

Case study: University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB)

# How UTMB leveraged Pure to promote and report on its COVID-19 response



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“I don’t know what we would have done without Pure and Research Expert Profiles during COVID-19. We’ve used it so much, from reporting on our work to showcasing our experts.”

— Melodi Moore,  
Research Development Specialist,  
UTMB Research Administration

Research Development Specialist Melodi Moore turned to Pure to track and showcase the team’s critical contributions

When a virus as infectious as COVID-19 emerges, speed is of the essence. Within days of China announcing the new coronavirus, experts at the Galveston National Laboratory (GNL) a US maximum biosecurity (BSL4) laboratory, were studying a live sample. Within weeks, they were collaborating with Moderna and Pfizer on vaccine candidates. Melodi Moore is a Research Development Specialist at University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB), where the GNL is based. In this case study, she explains the crucial role Pure played in swiftly monitoring and highlighting the lab’s work, as well as UTMB’s wider contributions to COVID-19. She also discusses plans to leverage Pure for future UTMB activities.

## Background

As soon as news of COVID-19 broke in December 2019, it was clear that the Galveston National Laboratory (GNL) would play a key research role. The GNL is one of only a handful of US national labs that has the clearance level necessary to handle diseases as infectious and lethal as Ebola. In addition, the lab is home to experts on the coronaviruses MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV; both close relatives of COVID-19.

Importantly, GNL researchers also helped to set up China’s maximum biosecurity lab in Wuhan in 2014 – the same lab that identified the new coronavirus strain.

Melodi explains: “As a result, we know the team at Wuhan well – that’s how we ended up with one of the first live samples of COVID-19 outside of China.”

It wasn’t long before the GNL researchers were using that sample and their extensive virus experience to contribute to global understanding of COVID-19; working “24/7” to develop antibody treatments and vaccines, in collaboration with companies like Pfizer and Moderna. In addition, when concerns

arose over early diagnostic tests, UTMB developed an alternative that was rolled out across the state. Meanwhile, UTMB Health's hospitals, clinics and walk-in services were treating patients with the virus, operating a vigorous vaccination program, and working hard to raise public awareness. As Melodi points out: "Our research is fabulous, but it's only a part of what we've been doing to combat COVID-19."

## The Challenge

With the GNL researchers and medical teams so active, Melodi needed a way to showcase their virus expertise and key collaborations. She was also tasked with providing data reports to UTMB leadership and local funding providers, such as the Sealy Smith Foundation, which awarded UTMB \$3.1 million.

In addition, updates were required for the wider University of Texas System, highlighting the team's important and ground-breaking COVID research. Importantly, she was also asked to source publication figures and media hits for the NIH (National Institutes of Health), CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and UTMB's industry partners; all core funding streams for UTMB's COVID-19 work.

As Melodi notes: "This kind of information is not only required, it is also something we are keen to share, as it's not unrealistic to think it influences funding decisions."

Finally, Melodi wanted to monitor the other alternative metrics – or altmetrics – associated with UTMB's work; for example, publication downloads, views, citations in policy documents and mentions in the media.

## The Solution

For Melodi, Pure – known at UTMB as Research Expert Profiles – has proved "a lifesaver" over the course of the pandemic. In particular, she has drawn heavily on the opportunities to filter and showcase data offered by the Pure portal 'COVID-19 banner' – a new feature launched by the Pure team in early 2020.

She says: "Elsevier and Pure did a great thing by introducing that banner early on. It's made it really easy to report on publications and media mentions – I can get the information I need with just one click. I've heard anecdotally that other UTMB departments use it a lot too."



"The weekly updates, using the Pure media and publications data, are invaluable to not only the research community, but also the senior executives to understand the tremendous amounts of innovation, hard work, and notoriety being created by SARS CO V2 researchers."

— Dr. Randall Urban,  
MD, VP and Chief Research Officer, UTMB





## The new Pure functionality Melodi used to monitor and highlight UTMB's COVID-19 contributions

The COVID-19 banner is an optional feature that institutions can choose to display on the homepage of their Pure portal.

Clicking on the banner leads to a landing page, where, thanks to a powerful, easy-to-tweak and transparent search string, only virus-related information is displayed.

Results can be viewed by the following content types:

- Experts
- Departments
- Equipment
- Projects/Grants
- Publications

In UTMB's case, there is an additional content type – Press/Media – as Melodi and the team integrated Elsevier's Newsflo solution, so they could track and analyze coverage of their COVID-19 publications at a granular level.

Data can also be further refined; for example, publications can be filtered by language, publication year and collaborators. And monitoring publication impact is easy – Scopus citations

are included, along with alternative metrics such as PlumX and Altmetrics, which track usage, social media/media mentions and more.

While the feature was launched in response to the pandemic, institutions can repurpose the functionality to highlight other key institutional activities and topics.

**“The COVID-19 banner leads to a really valuable portal. I can use it to filter information by publication type, open access, most relevant authors, and other useful categories. You can even filter by the top 50 research units!”**

- Melodi Moore

Thanks to the Pure portal COVID-19 banner, Melodi has been able to track and promote an array of impressive COVID-19 related statistics. Since the beginning of March 2020, UTMB scientists have:

- Submitted 259 proposals for COVID-19 research, worth a total of \$151.4 million
- Received more than \$34.3 million in funding
- Published 208 publications in respected medical journals
- Received approaching 10,000 global media mentions

According to Melodi, the topics that UTMB researchers have published on vary widely from vaccines to COVID-19's relationship to SARS. "The virus has also sparked new collaborations at UTMB, which we've been able to track and highlight using Pure. For example, the disproportional effect of COVID on the elderly prompted our experts on ageing research to join forces with our infectious disease researchers – a perfect opportunity for them to pool their expertise."

And the impact of those papers is clear to see. "The alternative metrics on our COVID-19 publications have reached a new high. Via Pure, we can see there has been a huge increase in usage in policy papers and a similar increase in media mentions."

She adds: "I'm sure that our ability to highlight that research on Pure has led to new collaborations. Pure has made it easier for experts to find other researchers and see what topics they are working on; especially as the COVID-19 banner looks and works the same on every institution's Pure portal."

"One of the things I really love about Pure is that if you go to another institution's Pure portal, you already know how to use it. That makes finding information really easy."

- Melodi Moore

## Looking to the future – how Melodi plans to leverage Pure's new features

Melodi has been so pleased with the COVID-19 banner, she has decided to reuse the functionality. She explains: "We have just received a renewal of our Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) from the NIH. It's a highly sought-after grant and

it's not often that institutions receive it more than once, so for us, it's a big deal. When COVID-19 settles down, we will take the banner technology and use it to highlight our translational research. It means we can showcase our experts in one place and pull the same sort of reports we've created for COVID."

Melodi also has plans to repurpose Pure functionality that was designed to showcase work related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She will use it to highlight progress towards the six research goals (RSPs) set by UTMB's Chief Research Officer, Dr. Randall Urban. The functionality will enable her to:

- Add a banner to the Pure Portal showcasing the RSPs. Visitors clicking on an individual RSP will be able to explore the research outputs and researcher profiles associated with it.
- Add badges on researcher pages showing the RSPs that person is associated with and links to other researchers active in that RSP area.
- Track progress towards RSP targets and report on them. This will include identifying top researchers and organizations per RSP.

Melodi explains: "I'm working with Elsevier now to repurpose the SDG technology. Leadership and faculty are really excited about it!"

"Every time I talk to the Elsevier Pure team, they teach me something new. They have been nothing but wonderful to us and have helped us tailor Pure technology and Research Expert Profiles to meet our needs."

- Melodi Moore



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## About UTMB Health – the University of Texas Medical Branch

The University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) began as a hospital and medical school in Galveston more than 125 years ago. Today, it is a major academic health sciences center of global influence with a \$3.3 billion annual statewide economic impact.

UTMB includes schools of Medicine, Nursing, Health Professions and Graduate Biomedical Sciences; several institutes for advanced study; a major medical library; a network of hospitals and clinics that provide a full range of primary and specialized medical care; and numerous research facilities. UTMB is a part of The University of Texas System, comprised of 14 academic and health institutions, and is a member of the Texas Medical Center.

The Galveston National Laboratory (GNL) is located on the UTMB campus and operates under the umbrella of UTMB's Institute for Human Infections and Immunity. As a high-containment research facility with BSL4 (biosecurity level 4) status, it serves as a critically important resource in the global fight against infectious diseases.

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“For me, the best thing about Pure is that most of our publications are in one place and I don’t have to go through the library or learn other systems to access them. It’s easy to sort and filter them and I can reach a live version of a publication in just two clicks.”

- Melodi Moore

## Building Pure usage and on-campus support – Melodi’s 4 top tips

When UTMB acquired Pure in 2015, Melodi took on the primary administrator role. Today, Research Expert Profiles, as it’s known on campus, is home to 917 experts, including postdocs and faculty. For Melodi, key priorities include training them to use Pure and optimizing their profile information. These are the steps she follows to achieve those goals.

### Encourage researchers to personalize their profiles.

Melodi says: “Without da Vinci’s portrait, we would have no idea who the Mona Lisa was. Images are important – they help people remember you. For example, we have found that people are more likely to book an appointment with a physician if they have seen photo of them. I’m sure it must be the same when researchers are looking for collaborators.” If researchers don’t volunteer their photos, she turns to other sources: “I often take them from our quarterly update or website.” UTMB researchers are also encouraged to add other personal details to their profiles. According to Melodi: “Around 30 percent of profiles now contain additional information, whether it’s a little blurb, educational history or updated keywords.”

### Then encourage them to link to it, wherever possible.

“A Pure profile says a lot about a researcher and offers a really effective and easy way to showcase them and their work. I recommend they link to their profile from their department webpage, in their email signature and in press releases – basically, anywhere they can place it where collaborators will link to it.”

### Join department and leadership meetings or book one-on-ones.

“They offer the perfect opportunity to demonstrate how Pure can highlight the accomplishments of that team or an individual researcher,” Melodi explains. “I also show them the kind of data we can report on. The good news is it’s really starting to increase usage and engagement; in fact, one department is now using Pure as its main web presence.”

### Communicate key Pure updates and developments

For example, each year, Melodi tries to improve Pure in some way. “That gives me a reason to go out to the campus and say, ‘hey, we are doing this and, by the way, here’s how you can use Pure.’”

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