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## First Four Students Receive Doctoral Degrees from Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

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By Memorial Sloan Kettering, Friday, May 18, 2012

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Louis Gerstner (third from left) is joined by Kenneth Mariani and Craig Thompson, along with the first four graduates of the school that bears Mr. Gerstner's name (from left): James Dowdle, Dimiter Tassev, Semanti Mukherjee, and Eric Alonzo.

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### Summary

As part of Memorial Sloan Kettering's 33rd annual academic convocation on May 11, the Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences awarded PhDs to four graduates.

Congratulations to the first graduating class of the [Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences](#), Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center!

As part of Memorial Sloan Kettering's 33rd annual academic convocation on May 11, the Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences awarded PhD degrees to [James A. Dowdle](#), Semanti Mukherjee, Dimiter V. Tassev, and Eric S. Alonzo. The diplomas were given by Memorial Sloan Kettering President and CEO [Craig B. Thompson](#), as well as two of the school's pioneers: Provost [Thomas J. Kelly](#), who is also Director of the [Sloan Kettering Institute](#), and Dean [Kenneth J. Marians](#).



Louis Gerstner (third from left) is joined by Kenneth Marians and Craig Thompson, along with the first four graduates of the school that bears Mr. Gerstner's name (from left): James Dowdle, Dimiter Tassev, Semanti Mukherjee, and Eric Alonzo.



(From left) Commencement participants Sloan Kettering Institute Director Thomas Kelly and Dean of the Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Kenneth Marians.





National Cancer Institute Director Harold Varmus delivers the Commencement address.



Eric Alonzo delivers remarks on behalf of his fellow Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences graduates.

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“I strongly believe that an integrative approach to science is fundamental to the future of basic and clinical research,” said Dr. Alonzo, who spoke on behalf of his fellow graduates. “The emphasis on translational research at the Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences was truly exciting because it meant that as a bench scientist I had an extraordinary opportunity to apply my work to projects that might be useful some day in the clinic.”

The Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences admitted its first students – including Dr. Alonzo – in 2006. The school was founded to advance the frontiers of scientific knowledge by educating creative and motivated students in an interactive, innovative, and collegial environment. Today, [more than 50 students](#) at the school are engaged in graduate thesis work in the laboratories of [Memorial Sloan Kettering researchers](#). Enrollment continues to remain steady, with a new class of 11 students beginning the program in July.

“For me,” said Dr. Mariani, “today is a deeply personal event. Over the past nine years, with the help of many, we’ve created a new graduate school that has risen rapidly to become one of the premier training grounds for cancer biology and a model for training biomedical scientists in the new millennium ... Students are our lifeblood [and] the scientific lifetime of our graduates will be full of astounding discoveries and insights.”

At the ceremony, the Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. School of Biomedical Sciences also presented honorary doctor of science degrees to

Mr. Gerstner and to former Memorial Sloan Kettering President Harold Varmus. Dr. Varmus, now Director of the [National Cancer Institute](#), received the Memorial Sloan Kettering Medal for Outstanding Contributions to Biomedical Research and delivered the Commencement's keynote address.

"I want to address an often-forgotten aspect of your transition from science students to science professionals — your new power to influence your discipline ... by bringing others into it," Dr. Varmus said as he began his talk. "Today we celebrate your passage through a gate that denotes your new expertise — a passage that will expand your scientific independence and your career opportunities. But you are also becoming a keeper of those gates. And as gatekeepers, you will now, or will soon be, in a position to entice others into the world of science, to select those worthy of attention by mentors such as yourselves, and to provide them with direction and inspiration — an influence that will extend over many decades."

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[Overview](#)

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[Cancer Engineering PhD](#)

[How to Apply](#)

[Application FAQs](#)

[Fellowships](#)



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[Faculty](#)

[Accreditation](#)

[Student & Faculty Handbook](#)

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