continue conducting military research and to contribute to better treatments and improving the quality of life of active duty service members, his fellow veterans, and their families.

## **Duc Phan**

Duc Phan received his Bachelor of Engineering in Environmental Engineering at Hanoi University of Science and Technology in 2005. He obtained two Masters of Science and Engineering in Environmental Engineering at Seoul National University, South Korea and Johns Hopkins University in 2011 and 2014, respectively. Duc is interested in utilizing environmental biotechnology to improve environmental public health. His current project is investigating nitrification inhibition by nanomaterial in wastewater treatment systems working under Dr. Vikram Kapoor's supervision. His academic goal is to be a professor in a university. Duc wants to provide the best academic experience in the field of environmental engineering to his students. Duc Phan chose UTSA because it is ranked as one of the best young universities in the nation with a dynamic research environment and excellent institution for conducting research.