

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



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A transformative educational experience

Lidia Rocha was inspired from a young age to pursue an education in nursing, but while working on her prerequisites for nursing school, her career aspirations shifted. As she began to research other options in the medical field – something she was certain about – she set her eyes on the histotechnology program at The University of Texas MD Anderson School of Health Professions.

“The name MD Anderson carries immense prestige and reputation, which greatly appealed to me,” says Rocha. “I was drawn to the organizational culture and the opportunity to challenge myself within this esteemed institution. Additionally, a bachelor’s degree focuses on both theory and the technical aspects of histotechnology.”

To maximize her chance of acceptance into SHP’s histotechnology program, Rocha first earned her associate degree in applied science with a focus on histotechnology from Houston Community College – Coleman College for Health Sciences in 2011. This decision helped her not only secure a spot in the SHP program but also thrive academically.

“One of my most memorable moments as a student was when (SHP associate professor) Dr. Toysha Mayer approached me with encouraging words that inspired me to lead by example for my peers. With my prior experience in histology, I found myself in a position where colleagues often sought my help. I embraced this role wholeheartedly, striving not only to set a high standard but also to support others in their learning journeys,” says Rocha, who went on to receive the Outstanding Student Award for Scholastic and Clinical Achievement her senior year at SHP.

Rocha graduated with her Bachelor of Science from SHP in 2014. She says transitioning from a student to a full-time histotechnologist was seamless because of the academic and professional development opportunities offered by SHP.

“Attending MD Anderson provided me with a transformative educational experience. The rigorous curriculum and dedicated professors challenged and deeply enriched my understanding of the subject matter. As a prominent institution, MD Anderson’s well-structured framework equips students

with extensive opportunities for academic and professional growth,” says Rocha. “The environment fosters regular exposure to cutting-edge scientific advancements, research, and clinical practices, affording students a distinct advantage in their daily learning experience.”

After working at a private lab for seven years, Rocha returned to MD Anderson in 2022 as a senior research histology technician in the Department of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery. This role allows her to immerse herself in numerous projects where she is able to keep up with the latest research technologies and undergo training in tissue microarray creation, a highly sought-after service by her lab.

“Our lab works with a technology-adjacent lab, which has been a great introduction to many of the latest, state-of-the-art techniques in biology. Some of these projects include spatial transcriptomics, high-plex FISH (fluorescence in situ hybridization), high-definition spatial transcriptomics and mass spectrometry imaging. These projects have introduced me to the newest technology used in research and help us understand certain cancers, individualized treatment and drug studies to advance treatments for patients,” Rocha says. “I take immense pride in my work, embrace continuous learning, and strive to enhance both myself and the field of science.”

Rocha, an aspiring mentor, has this to share with current and prospective students:

“Always remember to ask questions and seek help when needed. No one has all the answers, so don't hesitate to request assistance, guidance or clarification,” she says. “We are all constantly learning and growing. Surround yourself with like-minded individuals who share your goals and values and who will encourage and assist you on your path.”

Rocha is currently pursuing a master's degree in science, specializing in health care quality and safety. During her free time, she likes to read, engage in arts and crafts with her children, listen to music while tidying up, and relax while watching a compelling documentary. She looks forward to video chatting with her husband, who is currently on military deployment.

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