

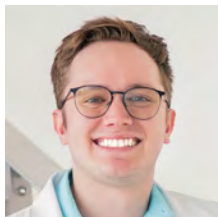
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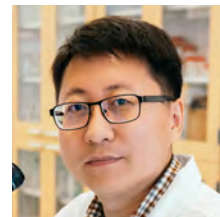
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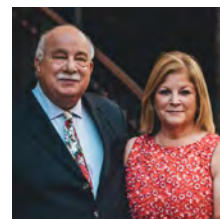
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### FALL/WINTER 2025

**Publisher** F. Lamar Pritchard, Ph.D., R.Ph.

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# A VISION REALIZED, A COLLEGE TRANSFORMED

## Building Worthy Home, Academic and Research Excellence Highlight Pritchard's Tenure

Although fourth generation pharmacist Dean F. Lamar Pritchard, Ph.D., R.Ph., may not have fully known where the University of Houston College of Pharmacy stood when he accepted the position in August 2009, he knew exactly where he wanted to take it.

The evolving academic demands of pharmacy practice and accreditation standards and the rapid advancement of research technologies required visionary leadership, which the college found in Pritchard.

Among the most tangible elements of Pritchard's vision for the college was a state-of-the-art academic research facility with all members of the college under one roof, with learning and research environments to ensure success in their training, education and scientific pursuits. Pritchard campaigned relentlessly to anyone who would listen – from alumni to legislators and prospective donors to UH System regents – to gather the financial support and goodwill necessary for bringing the building to life. In 2016, ground was broken on the nine-story, 300,000-gross-square-foot Health 2 and one year later, the college's new home was substantially complete. After a herculean move-in effort by faculty and staff, Health 2's first classes were held in 2017.

### Academic Programs

Among academic programs, a new Pharm.D. curriculum was implemented in 2018, with the new model designed to prepare students to be practice-ready upon arrival at their experiential sites. The curriculum integrates core knowledge areas into courses based on organ systems and disease states, with each module containing key aspects of pathophysiology of disease; pharmacology, medicinal chemistry, pharmacogenomics, and toxicology affiliated with the drugs relevant to the disease states; and therapeutic concepts centered on therapeutic goals, drug selection, monitoring, and self-care. Each module is paired with a hands-on module-related skills lab which presents students with structured cases as well as reinforcing courses covered earlier in the curriculum with an emphasis on critical thinking and skill development.

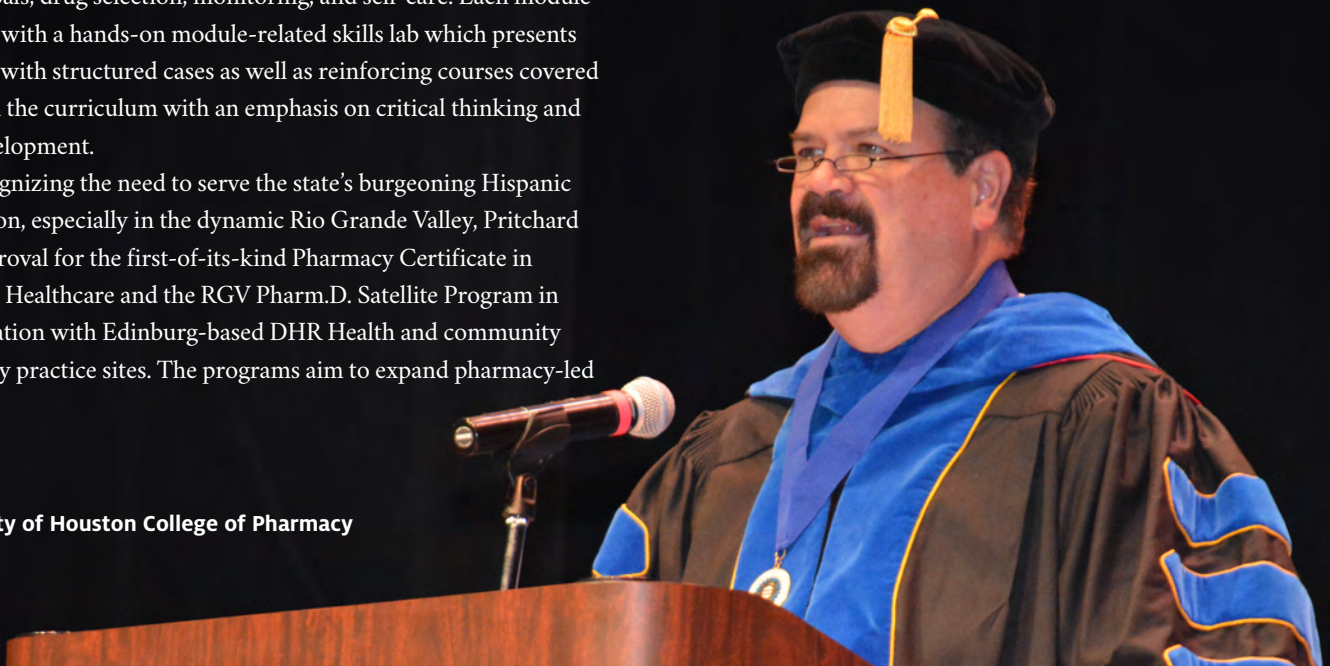
Recognizing the need to serve the state's burgeoning Hispanic population, especially in the dynamic Rio Grande Valley, Pritchard won approval for the first-of-its-kind Pharmacy Certificate in Hispanic Healthcare and the RGV Pharm.D. Satellite Program in collaboration with Edinburg-based DHR Health and community pharmacy practice sites. The programs aim to expand pharmacy-led

patient care to the RGV community as well as provide students with the opportunity to develop cultural and linguistic competencies. To generate more representative clinical trial data and explore new therapeutic interventions for all patients, the college also established a collaboration agreement with DHR Health Institute for Research & Development. This collaboration is generating data across a range of studies, including medication adherence, infectious diseases, pharmacodynamics in gastric-bypass surgery patients, and cancer therapeutics.

Pritchard also oversaw the launch and refinement of several graduate degree programs. These new offerings included the Ph.D. in pharmaceutical health outcomes and policy, which was later merged with the pharmaceuticals, pharmacology and medicinal chemistry doctoral programs as concentrations under the Pharmaceutical Sciences doctoral program. Additional concentrations in clinical and translational research and population health and pharmacoepidemiology also were approved. The Houston Program – which comprises a master's degree from UHCOP and PGY1-PGY2 residencies from seven fellow Texas Medical Center members – was revamped under Pritchard's tenure to better reflect the program's mission of developing the next generation of health-system leaders. To provide further options for students, a Pharm.D./Master of Business Administration dual degree program with UH's Bauer College of Business and a Ph.D./M.A. in applied economics with the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences also are now available.

### External Challenges

Pritchard's tenure as dean included countless obstacles and challenges, including Mother Nature. As the first phase of the Health Building 2 move-in process was underway, Hurricane Harvey brought





## REPORT CARD FOR F. LAMAR PRITCHARD



- Achieved elite rankings on North American Pharmacy Licensure Exam (NAPLEX), including #1 Texas first-time pass rates 2017-2020 and 2024, and #14 three-year all-time national pass rate for 2022-2024
- Secured record research funding of \$15 million in 2023-24 for #25 in National Institute of Health and #30 in all-source funding
- Led campaign to construct the college's state-of-the-art academic/research home in the nine-story, 300,000-gross-square-foot Health 2 Building
- Completed three ACPE accreditation reviews, retaining the UHCOP's history of uninterrupted accreditation since first awarded to the college in 1950
- Created of Rio Grande Valley Pharm.D. Satellite Program, collaboration agreement with DHR Health Institute for Research & Development, and the first-of-its-kind Hispanic Healthcare Certificate Program
- Established the college's first eight endowed professorships and an endowed chair



devastation to the Greater Houston area. While the new facility came out unscathed, the college's Texas Medical Center laboratories, classrooms and offices — due to be part of a later relocation — were damaged when a steam-generation system malfunctioned after being inundated by floodwaters. The college then had to scramble to temporarily absorb the students, faculty and staff into the Science & Research Building 2 on the main campus while their final spaces were still being finished in the new Health 2 Building.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pritchard rallied the administrative and curriculum teams in pivoting to online, staggered and asynchronous instruction models from late spring 2020 into 2022. When vaccines became available, Pharm.D. students and faculty participated in numerous community-based immunization clinics across the Greater Houston area and in the RGV.

### Academic Success and Validation

All these activities were focused on achieving improved patient health outcomes and quality of life through exceptional pharmacist-delivered care and the discovery of optimized and novel drug therapies.

UHCOP's graduating students have set new standards of excellence in first-time and all-time passing rates on the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination (NAPLEX) exam. Among the more notable years including four consecutive years of the highest first-time NAPLEX pass rate in Texas from 2017-2020 and, most recently, in 2024 as well as among the nation's top first-time pass rates, including 11-year mean first-time passing rate of 98.2% — 5th highest in the nation — for graduate test-takers from 2009 to 2019.

In areas such as leadership, service in the community, research and demonstrations of skills, individual students and student organizations regularly bring home awards and recognition. Examples of excellence in these areas over the past 16 years include three students among the Top 10 finalists in the APhA-ASP National Patient Counseling Competition; national chapter of the year honors for such organizations as the Industry Pharmacists Organization, Phi Lambda Sigma, Student College of Clinical Pharmacy, and Student National Pharmaceutical Association; and numerous national, regional and state officer elections and appointments.

For their part, faculty members have been positioned to excel in their academic and research endeavors. Among the recognition for UHCOP's faculty are national awards for mentorship and scientific excellence, fellow or senior status as clinical pharmacists and inventors, multiple U.S. and international patents, most-cited scholarship status, recruitment to clinical practice guideline writing teams, and publication of prestigious journals such as *The Lancet*.

Another top priority for Pritchard was to increase support for research programs, especially from the National Institutes of Health. To ensure faculty and students were equipped with the



to engage in high-impact, cutting-edge drug discovery and development, Pritchard developed and invested in the Core Laboratory infrastructure model of shared advanced research instrumentation and technology. The results? A remarkable increase in research funding from less than \$2 million in NIH – and approximately \$3 million from all sources – in fiscal year 2011 to approximately \$9 million in NIH – and a college-record \$15.03 million from all sources – in fiscal year 2024.

Perhaps no other measure of collective accomplishment can be found other than accreditation through the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE). During Pritchard's tenure, the college successfully completed three scheduled Self-Study reviews and site visits. With the latest accreditation approved in 2025 and running into 2033, the college has maintained its uninterrupted status since it was first awarded to UHCOP in 1950, only days before the first graduating class sat for its board exam.



2017

**UHCOP and Edinburg-based Doctors Hospital at Renaissance sign collaboration agreement establishing the Rio Grande Valley Pharm.D. Satellite Program.**



**The college receives its first of endowed professorships – the Robert L. Boblitt Sr. Endowed Professorship in Drug Discovery – from Robert L. Boblitt Jr., the son of the late faculty member and administrator.**



**Construction of the college's new home in Health 2 is substantially completed, with most administrative staff, Pharm.D. students, and clinical faculty among the first occupants. The first classes in the new building are held in the Fall semester.**



**F. Lamar and Judy Pritchard are inducted into the Mading Society.**



2022

**College hosts 75th anniversary gala for alumni, faculty, staff and friends of the college, including UH President Renu Khator, in conjunction with the year's Mading Society Induction.**



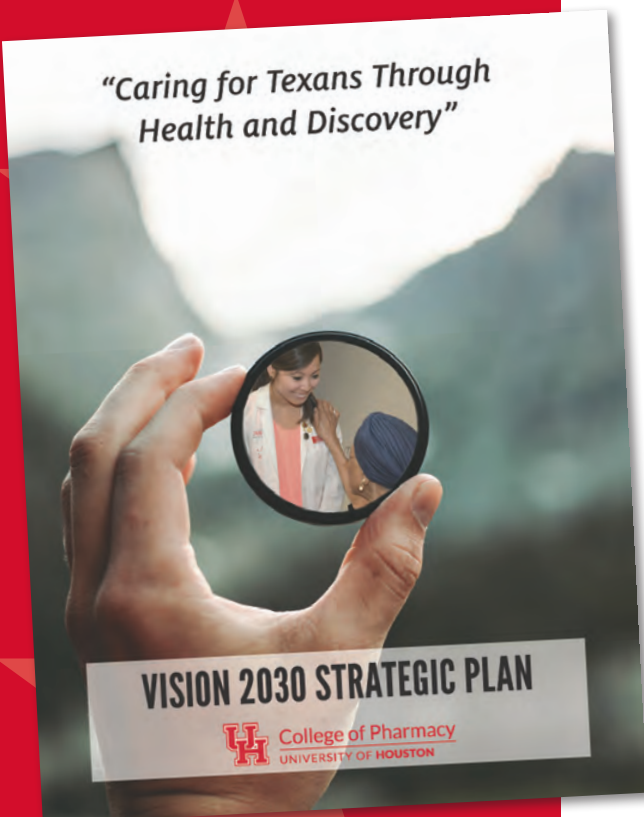
2024

**College completes third ACPE accreditation Self-Study of Pritchard's term, with full accreditation through 2033 granted following site visit in 2025. The approval maintains the UHCOP's uninterrupted national accreditation since it was first awarded to the college in 1950.**

## TOPS IN TEXAS

UHCOP reclaimed the first-place spot in Texas for Pharm.D. graduates taking the North American Pharmacist Licensure Exam (NAPLEX) for the first time, with 88.9% pass rate on the 2024 exam. In addition, among pharmacy institutions with at least 95 students taking the exam for the first time, UHCOP was ranked fifth in the nation.

UHCOP previously held the first-place spot in the state for four consecutive years from 2017 to 2020. Despite dropping out of the highest place in the state by only a few percentage points during those intervening years, first-time pass rates among UHCOP graduates continued to exceed the national average.



## STATE OF THE COLLEGE

### College Accreditation

The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Board of Directors has designated the UHCOP Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) professional degree program as compliant across all ACPE standards, with accreditation extended through June 30, 2033. UHCOP has maintained continuous accreditation since it was first awarded to the college in 1950, only days before the first class of students were to graduate and the first college at UH to earn national accreditation.

As part of the reaccreditation process, UHCOP started its self-study process in January 2023 and submitted the document 18 months later. The Self-Study report represents a comprehensive review of the didactic, experiential, professional development, personal wellbeing and other programs and activities within the Pharm.D. curriculum. It also presents an extensive survey of operational and administrative functions of the college, including finances, infrastructure, personnel, and other resources, as well as its relationship with the university.

Following submission of the self-study, a team of evaluators conducted a thorough on-site review that included interviews with various groups of faculty, alumni, preceptors, and students.

"I'm very proud of the tremendous work being done every day by our faculty, staff, alumni and preceptors in delivering high-quality, innovative education and training to develop future pharmacists who are keenly focused on improving patient health outcomes and continuous learning," said F. Lamar Pritchard, Ph.D., R.Ph., dean and Humana Endowed Chair in Pharmacy.

### Vision 2030

*2030 Vision Statement:* To be a world-class college of pharmacy through innovative education and pioneering research to transform health outcomes.

*2030 Mission Statement:* Provide comprehensive interdisciplinary education and training in pharmaceutical sciences and pharmacy practice to advance scientific discovery, serve diverse communities, and improve health and quality of life.

The following are the seven Strategic Imperatives by which the college will preserve and enhance its strengths and leverage opportunities for revenue generation and competitive ascendancy:

1. Secure a physical location in the TMC and maintain a footprint in the TMC
2. Establish research infrastructure, administration, training, and resources to facilitate collaboration between UH and RGV, especially in the area of health disparities research
3. Focus and strengthen the college's research infrastructure, administration and areas of research expertise
4. Enhance Innovation in the delivery of pharmacy education
5. Continued advocacy for funding considerations at the university and state level
6. Improve/maintain National Quality Metrics
7. Provide facility and innovative technological resources for students, faculty and staff necessary to meet the extensive goals of a Tier 1 Pharmacy College



**JANUARY 2025** marked 25 years since the Houston Outreach Medicine, Education and Social Services (HOMES) Clinic was launched to provide patient care for the city's unhoused population on a day when most other indigent-care services outside of the emergency room weren't available.

Operating under the auspices of non-profit Healthcare for the Homeless-Houston, the clinic was the brainchild of then-Baylor College of Medicine faculty member David Buck, M.D., who now serves as associate dean for community health at UH's Fertitta Family College of Medicine. UHCOP was recruited shortly after its launch, with the McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston and UH Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) also coming on board. Baylor and GSSW are no longer involved, but Fertitta is now part of the team.

The H.O.M.E.S. clinic has helped train thousands of student volunteers and served over 5,000 patients. While the clinic itself is

open Monday through Friday, it is turned over to the students and their attending physicians and pharmacists on Sundays.

*"The H.O.M.E.S. Clinic is a shining example of how interprofessional patient-centered care plays a critical role in improving the health of all communities, especially underserved populations,"* said Dean F. Lamar Pritchard, noting that the clinic was recognized with the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Model Community Engagement Award in 2010.

On any given Sunday, the student teams examine the patients first, present their findings to the supervising physician to develop a treatment plan and then to Wallace—or less often, another pharmacy preceptor—who determines what medications might be needed.

*"We will see the gamut of things that can be seen in the housed population where you have diabetes or high blood pressure, COPD or asthma,"* Wallace said. *"We'll also see people*

*with different kinds of skin infections like cellulitis that is a little more acute. We also see patients with mental health concerns like depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and they may bring multiple conditions across this range of health challenges together."*

It keeps you on your toes, said 2025 Pharm.D. candidate and past member of the clinic's student board Annie Man.

*"It's more like an emergency room or urgent care; you don't know what to expect but you make sure you have all the supplies, everything ready to treat them."* Man said.

The immediate medical problem is not the only issue of focus at the clinic. The volunteers discuss patients' social situations, where they get their food and where to go if they need to get into stabilized housing.

*"We may not be able to provide all the services, but we can serve as a bridge back into health care for patients,"* Wallace said.

—Laurie Fickman, UH Media Relations

# SUNDAY SERVICE EVERY WEEK

*Student-run HOMES Clinic Marks 25 Years of Providing Care for Unhoused Patients*







# WINDS OF CHANGE IN RIO GRANDE VALLEY

UHCOP Focused on Student Recruitment, Community Health in Fast-growing Region

UHCOP is enhancing its pharmacy student recruitment and community education outreach efforts among the underrepresented and underserved populations of the Rio Grande Valley.

Headed by the college's Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Pharm.D. Satellite Program established in 2017, the college's outreach efforts include hosting pharmacy camps to expose high school and college-level students to rewarding career opportunities within professional pharmacy and mentor participants through their academic experience. Outreach efforts also include providing wellness screenings and health education to RGV residents from pharmacy practitioners and students.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley is home to majority Hispanic border communities across four counties, all of which are classified by the federal government as "medically underserved" due to the lack of health care professionals. This unique

population of more than 1 million residents is facing one of the hardest health care crises in the country.

According to Medicare data, the region is burdened with chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, Alzheimer's, and hypertension. In one county alone, nearly 1 in 4 older adults had Alzheimer's or a related dementia in 2021, compared to 1 in 14 nationwide. Roughly one quarter of the population is estimated to have hypertension, with one-half of those going untreated.

*"It is rewarding to see that with our efforts we are turning students on to the various opportunities in the pharmacy profession,"* said Ron Ozuna, Pharm.D., BCPS, assistant dean and assistant clinical professor at UHCOP-RGV and clinical pharmacy manager at satellite program partner DHR Health.

*"When I decided to pursue pharmacy school, I had already earned my bachelor's but still needed prerequisites,"* said Leslie Gomez, current P4





Pharm.D. student who completed three of her advanced pharmacy practice experiences in the RGV. “I enrolled at STC, which connected me with the DHR mentors who guided me and prepared me for my interviews. Now, as I prepare to graduate, those same mentors continue to support me.”

The college’s efforts have been buoyed by a \$35,000 grant from the UH Office of the Provost in 2019 and a \$15,000 scholarship grant from the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) Foundation in 2024.

The RGV Pharm.D. Satellite Program has developed a strong partnership with the Region 1 Education Service Center, one of 20 such entities established by the Texas Legislature to support school districts and charter schools across the state and serve as a liaison between them and the Texas Education Agency, to augment UHCOP’s existing cooperative pipeline program with South Texas College.

Juan Medrano, a first generation, second year Pharm.D. student,

completed the pharmacy mentoring program while obtaining his undergraduate degree.

“Through this program, I gained a clearer understanding of the many career paths within pharmacy and came to appreciate even more that pharmacy is, at its core, a people-centered profession,” Medrano said. “Becoming a pharmacist will allow me to serve where the need is greatest, fulfilling my responsibilities with dedication and care.”

Medrano chose to complete his first-year Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experience (IPPE) at Saenz Pharmacy in the heart of RGV.

“I truly enjoyed my time there, as it gave me the opportunity to connect with many members of my Hispanic community,” Medrano said. “I was able to take verbal orders, provide counseling, and interpret prescriptions to ensure patients fully understood their medications. Being back home made the experience even more meaningful—it brought me a sense of comfort, pride, and joy to serve the community that shaped me.”

“It is rewarding to see that with our efforts we are turning students on to the various opportunities in the pharmacy profession.”



Following approval of University of Houston System Board of Regents in November 2025, Arash Bashirullah, Ph.D., has been named the new dean of UH College of Pharmacy. The esteemed researcher, teacher and academic leader's term will begin in January 2026.

*"During my brief campus visit, I could feel a palpable excitement for the future and a genuine spirit of collaboration," Bashirullah said. "Everyone shares a deep commitment to advancing student success and making a real impact on society. That energy and passion were infectious. It made me want to be part of this incredible community and contribute to the momentum already building at the college."*

Bashirullah joins UH from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Pharmacy, where he served as a professor and associate dean for research and graduate education. At UW-Madison, he also served as executive director of the school's Lachman Institute for Pharmaceutical Development. During his tenure at UW-Madison, he has served on multiple university wide committees and task forces.

Before joining UW-Madison, Bashirullah completed postdoctoral fellowships at the University of Utah and Yale University. He holds a Bachelor of Science in chemistry from the University of Winnipeg and a doctorate in biology from the California Institute of Technology.

As a scholar, Bashirullah's research explores the regulation of hormonal signaling and, more recently, the mechanisms of intracellular lipid trafficking and their connection to neurodegenerative diseases. He has maintained continuous research funding from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences since 2011.

His work has been published in leading international journals and featured at scientific meetings and conferences around the world. He also serves as the senior advisory editor for Genetics, the flagship journal of the Genetics Society of America.

In addition to being recognized as a Kavli Fellow by the National Academy of Sciences and a Fellow of the Big Ten Academic Alliance-Academic Leadership Program (BTAA-ALP), Bashirullah has earned multiple Teacher of the Year awards at UW-Madison.



## COLLEGE WELLNESS PROGRAMMING BRINGS NATIONAL RECOGNITION

UHCOP earned Insight Into Academia magazine's 2025 Excellence in Mental Health and Well-Being Award, recognizing its strong, campus-wide commitment to mental health.

UHCOP's selection reflects the work of its Student Wellness Advisory Council formed in 2019 and committed faculty who have expanded wellness programming, strengthened curriculum and co-curriculum, and advanced faculty-focused support.

As one of only two pharmacy schools among 70 national honorees, the college was recognized for its sustained investment in student advocacy, data-informed initiatives and leadership that has shaped mental health efforts across the university. Specific programs include yoga and meditation classes, mental health first aid training, wellness convocations, advising focused on financial stress, and annual surveys.



# TERRIFIC TECHS: LAB MANAGERS EARN TOP HONORS FROM LOCAL, STATE PHARMACY GROUPS

Two of the three members of the instructional lab managers team—Leslie Joseph, B.S., RPhT, and Sherrie Myers, RCPHT—are making their impact felt far beyond the skills laboratory where they help train professional program students on a variety of clinical patient care techniques.

Joseph and Myers served as co-chairs of the Gulf Coast Society of Health-System Pharmacists (GCSHP) in 2023-24, followed by Joseph being honored with the organization's Outstanding Technician Award in 2023. The next year, Myers was recognized with the GCSHP Outstanding Technician Award and the Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists Mike Knapp Pharmacy Technician Award as she began her term as the state organization's Pharmacy Technician Section Chair. In 2025, Joseph earned the TSHP Mike Knapp Pharmacy Technician Award and her second GCSHP Outstanding Technician Award while serving as the local organization Technician Section chair.

Within both organizations, Joseph and Myers have been strong advocates for expanding professional development for technicians. The pair also have actively recruited GCSHP members to serve as preceptors to oversee and serve as a resource for students providing wellness screenings and education at the annual Houston Mayor's Back 2 School Fest, which commonly involves more than 1,200-plus patient encounters.



## THE HOUSTON PROGRAM HONORS VARKEY WITH ANDERSON LEADERSHIP AWARD

Divya A. Varkey, Pharm.D., M.S., was honored with the 2025 Roger W. Anderson Leadership Award during The Houston Program's 7th Annual Leadership Celebration.

As clinical associate professor and director of the M.S. in Pharmacy Leadership and Administration—THP's academic component—Varkey has distinguished herself through scholarly work, professional service and the mentorship of more than 60 M.S. graduates.

During the celebration, former residents praised her transformative leadership and continued support. In her keynote, Varkey reflected on purpose, presence and connection, encouraging attendees to value who they become through their journey rather than titles or achievements.

*"The real reward is not the diploma," Varkey said in her keynote. "It's who you became while earning it. Keep leading with your heart, and never forget you are already, and have always been, someone worth remembering."*



## COUGAR CATALYSTS: AHMAD, BIUNDO HONORED FOR COLLEGE, PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

UHCOP bestowed its highest honors to two of the college and profession's most ardent and accomplished cheerleaders: **Shawn Ahmad**, Pharm.D. ('18), R.Ph., and **Bruce Biundo**, R.Ph. (B.S. '61), FACA.

A pharmacist at Stone Gate Pharmacy in San Antonio, Ahmad received the Alumnus Pharmacist of the Year Award for his extensive professional, volunteer and leadership contributions.

Ahmad distinguished himself through professional and volunteer service during his time at UHCOP and beyond. While pursuing his Pharm.D., he served as education chair and later president of the Student Leadership Group (now the Academy of Student Pharmacists) at the Texas Pharmacy Association (TPA).

In his final year in school, he completed an advanced experiential rotation in association management with TPA and helped create the Student Pharmacist Advocacy and Relations (SPARx) Program. In recognition of his work, Ahmad earned the TPA Distinguished Student Pharmacist Award and the UHCOP Advocacy Award in 2018.

Ahmad has continued to be active in TPA following graduation, including serving in the house of delegates and various

bodies before being elected to the board of directors. He also has been active in the Texas Pharmacy Foundation, serving on the scholarship committee and as treasurer on the Board of Trustees. In 2023, he was honored with TPA's Distinguished Young Pharmacist Award.

He worked on the front lines of Bexar County's COVID-19 response, receiving citations of appreciation from the mayor and county judge. Ahmad remains active with UHCOP, serving as 2021 White Coat Ceremony keynote speaker and president of the revived Pharmacy Alumni Association (PAA), which hosts alumni events and student engagement programs.

Biundo received UHCOP's 2025 Meritorious Achievement Award for his decades-long impact on pharmacy practice, education and the college community.

Biundo grew up above his father's pharmacy in Louisiana with two siblings who also followed into the profession. After graduating from UHCOP in 1961, he worked for Walgreens, opened his own independent pharmacy in Houston, and later managed a hospital-affiliated pharmacy.

He joined Professional Compounding Centers of America (PCCA) in 1997, assisting

members with formulary questions, presenting continuing education and developing expertise in men's hormone replacement therapy, earning Employee of the Year in 2015 and the Eagle Award in 2021.

A fellow of the American College of Apothecaries, Biundo co-developed patents, published in peer-reviewed journals, and served as section editor for the 22nd edition of "Remington: The Science and Practice of Pharmacy" during his time at PCCA.

Active in TPA, TPF and TPA PharmPAC, he earned the TPA Education Excellence Award in 2008, and Pharmacist of the Year and R. Louis Rumsey PharmPAC Member of the Year in 2013.

Biundo and his wife, Ann, are longtime Mading Society members, with an endowed scholarship for students and named spaces in the Health 2 building. Biundo has held numerous UHCOP leadership roles, including induction into Phi Lambda Sigma Leadership Society, co-chair of the Dean's Advisory Council, chair of the UHCOP Capital Campaign, and past PAA president. His past college recognitions include 2010 Volunteer of the Year and 2014 Alumnus Pharmacist of the Year.





# UNSTOPPABLE, UNFORGETTABLE





# JOURNEY OF GOLD

## Williams Marks 50+ Years of Service to College

Whether it was extra tutoring to help a learner struggling to understand functional groups or providing a few encouraging words to an anxious leader to-be campaigning for office, Louis Williams always – or at least for the past five decades – has been there for his students and mentees. Colleagues, students and alumni alike echo the idea that Williams truly represents the heart and soul of the University of Houston College of Pharmacy: highly knowledgeable and resolute, yet warm and supportive in helping students achieve the best version of themselves.

In recognition of his 50 years at UHCOP, the college family – students, faculty, staff and alumni paid tribute to Williams with celebrations fit for a king. Over the course of several events, hundreds of his well-wishers expressed their deep respect and admiration for the impact his guidance, mentorship and friendship made on their professional development and personal growth.

*“To think that someone like me could have touched so many lives and helped them achieve success in their professional careers to provide care for patients across the country is nothing short of remarkable,”* Williams said.

Over his five-decade career, Williams taught and mentored conservatively more than 5,000 professional and graduate students and served as a faculty advisor to four student organizations, including his longest tenures over the UHCOP Chapter of the Student National Pharmaceutical Association and the Delta Delta Chapter of the Kappa Psi Pharmaceutical Fraternity (KY).

In fact, he is believed to have the distinction as the longest-serving advisor nationally in KY. Both organizations have established legacies of success at the highest levels, from national and regional awards for outreach activities and pharmacy skills competitions to scholarships and officer leadership elections. Through these organizations, he befriended and mentored students from across the country who were drawn into his sphere by word of mouth.

A past-president of the UH Chapter of Phi Kappa Phi International Honor Society, Williams’ past honors include two-time recipient of the Houston Alumni Organization Outstanding Faculty Award for Teaching Excellence, over 10-time recipient of the Rho Chi Society UHCOP Beta Omicron Chapter Teaching Excellence Award, recipient of the Phi Lambda Sigma UHCOP Upsilon Chapter Faculty of the Year, and multiple Grand Council Deputy honors from the Kappa Psi.

He has served on the organizing committee of the MALTO Medicinal Chemistry and Pharmacognosy Meeting-in-Miniature since its infancy in the early 1970s, which included volunteering to drive participating UHCOP students and fellow faculty members to and from the regional conferences in host cities across the five Southern member-states.

Beyond teaching, research and organizational mentorship, Williams has served in numerous college and university capacities, including scholarship and grievance committees, UH faculty senate, and as the college’s commencement grand marshal.

Originally trained as a pharmacist, Williams completed his M.S. and Ph.D. in medicinal chemistry from the University of Pittsburgh and was recruited to join UHCOP in 1974, becoming its first African-American faculty member.

Outside of the classroom, Williams investigated the medicinal properties of natural products, specifically native African plants. On two separate occasions in the 1980s as the college’s first Fulbright Senior Research and Teaching Scholar, he spent several months in Lagos, Nigeria, presenting lectures and conducting research into medicinal plants as potential anticancer, anti-inflammatory, and antimicrobial agents as well as plants to treat Sickle Cell Disease. His investigations extended beyond Nigeria to other African countries, including Ghana and The Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly known as The Democratic Republic of Zaire). Results of his investigations were later published in peer-reviewed journals.

*“I tried to diffuse the myth that science in general and chemistry in particular are mysteries as far as African-Americans are concerned,”* Williams said. *“We don’t have enough role models to carry that message.”*

In 1979, Williams and UHCOP alumnus and former faculty member Larry McClaugherty ('72) co-founded the college’s scholarship golf tournament. Still going strong 45 years later, the tournament has generated hundreds of thousands of dollars for student scholarships and travel funds and spawned one of the college’s largest scholarship endowments.

In 2024, Williams received the college’s Meritorious Achievement Award and was inducted into Mading Society along with his wife, Sandra, for their support of the college, including through the Louis Williams Scholarship Endowment.





*"You love as a father, you love as a friend, you love as a colleague, you love as a therapist, and you love as a trainer. You believe against all odds."  
Rosalyn Adigun, Class of 2005*

*"You can look at him and feel like you belong, and he's going to help you along the way."  
Charles Franklin, Pittsburgh alumnus*

*"He's as caring, supportive and eager to provide his opinion on your best course of action at home as he is at work."  
Brian Williams, son*

*"Louis is not only a great teacher of students, but also a great faculty teacher and mentor."  
Doug Eikenburg, Professor Emeritus*

*"To have a colleague, a medicinal chemist, to have somebody who I had a lot of mentoring from and, most importantly, how many people can claim they have a friend that extends back 50 years?"  
Thomas Lemke, Professor Emeritus*

*"They say, 'Everything you need to know, you learn in kindergarten.' I say, 'Everything you need to know, you learn in Med Chem I.'"  
Julie Spier, Class of 1986*

*"When I left home to come to college, I wanted to make my parents proud. When I left the college, I wanted to make this man proud."  
Roy Armstrong, Class of 1981*





# FROM SUMMER JOB TO LIFELONG PATH



New graduate Hunter Adam, Pharm.D. ('25), was introduced to the world of pharmacy in high school through a technician certification program. What started as a practical way to earn a summer income quickly became a calling.

*"Once I moved into that role as a pharmacy tech, it drove me to want to go into pharmacy school," Adam said.*

After earning his associate's degree at a local community college, Adam enrolled in UHCOP—drawn by its proximity to his hometown and the strong legacy of UH alumni he worked alongside as a pharmacy technician.

*"All the pharmacists that I worked with at the time were from UH," Adam said. "Those were the pharmacists that I enjoyed working with the most, and they were very knowledgeable and gave me great advice."*

As a student pharmacist, Adam steadily immersed himself in all that UHCOP had to offer, joining multiple student organizations.

*"I started to notice what other students were doing, how they were very involved and still academically thriving, so I challenged myself to do the same," Adam said.*

First seeing how student ambassadors presented themselves and the college, Adam felt inspired to become a UHCOP student ambassador himself. As he progressed in his studies, Adam began taking on leadership roles in the organizations he had joined. Adam served as president of the Hispanic Pharmacy Student Association (HPSA), guiding the organization to win the Outstanding Program Award at UH Center for Student Involvement's 38th Annual Campus Leaders Ceremony for their efforts in increasing COVID-19 vaccine uptake among Houston's Hispanic population.

Additionally, he served as Operation Naloxone training coordinator of the Student College of Clinical Pharmacy (SCCP), Over-The-Counter (OTC) Medicine Safety senior chair of the American Pharmacists Association-Academy of Student Pharmacists (APhA-ASP), Pharmacy Council representative of the Rho Chi Pharmacy Honor Society, Leadership Challenge chair for Phi Lambda Sigma (PLS), and multiple positions in Phi Delta Chi (PDC).

Throughout his pharmacy school career, Adam has received numerous accolades for his academic and extracurricular achievements, especially in patient counseling competitions.

Between 2022 and 2024, Adam built an impressive record of competition success. He was named a Top 10 finalist in the UHCOP APhA-ASP Patient Counseling Competition (PCC) in 2022, followed by a state finalist placement in the Texas Pharmacy Foundation PCC in 2023. That same year, he was also part of the first-place team in the Texas Pharmacy Association Self-Care Competition. In 2024, he took home second place in the Texas Pharmacy Foundation PCC.

Most recently, Adam placed first runner-up in the APhA-ASP National PCC. These competitions sharpened his counseling skills and deepened his understanding of patient care.

*"What is most important whenever you're counseling patients is having empathy and understanding of where they're coming from," Adam said.*

Adam plans to continue in community pharmacy, an environment he has loved since the beginning of his technician days.

*"I love the patient interaction I get on a day-to-day basis, as well as having a small, close-knit team that comes whenever you work in community pharmacy," Adam said.*



To enhance the professional development of pharmacy students, new student chapters of the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists (ASCP) and the American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists (AAPP) have been established.

The ASCP chapter aims to “promote healthy aging by empowering pharmacists with education, resources, and innovative opportunities.” Pharm.D. candidate Aryonne Gibson, the chapter’s inaugural president, spearheaded its creation after being introduced to consulting pharmacy during a presentation by UHCOP alumnus James Plimper, Pharm.D. (’08).

*“I believed this would be a good option to have an organization for students who would be interested in older patient care,”* Gibson said.

The ASCP chapter plans to host two convocations featuring speaker panels and collaborate with occupational therapists to engage nursing home residents in mobility-enhancing activities.

*“There are not enough providers who specialize in the care of older adults,”* said UHCOP faculty advisor Julianna M. Fernandez, Pharm.D. (’06). *“The more exposure new providers get to the specific needs of this population will result in better care for older adults.”*

Meanwhile, the AAPP chapter was established to address growing interest in mental health treatment. Led by Pharm.D. student Najat Abu-Hmidan and faculty advisor Austin De La Cruz, Pharm.D., BCPP,

the chapter aims to reduce stigma surrounding mental health and educate students on mental health disorders.

*“I want to educate about mental health disorders, how to act, talk and respond to decrease the stigma,”* Abu-Hmidan said. *“I want to emphasize the importance of taking care of your mental health because one mentally ill family member affects the whole family.”*

The AAPP chapter aligns with national efforts to provide psychiatric pharmacists with research opportunities, grants and access to psychiatric medication databases. De La Cruz, who practices at the Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center, highlighted the shortage of mental health providers.

*“This shortage presents an opportunity for psychiatric pharmacists to help meet the demand by prescribing and caring for patients with mental health disorders,”* De La Cruz said.

Abu-Hmidan and De La Cruz aim to make the chapter a national voice in psychiatric pharmacy. The chapter has already planned events for the academic year, including tabling and educational session topics like seizure first aid and autism awareness.

*“Without proper patient education, nonadherence is not a question of if but when, and this can deeply impact both patients and their families,”* Abu-Hmidan said. *“That’s why I want to become a psychiatric pharmacist—to be the provider I always wished I had as a child.”*

## STUDENTS LAUNCH CHAPTERS OF CONSULTANT, PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACY



*The AAPP chapter was created to educate students and the public about mental health disorders and raise awareness of opportunities in the specialty field.*



*The UHCOP chapter is one of 50 collegiate ASCP chapters nationwide.*





# LEADING WHILE LEARNING: STUDENTS CAR

UHCOP continues to shine on the national stage, with multiple student organizations earning prestigious awards for service, leadership, clinical skills and community impact. From top chapter honors to national competition victories, these achievements reflect the commitment to excellence and diverse skill sets that define UHCOP's student leaders.

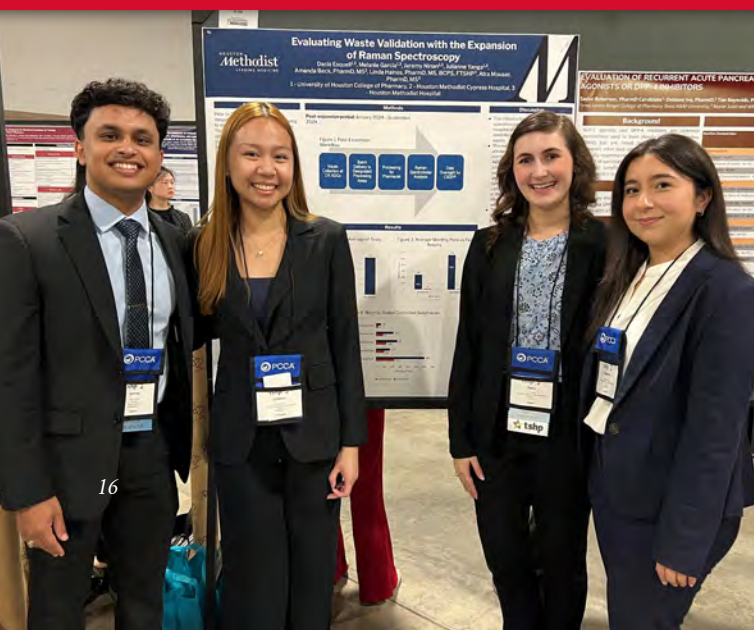
The Upsilon Chapter of Phi Lambda Sigma (PLS) earned its fourth national Chapter of the Year Award – Division III in 10 years during the 2025 PLS Awards Ceremony. The chapter was recognized for its 2023-24 activities, including its annual President's Retreat, which provides leadership training to presidents from all UHCOP student organizations.

It also was honored for professional development and service initiatives such as mentorship programs with PLS alumni and volunteering at the Houston Food Bank and Project C.U.R.E. In

addition, the chapter's four-part leadership workshop series earned one of only two national "Lead the Way" awards after winning the PLS Charles Thomas Leadership Challenge in 2023, which provided annual funding for its implementation in 2023-24.

UHCOP's chapter of the Student National Pharmaceutical Association (SNPhA) earned major national honors in 2025, including Chapter of the Year, first place in the Kroger Clinical Skills Competition, and top awards across multiple national initiatives.

The chapter participated in nearly 200 community events, providing thousands of health screenings and educational outreach efforts. The chapter capitalized on its success in the prior year when members swept the top two spots in the clinical skills competition and one win away from sweeping all eight national initiative awards. Additionally, a chapter-led campaign to establish "Combating Cancer" as a ninth national initiative was approved.







# WE SHINE OUT PLACE AMONG ELITE COMPETITORS

Other successes at the 2025 conference included five students winning national scholarships, two students securing national leadership appointments, and the community outreach chair earning the Community Leader of the Year Award.

At the 2025 Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists Annual Seminar, UHCOP students captured a fourth consecutive win — as well as a third-place finish — in the Student Pharmacist Leadership Challenge. Multiple students also received TSHP Foundation scholarships and poster competition honors.

UHCOP's Delta Delta Chapter of Kappa Psi Pharmaceutical Fraternity reclaimed the Southwest Province Chapter of the Year title at the 2025 SWP Spring Assembly. The chapter was recognized for providing wellness screenings and education on topics such as kidney disease, ovarian cancer, diabetes and stroke at multiple health fairs. The chapter also organized fundraisers and drives —

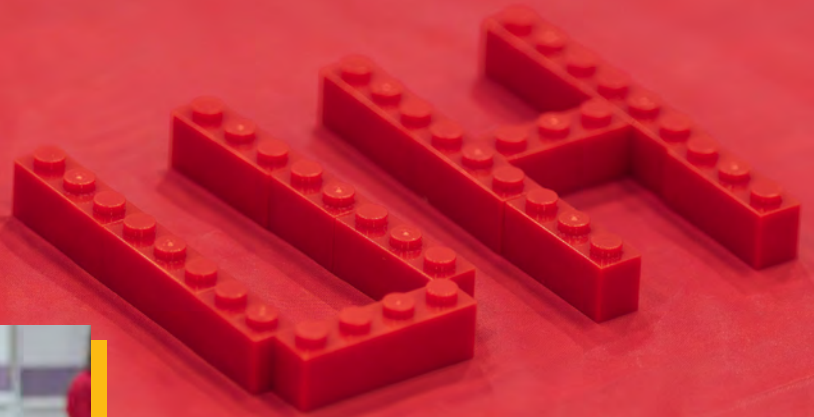
including the long-running Mr. Pharmacy pageant — to support nonprofits such as Reach Out and Read!, Gano Mission Center, Nora's Home, Doctors Without Borders and The Bear Foundation of Houston. They also volunteered at the Houston Food Bank and wrote encouragement cards for pediatric patients at Texas Children's Hospital.

The UHCOP Industry Pharmacists Organization (IPhO) chapter earned national recognition for a community service “best practice” at IPhO's 2025 virtual annual meeting. In March, members partnered with the National Marrow Donor Program to host an outreach event at the UH Student Center, encouraging students, faculty and staff to join the bone marrow registry and learn about blood diseases and the match process. The initiative demonstrated the chapter's commitment to community service and patient impact.





# BACKPACKS AND BETTER HEALTH







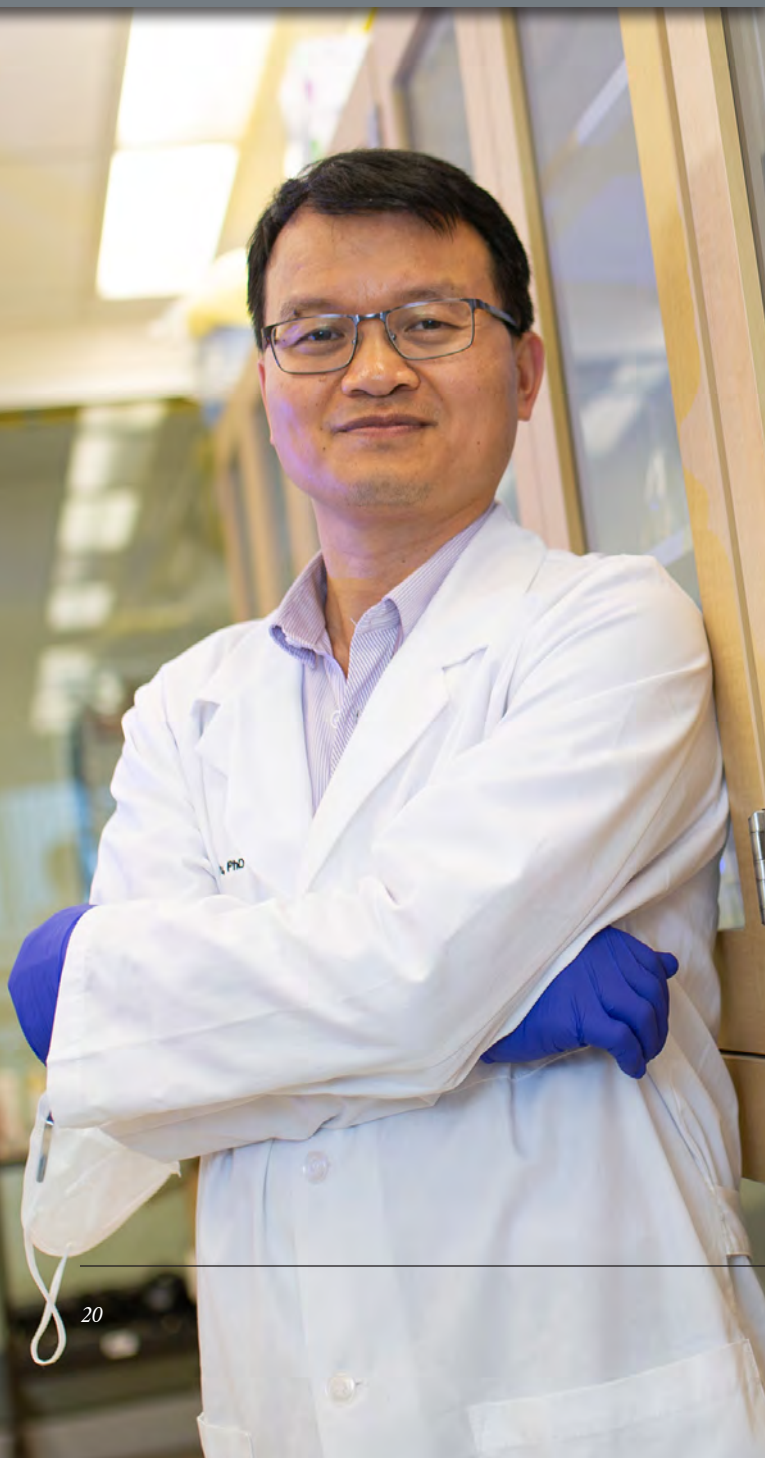
At the 2025 Houston Mayor's Back 2 School Fest, UHCOP Pharm.D. students, faculty preceptors, and staff members engaged in 1,685 service encounters, including educational outreach as well as wellness and immunization screenings. Drawing up to 25,000 each year, annual event and family members or guardians with essential school supplies and other resources to prepare for the upcoming academic year. With the exception of two years during COVID, UHCOP has participated in the event since 2013.





# UNVEILING THE HEART'S SECRETS

## UH Professors Are Unraveling Complex Molecular Mechanisms Behind Heart Formation and Congenital Heart Diseases



Despite decades of progress in the treatment and prevention of cardiovascular diseases and disorders, CVD remains the leading cause of death worldwide – with about one-third of all deaths attributed to it.

In recent years, UHCOP has expanded its cadre of researchers dedicated to not only gaining new insights into the molecular mechanisms contributing to the development and progression of CVD but also cultivating a new generation of scientists to join the mission to knock it out of the top spot.

One such researcher is Professor Mingfu Wu, Ph.D., who is working to unlock the processes behind the congenital diseases of left ventricular non-compaction (LVNC) and Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome (HLHS).

### Left Ventricular Non-Compaction

The early stages of heart formation, which begin around the third week after conception, set the stage for a lifetime of heart health. During this critical period, the heart forms two essential layers: the myocardium, which makes up the outer muscle layer, and the endocardium, the inner lining.

These layers must communicate efficiently to ensure proper heart development. This communication is facilitated by trabeculae, sheet-like structures that protrude from the heart wall. These trabeculae increase the surface area inside the heart, allowing for efficient blood flow and nutrient exchange while the coronary system is still developing.

However, the development of trabeculae is a delicate process. An imbalance in trabeculation—either a lack of trabeculae or an excess of them—can lead to serious heart conditions.

*“Without trabeculae, the heart wall would suffer from insufficient oxygen and nutrients, potentially leading to death,” Wu said. “Conversely, an excess of trabeculae can result in an overly porous heart wall, leading to left ventricular non-compaction cardiomyopathy, commonly known as spongy heart.”*

Wu’s research suggests that a gene called *Itgb1* plays a pivotal role in the formation of these trabeculae.

*“We found that the protein  $\beta 1$  integrin encoded by *Itgb1* and its ligands, the extracellular matrix, create a molecular network that acts as a scaffold for cardiomyocytes in the heart wall,” Wu said. “When *Itgb1* is deleted, cardiomyocytes disengage from this scaffold, losing their ability to maintain shape, divide properly, migrate, and form trabeculae.”*

One of the most intriguing discoveries from Wu’s research is the identification of signaling bridges—tiny nanotube-like structures that extend from cardiomyocytes across a layer of cardiac jelly to reach endocardial cells. These signaling bridges are essential for cell communication during heart formation. Research from Wu’s lab shows that signaling bridges play a critical



role in activating Notch signaling, a pathway that helps cells communicate and coordinate developmental processes.

## Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome

Affecting approximately 1 in every 4,000 babies born each year, HLHS results in a smaller or absence of the left ventricle and abnormal valves. Detected during pregnancy, at birth or soon thereafter, HLHS may be managed with surgery and medication to improve blood flow. However, patients are at risk of complications such as lung, liver and gastrointestinal diseases, neurodevelopmental issues, and heart failure and arrhythmias.

Although the underlying causes of HLHS aren't known, recent research has identified a specific gene called myelin regulatory factor (MYRF) linked to embryonic cardiac defects. Through DNA sequencing studies, MYRF gene variants have been identified in multiple HLHS patients – a possible clue in the underlying cause in why heart valves and the left ventricle fail to form correctly, Wu said.

*"I am especially interested in how MYRF affects two things: the making of valves inside the heart, like ensuring doors open and close properly; and how it ensures the heart's walls are shaped properly to pump blood effectively,"* Wu said.

Wu's work on LVNC is being supported by a five-year, \$2.6 million National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) grant in 2024 and a five-year, \$550,000 American Heart Association (AHA) Established Investigator Award in 2025, while his work on HLHS is backed by a \$300,000 AHA Transformational Project Award in 2024.

## Cardiac repair

Wu's colleague and collaborator Lianjie Miao, Ph.D., research assistant professor, is investigating the regenerative potential of epicardial cells in cardiac repair. These specialized progenitor cells play a critical role in heart regeneration following damage such as after a heart attack. Miao's research focuses on understanding how these epicardial cells are activated in adult hearts and how they transform into various cell types to assist in the repair process.

Miao's study is particularly interested in the role of the Numb and Numb-like protein family in regulating the differentiation and proliferation of epicardial cells. By exploring these mechanisms, Miao hopes to unlock new therapeutic strategies for heart protection and regeneration, potentially improving outcomes for patients suffering from heart failure or damage caused by myocardial infarction.

*"We anticipate that our findings will contribute to developing new therapies that can utilize the different abilities of epicardial cells and identify molecular targets for enhancing heart protection and regeneration,"* Miao said.

Miao's research is supported by a \$300,000 AHA grant for "highly promising investigators in their early years of professional appointment as they address critical and emerging areas of research."

## UH-HEART, UH-CURE

The experiences of mentoring undergraduate students through two long-running UH-sponsored research programs—the Provost's Undergraduate Research Scholarship (PURS) and the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF)—inspired cardiovascular researchers Bradley McConnell, Ph.D., FCVS, FAHA, UHCOP professor, and Tho Tran, Ph.D., UH Natural Sciences and Mathematics research assistant professor, to seek external support for expanded student mentoring initiatives.

The result? A three-year, \$300,000 AHA grant (later extended by three years and \$165,000) and a five-year, \$792,900 NHLBI grant to launch the UH-Houston Experience for Advancing Research and Training (HEART) and the UH University of Cardiovascular Undergraduate Research Experience (CURE) programs, respectively.

UH-CURE builds on the success of the UH-HEART program, which focuses on basic cardiovascular research for undergraduate students from UH and other institutions across Texas and beyond.

During the program, participants assisted in UH faculty-led experiments aimed at better understanding topics ranging from adrenoceptor signaling in the heart, coronary microvascular dysfunction, inflammasomes' role in kidney injury, cardiac cell differentiation, and finally to engineering microenvironments for cardiac cell reprogramming. Hands-on laboratory research activities included cell culture, cell transfections, protein and gene expression, and microscopy.

UH-CURE is designed as a transdisciplinary experience, covering areas from community engagement to applied research. It will also emphasize diversity and collaboration, aiming to inspire students to pursue further training in cardiovascular research and contribute to a more diverse biomedical research landscape.

*"We want UH-CURE participants to gain confidence in their research abilities through our hands-on approach and the skillset to navigate future challenges through our professional training,"* Tran said. *"We all know that a diverse environment leads to a much better generation of ideas and solutions. We hope to bring that strength to the future of cardiovascular research through our students."*

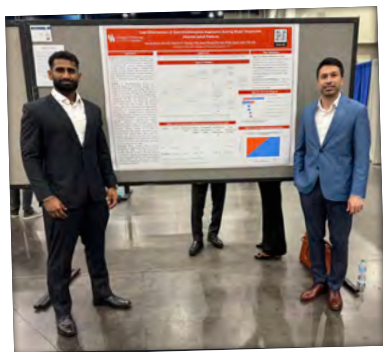




# QUESTION AND INVESTIGATE

## Doctoral, Professional Program Student Researchers Secure National Awards

Year-in, year-out, UHCOP students from every academic program present their research at prominent local, state and national level meetings and symposia, where they demonstrate their critical thinking and analytical prowess and technical skills. And each year, UHCOP students inevitably distinguish themselves by receiving external travel grants, publication in meeting programs or journal special editions, and presentation awards—and they kept the tradition alive in 2025.



*Sourab Ganna*

Ph.D. candidate Sourab Ganna, Pharm.D. ('22), received a Platinum medal and podium presentation invitation at the 2025 Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy Annual Meeting in Houston for his cost-effectiveness analysis of the antidepressant Auvelity. His study demonstrated the therapy's strong clinical performance, showing higher remission rates than placebo and rapid symptom improvement, and outlined pricing thresholds for cost-effective use.



*Cathy Liao*

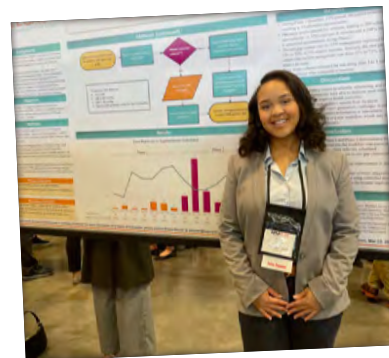
Ph.D. student Hanyue (Cathy) Liao earned a Student Abstract Award at the 2025 American College of Clinical Pharmacology Annual Meeting in Phoenix, Ariz., for research on optimizing statin dosing in obese Hispanic patients in the Rio Grande Valley undergoing Roux-en-Y gastric bypass surgery. Tracking atorvastatin and rosuvastatin pharmacokinetics and clinical outcomes over 12 months, her early findings suggest post-surgical physiological changes may affect drug levels differently, highlighting the need for individualized therapy in this understudied population.

Pharm.D. candidate Ariana Moorer received a Presentation Merit Award in the Research Poster Competition-Innovative Report (Student) category at the 2025 American Pharmacists Association Annual Meeting & Exposition in Nashville, Tenn. She developed a workflow integrating pharmacy interns at Legacy Community Health into efforts to close hypertension

and diabetes care gaps. The approach improved referrals, scheduling and documentation while boosting CMS Star Ratings for both diseases.

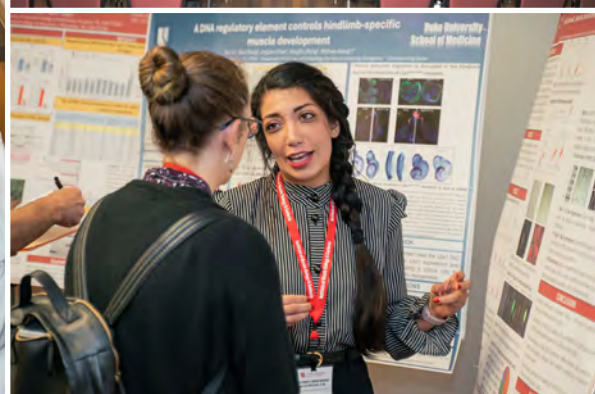
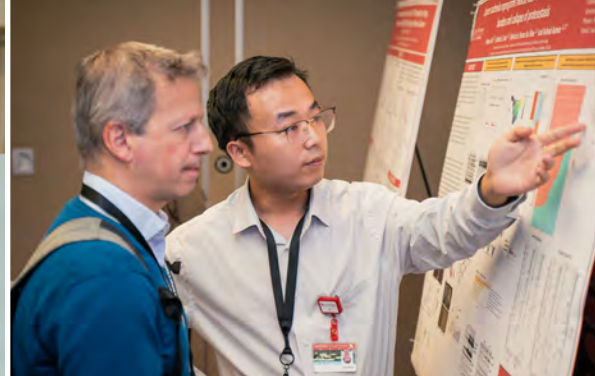
Then-graduate student Sahar Yazdanfard, Ph.D. ('25), received the Abstract Submission Award at the American Society of Addiction Medicine 56th Annual Conference in Denver, Colo., for her study on buprenorphine access for opioid use disorder. Using three years of national claims data, she examined changes in travel distance and pharmacy switching after treatment initiation. Nearly 40% of patients faced increased travel burdens, underscoring how pharmacy availability affects continuity of care and overdose risk.

Together, these award-winning projects reflect UHCOP's strength in the development of student researchers—and future scientists and practitioners—to improve patient health outcomes across diverse patient populations through data-driven, evidence-based investigations.



*Ariana Moorer*





## NEW UHCOP INSTITUTE FOCUSES ON MUSCLE BIOLOGY AND CACHEXIA

The Institute of Muscle Biology and Cachexia (IMBC) at UHCOP has been established as the first of its kind at UH and across the Greater Houston area dedicated to research and education on muscle biology, cachexia, and neuromuscular disorders.

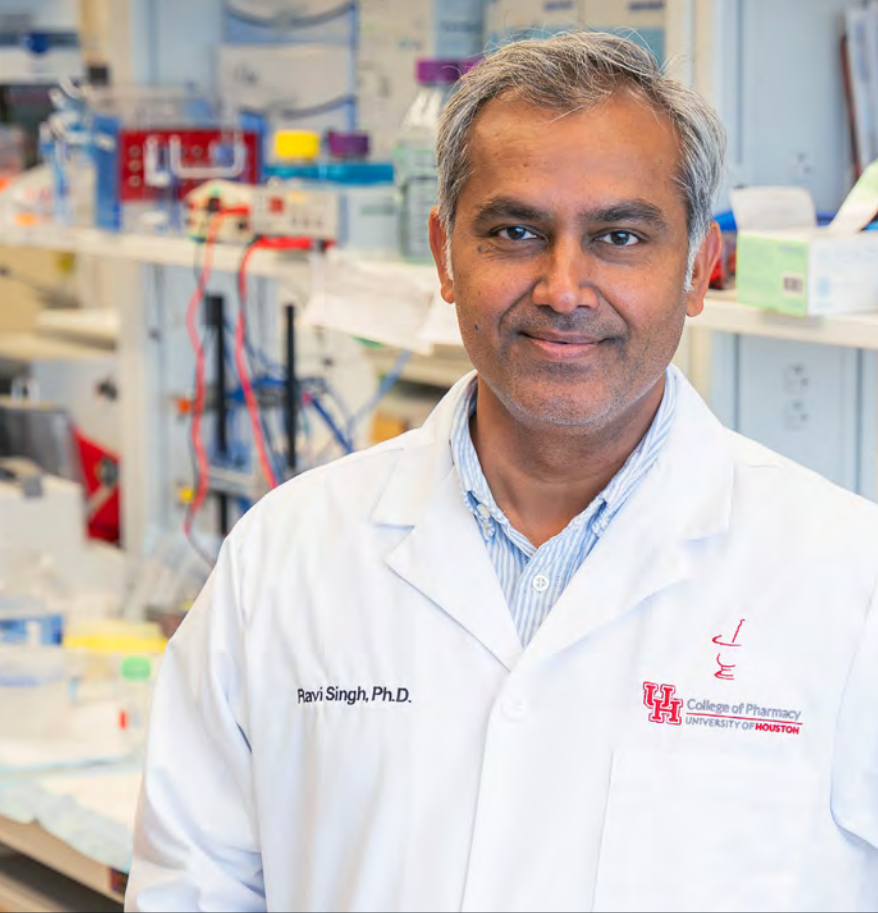
The institute's mission is aimed at discovering the mechanisms of muscle biology and muscle wasting (or cachexia) and developing therapeutic interventions to stop muscle loss or alleviate the impact of muscle wasting. Approved in January 2025, the institute is led by Ashok Kumar, Ph.D., and Radbod Darabi, M.D., Ph.D. Members include UHCOP's colleagues Bin Guo, Ph.D., Bradley McConnell, Ph.D., Anirban Roy, Ph.D., Ravi Singh, Ph.D., Alexander Statsyuk, Ph.D., Moosa Tatar, Ph.D., and Meghna Trivedi, Ph.D., Pharm.D., as well as investigators from across the UH campus.

The IMBC's dual mission includes performing innovative and impactful research on muscle biology and cachexia and fostering the next generation of scientists. The educational component of IMBC aims to provide research training to undergraduate and graduate students and post-doctoral fellows as well as mentorship to early-stage investigators and junior faculty.

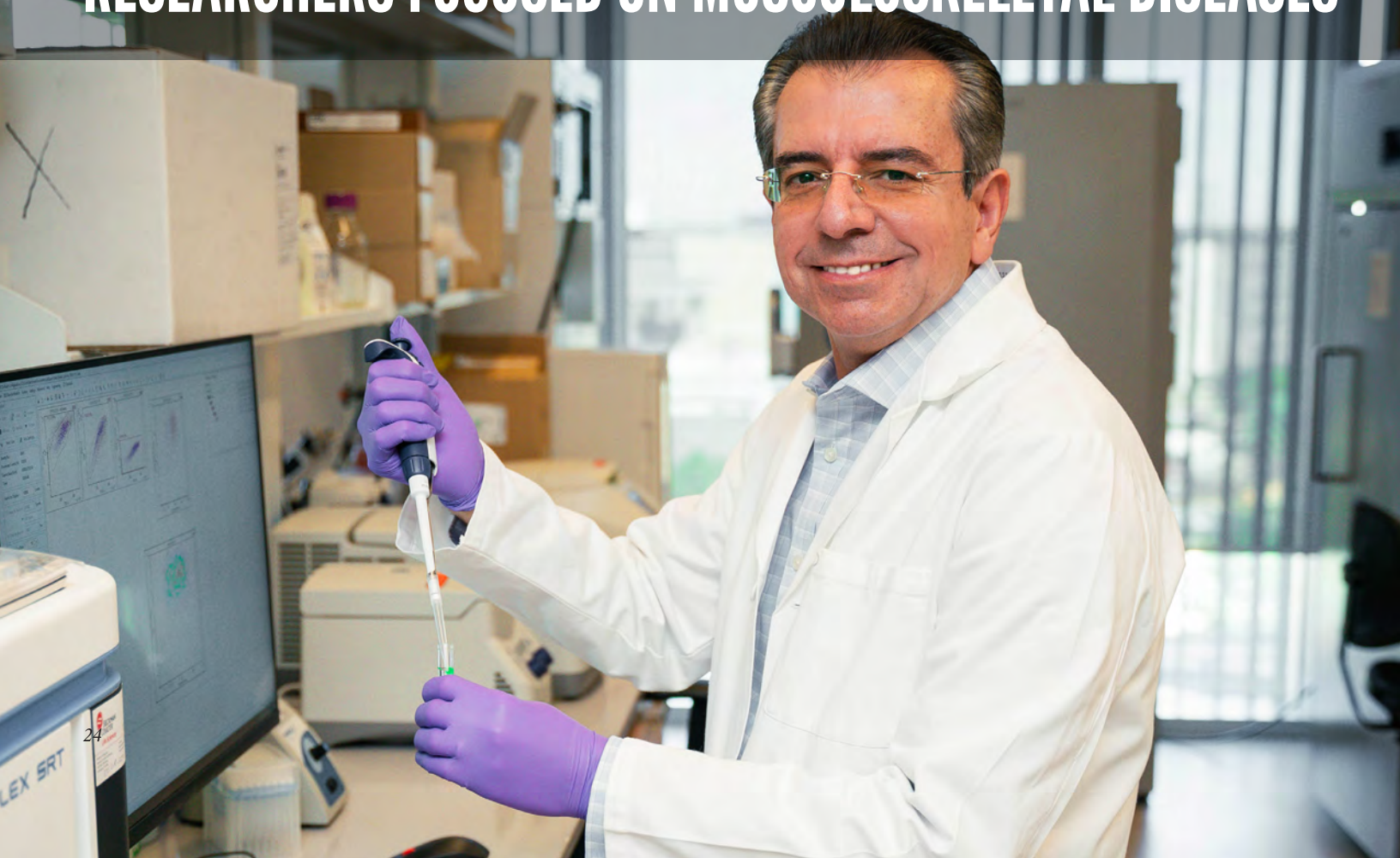
One of the institute's first major undertakings was hosting the inaugural Muscle Biology and Cachexia Conference over two days at UH in May 2025. The event drew nearly 300 established, early-career and student researchers from across the U.S. as well as Canada, Italy, Singapore and Turkey for 46 podium, 20 short-talk, and 65 poster presentations. A second conference is being planned for late 2026.

*"The IMBC aims to be a prominent institute to bring together nationally and internationally renowned investigators in the field of muscle biology, cachexia, and neuromuscular disorders to perform innovative research and education and to develop new therapeutics," Kumar said.*





## BAD TO THE BONE: COLLEGE BUILDS TEAM OF RESEARCHERS FOCUSED ON MUSCULOSKELETAL DISEASES





From stopping tumors in their tracks to rebuilding damaged tissue, UHCOP faculty members Ashok Kumar, Ph.D., Radbod Darabi, M.D., Ph.D., and Ravi Singh, Ph.D., are part of a cadre of college researchers focused on diseases and disorders of the musculoskeletal system.

The efforts of Kumar and Darabi are focusing on very different conditions—one a fast-growing pediatric cancer, the other a rare genetic muscle disorder—but their missions are united by a common goal: improving outcomes for our youngest patients facing devastating diagnoses.

Rhabdomyosarcoma (RMS), a malignant soft tissue cancer, primarily affects young children and accounts for about 8% of all pediatric cancers. When the cancer spreads beyond its origination site in or near muscle beds, the prognosis becomes grim, with survival rates dropping to just 20–30%.

*“Our project will identify key mechanisms and molecular targets to prevent tumor progression in RMS patients in future therapies,”* said Kumar, Else and Philip Hargrove Endowed Professor of Drug Discovery and director of the Institute of Muscle Biology and Cachexia.

A promising lead is TAK1 (Transforming Growth Factor  $\beta$ -Activated Kinase 1), a protein that appears hyperactive in RMS cells. Kumar’s preliminary data suggest TAK1 plays a central role in promoting uncontrolled cell growth and blocking the natural maturation process of muscle cells. By targeting TAK1, the lab hopes to stop the progression of RMS at its source, and his work toward that end is being supported by a \$3.3 million National Cancer Institute grant awarded in 2025.

*“Based on our preliminary studies, we hypothesize that aberrant activation of TAK1 causes tumorigenesis and growth of RMS, and inhibition of TAK1 can be a potential therapeutic approach,”* Kumar said.

Darabi is studying nemaline myopathy (NM)—a genetic condition that severely weakens skeletal muscles—as part of a National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS-D)-funded project. Affecting approximately one in 50,000 live births, NM can be fatal in its most severe forms, particularly when caused by mutations in the ACTA1 gene.

*“Some children with NM are so weak from birth that they are not able to breathe for themselves,”* said Darabi, associate professor of pharmacology. *“Even with intensive medical care, some of these children die in the first weeks or months of life.”*

To better understand NM, Darabi and his collaborator, principal investigator Callie Kwartler, Ph.D., at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth-Houston, are using reprogrammed human stem cells with ACTA1 mutations. These cells are directed to become muscle progenitor cells, enabling researchers to model the disease and explore its molecular roots. This innovative strategy provides an abundant, controllable source of diseased cells—crucial for studying such a rare condition.

Both researchers are also exploring how healthy muscle can be regenerated. Supported by a separate NIAMSD project, Darabi’s second project uses human induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) to generate myogenic progenitor cells and vascular endothelial cells—two cell types critical for muscle repair. His lab is testing how these cells “talk” to each other through paracrine signaling, and whether they can be used in combination to regenerate injured or dystrophic muscle in animal models.

*“By studying this cellular interaction, we hope to develop a novel stem cell-based therapy approach for treatment of muscle disorders,”* Darabi said. *“Results of this study also pave the way toward development of multicellular, bioengineered muscle tissues which can be used for surgical replacement of muscle loss.”*

While Kumar and Darabi study cancer progression and congenital muscle disease, Singh is examining how alternative splicing fine-tunes adult muscle metabolism. Skeletal muscle relies on alternative splicing to generate essential protein variants, yet the roles of many isoforms remain unclear. Splicing disruptions are a hallmark of muscular dystrophies and age-related muscle decline—conditions in which metabolic dysfunction often appears long before overt disease.

Singh is working to close this knowledge gap. His earlier research showed that Rbfox RNA-binding proteins—which help produce the predominant adult muscle isoform, MEF2D $\alpha$ 2—are essential for maintaining muscle mass and metabolic balance. When Rbfox genes were switched off in adult mice, the animals lost nearly half their muscle mass, had impaired glucose handling, and showed splicing defects in more than 700 genes.

To define MEF2D $\alpha$ 2’s role, Singh generated a mouse model lacking the  $\alpha$ 2 exon, which led to reduced endurance and impaired ketone body oxidation, a sign that the missing isoform plays a crucial role in how muscle processes fuel under conditions of metabolic stress, such as exhaustive exercise and upon consumption of a high-fat diet. Singh’s lab also is working to identify a new non-canonical role of MEF2D in skeletal muscle, as MEF2D was found to interact with mitochondrial and metabolic proteins, Singh said.

*“That tells us MEF2D $\alpha$ 2 may be working as a metabolic partner rather than a traditional transcription factor.”*

Supported by a \$362,000 NIAMS grant awarded in 2024, Singh’s team is mapping MEF2D $\alpha$ 2’s protein-interaction network and assessing how its loss alters muscle metabolism, with plans to validate findings in human muscle. *“By uncovering this new metabolic role for MEF2D $\alpha$ 2, we hope to reveal a conserved mechanism that could eventually guide new strategies for improving muscle health and whole-body metabolism,”* Singh said.

Because metabolic dysfunction in skeletal muscle often precedes type 2 diabetes and obesity—two of the most prevalent chronic diseases worldwide—Singh’s work has far-reaching implications.



## CRYPTOSPORIDIUM IN THE CROSSHAIRS

### New \$4M NIH Grant Boosts Cuny-led Pursuit of Effective Therapies Against Protozoan Parasite

The ongoing pursuit of effective therapeutics led by UHCOP researchers to halt infections caused by the protozoan parasite *Cryptosporidium*—a life-threatening waterborne pathogen that claims the lives of over 50,000 children under 5—has received a major boost with a new National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases grant of nearly \$4 million.

Gregory Cuny, Ph.D., Joseph P. & Shirley Shipman Buckley Endowed Professor of Drug Discovery, lead a multi-institutional team to develop effective drugs to manage cryptosporidiosis in young children, immunocompromised adults and as a countermeasure to epidemic outbreaks.

*Cryptosporidium* stands alone among the top four diarrheal pathogens with no effective treatments or vaccines. The parasites are the second leading cause of diarrhea-related death after rotavirus and can also be fatal for immunocompromised adults. Also frightening, these parasites have the potential to be deliberately introduced into the water supply, making them a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Class B bioterrorism agent.

An essential enzyme for *Cryptosporidium* survival – CDPK1 or

Calcium dependent protein kinase 1 — has emerged as an attractive target for cryptosporidiosis as scientists find that silencing CDPK1 significantly reduces parasite growth.

*“Our long-term goal is to identify clinical candidates that can be advanced in our effort to establish CDPK1 as a validated drug target for treatment of *Cryptosporidium*-induced infections,” Cuny said.*

Cuny and team plan to design the drug candidates to stay in the system longer, absorbed through the liver and then sent to the intestine through the process of enterohepatic recycling, instead of being eliminated.

To minimize systemic exposure, they are also designing the drugs to go directly to the gastrointestinal tract, where *Cryptosporidium* infections primarily occur.

*“CDPK1 has structural features that present opportunities for selective inhibitor design targeting the parasite kinase enzyme without harming similar human enzymes,” Cuny said. “Demonstrating GI-targeting would also be highly significant to drug design strategies for other GI conditions, such as colonic cancers and inflammatory bowel diseases.”*

Cuny’s team includes UHCOP’s Ming Hu, Ph.D., Diana S-L. Chow Endowed Professor of Drug Discovery and Development, and Kevin Garey, Pharm.D., M.S., FASHP, FIDSA, FCCP, Robert L. Boblitt Endowed Professor of Drug Discovery; University of Washington’s Wesley Van Voorhis; and Tufts University’s Saul Tzipori, D.V.M., Ph.D., D.Sc., FRCVS. - Laurie Fickman, UH News



# ANTIMICROBIAL ALGORITHM | \$3.96M NIH-funded Pharmacy, Engineering Alliance Aims to Overcome Resistance with Optimized Combinatorial Therapies

While combinatorial therapies aren't new, they have some of the same shortfalls as single-agent treatments when it comes to dosing regimens, toxicity and risk of resistance. However, Professor Vincent H. Tam, Pharm.D., FIDSA, FIDP, BCIDP, Cullen College of Engineering collaborator Michael Nikolaou, Ph.D., and other members of their team have come up with a solution: a cutting-edge monitoring device and data-processing algorithm that will guide the design of combination therapy.

Tam and Nikolaou's long-running partnership on the initiative received a five-year, \$3.96 million infusion from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in 2024.

Their focus is on infections caused by gram-negative bacteria, whose biology (enclosed in a protective capsule that prevents guardian white blood cells from mounting an effective defense) and death (releasing toxins that can trigger inflammation, fever or sepsis) give them a tactical advantage. Gram-negative bacterial infections can cause or contribute to urinary tract infections, pneumonia, bloodstream infections, wound or surgical infections

and meningitis.

*"Upon completion of our research, clinicians could be guided in the selection of combination therapy, without comprehensive knowledge of the resistance mechanisms involved,"* Tam said.

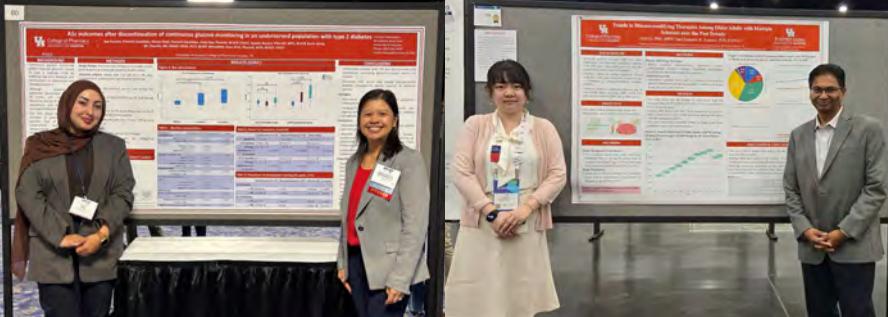
Tam plans to first identify useful antibiotic combinations against multidrug resistant bacteria and then validate the mathematical model predictions with clinical outcomes. He will use three highly resistant gram-negative strains — *P. aeruginosa*, *A. baumannii* and *K. pneumoniae* — for his research.

*"However, the proposed model-based system is not confined to a specific antimicrobial agent-pathogen combination,"* Tam said. *"It could be extrapolated to other antimicrobial agents (e.g., antibacterials, antifungals and antiretrovirals) with different mechanisms of action, as well as to other pathogens (e.g., Neisseria gonorrhoeae, Candida auris, and HIV) with different microbiological characteristics."*

Other members of the team are Houston Methodist Hospital's William Musick, Pharm.D., BCIDP, and Houston Methodist Research Institute's Truc Cecilia Tran, Pharm.D. ('08).







# CLINICAL, HEALTH OUTCOMES FACULTY SECURE NATIONAL PRESENTATION HONORS

UHCOP is marking a standout year for faculty achievement, with national awards recognizing their leadership in teaching, scholarship and patient-centered advancement.

Clinical Associate Professor Bernadette Asias-Dinh, Pharm.D. ('11), BCPS, BCACP, CDCES, earned Best Poster in the practitioner category at the 2025 ACCP Annual Meeting for her study on the outcomes of underserved adults with type 2 diabetes who lose access to continuous glucose monitoring (CGM).

The project followed patients after a pharmacist-led program that previously provided CGM supplies at no cost. Those who discontinued CGM saw their A1c rise by up to 2.6 points over a year, while patients who continued were far more likely to keep A1c below 9%. The findings suggest that uninterrupted CGM access may be essential for sustaining blood sugar improvements in underserved populations.

Research Assistant Professor Jieni Li, Ph.D. ('24), MPH, received a Gold medal from the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy (AMCP) for her abstract examining trends in disease-modifying therapies among older adults with multiple sclerosis (MS) using Medicare claims data from 2011 to 2021.

Li's study, "Trends in Disease-modifying Therapies Among Older Adults with Multiple Sclerosis over the Past Decade," found a 67% increase in MS diagnoses and a 225% rise in therapy use, with interferon-beta and glatiramer acetate most commonly prescribed. Li's work was among the top 15% of abstracts recognized by AMCP.

Clinical Assistant Professor Natalie Rosario, Pharm.D., MPH, BCACP, has been selected as the 2025 recipient of the Innovation in Self-Care and Nonprescription Medicines Teaching Award from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy's Self-Care Therapeutics/Nonprescription Medicine Special Interest Group.

The national award honors inventive approaches to teaching over-the-counter medicine education. Rosario coordinates and teaches UHCOP's Nonprescription Pharmacotherapy and Self Care course, where she uses immersive counseling simulations and real-time decision-making activities to prepare first-year student pharmacists for frontline patient interactions. Already shared across the curriculum, her model emphasizes clinical judgment, communication and culturally responsive care.





## New Record Unlocked: UHCOP Research Hits All-time High of \$15M

UHCOP attained a new record of \$15 million in research funding — including a top 25 spot in National Institutes of Health support among the 140 colleges of pharmacy nationwide — according to the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy's rankings for the Fiscal Year 2024.

The college also ranks 30th in the nation for all-source funding, which includes not only other federal agencies, but also state, industry and foundation/association research grants and contracts.

UHCOP's NIH funding rose to \$10.9 million in FY2024—moving the college up two spots—an increase of approximately \$1.4 million over FY2023.

Although the college's ranking remained the same over the past two years, total funding from all sources — including grants from the NIH and other federal agencies, the state, and foundations and other organizations—increased from \$13.1 million in 2023 to slightly over \$15 million in 2024.

Among the largest non-NIH grants awarded to UHCOP researchers were \$1.4 million from the Texas Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas to Ming Hu, Ph.D., and Greg Cuny, Ph.D., for “Lead Optimization, Target Engagement and Efficacy Studies of Locally Bioavailable COX-2 inhibitors for Preventing Colon Cancer Progression in FAP Children” and \$1.1 million from the U.S. Department of Defense's U.S. Army Medical Research Acquisition Activity to Meghna Trivedi, Ph.D., Pharm.D., for “Investigating Nebivolol in Triple-Negative Breast Cancer.”

# #25

National Institutes of Health

# #30

All Sources



## EARLY WARNING: Eubank Earns ASHP Drug Therapy Award for Study on Vancomycin Resistance Patterns in C. diff

A study published in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases* by Research Assistant Professor Taryn Eubank, Pharm.D., BCIDP, on how reduced vancomycin susceptibility in *Clostridioides difficile* (C. diff) may impact patient outcomes was lauded as the 2025 Drug Therapy Research Award by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists.

While oral vancomycin has long been a cornerstone of treatment due to its greater accessibility than other antibiotics such as fidaxomicin, cure rates have dropped from nearly 100% in the early 2000s to around 70% in recent years. The cause of this decline remains unclear, prompting Eubank and her team to investigate whether increased vancomycin use—like the recent 54% uptick following updated treatment recommendations published in 2018—may be contributing to reduced susceptibility to the antimicrobial agent.

Using bacterial samples, known as isolates, from 300 patients from 14 hospitals treated only with vancomycin, Eubank and team found that patients infected with strains showing reduced vancomycin susceptibility were significantly less likely (76%) to achieve the primary outcome of 30-day SCR (symptom-free with no recurrence or death within 30 days) than those infected with susceptible strains (86%). Lower initial cure rates at 14 days were also observed.

About 25% of patients treated with vancomycin for C. diff. got sick again. In over 80% of those recurrences, the infection was caused by the same bacterial strain that caused the original illness and not a new infection. Because the same strain survives treatment and causes relapses, it's reasonable to suspect the drug may not fully eliminate the bacteria, Eubank said.

The study also examined the role of a genetic mutation, Thr115Ala, in the VanR regulatory protein, part of a two-component regulatory system (VanR/VanS) that controls vancomycin resistance in bacteria. When VanR is activated, it triggers enzymes that produce a cell wall to which vancomycin can no longer bind.

While this mutation was associated with higher vancomycin resistance levels, it appeared most frequently in the hypervirulent RT 027 strain, making it difficult to determine whether the mutation itself, or other virulent traits of RT 027, were responsible for poorer outcomes. RT 027 was also linked to more severe or fulminant disease (62%) compared to other types (45%). Approximately 43% of patients died within 30 days of diagnosis, with most deaths occurring in the first 12 days.

Eubank's research underscores the growing importance of understanding antibiotic resistance mechanisms, such as the activation of the hidden vanG operon, which can alter bacterial cell wall targets and reduce vancomycin binding effectiveness.

Project collaborators were Kevin Garey, UHCOP professor and department chair; Julian Hurdle, Ph.D., professor at Texas A&M University (TAMU) and director of the Center for Infectious and Inflammatory Diseases; Chetna Dureja, Ph.D., molecular microbiologist and postdoctoral research associate at TAMU, and former UHCOP faculty member Anne Gonzalez-Luna, Pharm.D., BCIDP.





# WINNING RESULTS FOR OUTCOMES RESEARCHERS

## Thornton, Aparasu Earn National Research Honors from APhA

Two of UHCOP's most prolific health outcomes researchers—Rajender R. Aparasu, Ph.D., FAPhA, and Doug Thornton, Ph.D., Pharm.D., BCPS—have amassed some of the pharmacy profession's most prestigious national honors in rapid succession.

Serving as director of the Prescription Drug Misuse Education and Research (PREMIER) Center, Thornton has been honored by the American Pharmacists Association in two consecutive years: the 2025 Wiederholt Prize For Best Published Paper Award For Economic, Social And Administrative Sciences and the 2024 Generation Rx Award.

The Wiederholt Prize was bestowed in recognition of a study he led, "Parents' intention to have their child vaccinated at a community pharmacy: a national cross-sectional survey," which was published in the March-April 2023 issue of the APhA Journal (JAPhA). The study was aimed at assessing parents' comfort levels in having their child vaccinated in a community pharmacy setting.

The Generation Rx Award recognized Thornton for his expansive work on opioid use disorder (OUD) awareness and

reduction. Thornton oversees a variety of PREMIER Center activities under federally funded/state-administered grant programs, including development of pharmacy continuing education programs on various OUD-related topics and distribution of single-use drug disposal system distribution to community pharmacies, first responders, local/regional prevention groups and others.

In addition, Thornton's work has been featured in national policy forums, including the White House, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and Food and Drug Administration workshops, and his research has been cited in the CDC's 2022 Opioid Prescribing Guidelines. He is the sole pharmacist among the 13 state appointees to the Texas Opioid Abatement Fund Council, where he helps ensure opioid lawsuit settlement funds are used effectively to reduce the impact and enhance prevention of opioid misuse.

With a research focus on patient health outcomes and pharmacoepidemiology in the older adult population, Aparasu was awarded the APhA Academy of Pharmaceutical Research & Science (APRS) Research

Achievement Award in 2024.

As principal investigator, Aparasu has received continuous research funding from such sources as the National Institutes of Health, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), and pharmaceutical companies. As a founding director of the Center for Population Health Outcomes and Pharmacoepidemiology Education and Research (P-HOPER Center), Aparasu secured the center's first grant: a \$1.6 million award from AHRQ to evaluate deprescribing in older adults with multiple sclerosis.

He has edited four textbooks and authored nearly 200 peer-reviewed manuscripts, earning recognition as one of the world's top 2% most-cited scientists by PLOS ONE. Additionally, he has made over 250 presentations at national and international meetings.

Among Aparasu's other recent accolades include the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy's Paul R. Dawson Award for Excellence in Patient Care Research in 2022 and Fulbright Faculty Specialist for 2016-2021.



## PLANTING SEEDS OF INNOVATION | Tejada-Simón Completes Fulbright Specialist Residency in Honduras

UHCOP faculty continue to be sought-after scholars to share their expertise with higher education institutions around the world, with Associate Professor and Director of Faculty Development MariVi Tejada-Simón, Ph.D., M.Ed. ('07), the latest faculty member to be selected for the prestigious Fulbright Specialist program run by the U.S. Department of State since 1946.

Tejada-Simón spent two weeks at the Universidad Zamorano in Honduras, where she worked with faculty and administrators to strengthen institutional culture, foster pedagogical innovation and elevate student-centered learning. Through workshops and collaborative sessions, Tejada-Simón's curriculum spanned six interrelated domains — leadership, community, pedagogy, technology, educational research, and sustainability — each offering pathways for institutional growth and long-term impact.

Her presentations delved into such areas as cultivating motivation and emotional safety, the transformative potential of AI and instructional technology, and the importance of faculty well-being and formative feedback in sustaining high-quality teaching.

Tejada-Simón's match with Universidad Zamorano, one of the region's leading agricultural universities, was especially fortuitous: Before embarking on her neuropharmacology research career, Tejada-Simón earned an undergraduate degree in dairy industries and engineering and a master's degree and Ph.D. in food science and nutrition.

*"My partnership with Zamorano University is especially meaningful because it bridges my passion for transformative education with my academic roots in biology and agricultural sciences,"* Tejada-Simón said. *"It's a return to the foundation that shaped my approach to learning and a step forward in reimagining what higher education can look like."*

*"The parallels between agricultural and pharmacy education, both centered on science, critical thinking, and community well-being, offer powerful opportunities for cross-disciplinary exchange."*





# END OF AN ERA

## Honoring the Legacy of UHCOP's Transformative Faculty

With an impact on literally thousands of professional and graduate program students over their careers, several long-time faculty members have hung up their lab coats, but all have left an indelible mark on the advancement of science and the college's reputation. Each of these individuals who were instrumental in the college's advancement are now recognized as Professor Emeritus in recognition of their impact.

### **Karim Alkadhi, Ph.D.**

Karim Alkadhi, Ph.D., retired after four decades of teaching, research and service to the college. His research largely focused on the effects of stimuli and suppressors—such as caffeine, nicotine, exercise, stress and sleep deprivation—on cognitive function and the development and progression of neurodegenerative disease, including dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Alkadhi authored more than 150 peer-reviewed research articles and book chapters, contributing to some of the most respected journals in the field of neuroscience and pharmacology. Expertscape, an online platform ranking scientists based on the quality and quantity of their publications indexed in the National Library of Medicine's MEDLINE database, ranked Alkadhi as a "World Expert" in the subject area of "Hippocampal CA1 Region" and an "Expert" in the subject area of "Dentate Gyrus."

In the classroom, he played a major role in the development of the Pharm.D. toxicology course and the graduate-level neuropharmacology course. Alkadhi was recognized at the college level for teaching excellence multiple times and a finalist for the UH teaching award. Alkadhi and his wife, Ann L. Bragdon, established a Presidential Endowed Fellowship for pharmacology graduate students and were welcomed into the Mading Society in 2010.

### **Richard Bond, Ph.D. ('88), B.S. ('83)**

Two-time alumnus and Professor Emeritus Richard A. Bond, Ph.D. ('88), B.S. ('83), retired from the college in 2025 after a career spanning three decades.

Bond's career was marked by a relentless drive for scientific "truth," which brought encouragement from the likes of Sir James Black—the father of "beta blockers"—as well as a few detractors from the scientific community and pharmaceutical industry.

His work on beta adrenergic inverse agonists (beta blockers) redefined clinical assumptions, introducing the concept of "paradoxical pharmacology"—the idea that certain drugs could be harmful in the short term, but beneficial in the long term. With nearly 10,000 citations, he authored/coauthored more than 100 papers in such prestigious publications as Science, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, PLOS One, and the British Journal of Pharmacology (BJP). His body of work also spans seven book chapters, 20 invited publications, and over 200 abstracts.

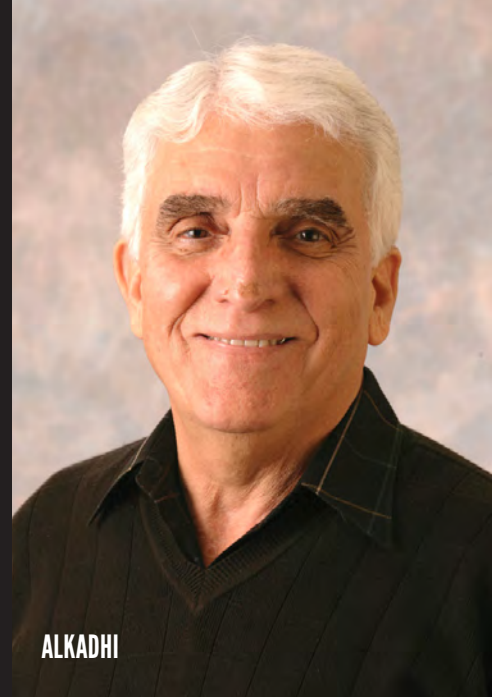
While his career included collaborations with two Nobel Prize recipients and earning fellowships and patents along the way, perhaps his greatest legacy lies in mentoring the next generation of scientists. He supervised over a dozen Ph.D. students and numerous postdoctoral researchers, and established a travel award scholarship for students in memory of Black.

*"You must be the best mentor to your mentees, who will be your longest-lived accomplishment,"* Bond said. *"They will live long beyond when people stop reading your papers."*

### **Michael Johnson, Ph.D.**

During his 18 years at the college, Michael Johnson, Ph.D., served as faculty member, department vice chair and director of graduate studies. The college's sole biostatistician, Johnson was an invaluable resource and collaborator for researchers within the college, contributing to a variety of cross-discipline research projects.

Johnson authored or coauthored nearly 200 articles in such journals as Pharmacotherapy, Cancer, the Journal of the American Pharmacists Association, the Journal of Managed Care & Specialty Pharmacy, and Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy as well as contributed to more than 150 abstract presentations at local, national and international conferences.







In addition, he was tapped to lead the Task Force on Good Research Practices for Retrospective Database Studies of the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy and the National Pharmaceutical Council, which resulted in a report published in *Value Health* and the 2009 ISPOR Distinguished Service Award.

A key contributor to the creation of the college's original PHOP Ph.D. degree, Johnson also served as primary mentor for doctoral and master's program students and secondary mentor to dozens more trainees.

#### **Brian Knoll, Ph.D.**

Brian J. Knoll, Ph.D., retired from UHCOP after 23 years of teaching pharmacology, research into beta-2 adrenergic receptor ( $\beta$ 2AR), and a variety of service activities at the college and university.

In addition to his faculty position, Knoll served as UHCOP's assistant dean of graduate level programs for the past decade and director of graduate education in PPS for the prior eight years. Knoll's primary research focus was on the development of new therapeutics designed to reduce airway inflammation by modifying  $\beta$ 2AR signaling in airway epithelium. His research was supported by grants from such organizations as the National Institutes of Health, the American Cancer Society, and the American Heart Association.

He authored or coauthored more than 50 book chapters and peer-reviewed journal articles in such publications as *Proceedings of the National Academies of Science (PNAS)*, the *European Journal of Pharmacology*, the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, *PLOS One* and the *British Journal of Pharmacology*.

Knoll was involved in the training and progression of more than 50 graduate and undergraduate students as well as postdoctoral fellows over the course of his career. He taught several graduate courses as well as coordinated multiple classes and modules in the Pharm.D. program.

#### **Mustafa Lokhandwala, Ph.D., FAHA, FASN**

Mustafa Lokhandwala, Ph.D., FAHA, FASN, retired after a 46-year career at UHCOP as a faculty researcher, teacher and leader, including ushering in the Pharmacology and Pharmaceutics Ph.D. programs and the Pharm.D. program at the college.

From his early days as a graduate student to serving as department chair, dean and later executive vice dean for research, Lokhandwala helped steer the college into national prominence.

Lokhandwala's leadership as dean and research administrator pushed the college's faculty research portfolio from approximately \$500,000 in the 1990s to over \$11 million by 2018.

An internationally recognized leader in cardiovascular pharmacology in his own right, Lokhandwala was among the "world's most cited" scientists in inflammation and oxidative stress in hypertension and kidney dysfunction. He maintained continuous and overlapping grants from the National Institutes of Health throughout most of his career and authored over 200 peer-reviewed articles.

A fellow of the American Heart Association and the American Society of Nephrology, Lokhandwala directly mentored 30 graduate students during his career and two dozen postdoctoral fellows and junior faculty members.

"Red Coat" honorees of the college's Mading Society, Lokhandwala and his wife, Sanobar, established two endowed scholarships and contributed to countless others as well as funding the college's first endowed professorship in the Department of Pharmaceutical Health Outcomes and Policy.



#### **Ke-He Ruan, M.D., Ph.D.**

After nearly two decades of exemplary service, teaching, and groundbreaking research, Professor Emeritus Ke-He Ruan, M.D., Ph.D., retired from UHCOP in 2025.

Ruan's research was instrumental in advancing the understanding of the molecular and cellular regulation of lipid metabolites, particularly through the cyclooxygenase pathway.

One of Dr. Ruan's landmark achievements is the engineering of the Single-Chain Hybrid Enzyme Complex, also known as Enzymelink technology. These enzymes selectively enhance prostacyclin (PGI<sub>2</sub>) biosynthesis while suppressing thromboxane A<sub>2</sub> (TXA<sub>2</sub>) and prostaglandin E<sub>2</sub> (PGE<sub>2</sub>) production, demonstrating profound therapeutic potential in preventing endothelial dysfunction and ischemic heart disease.

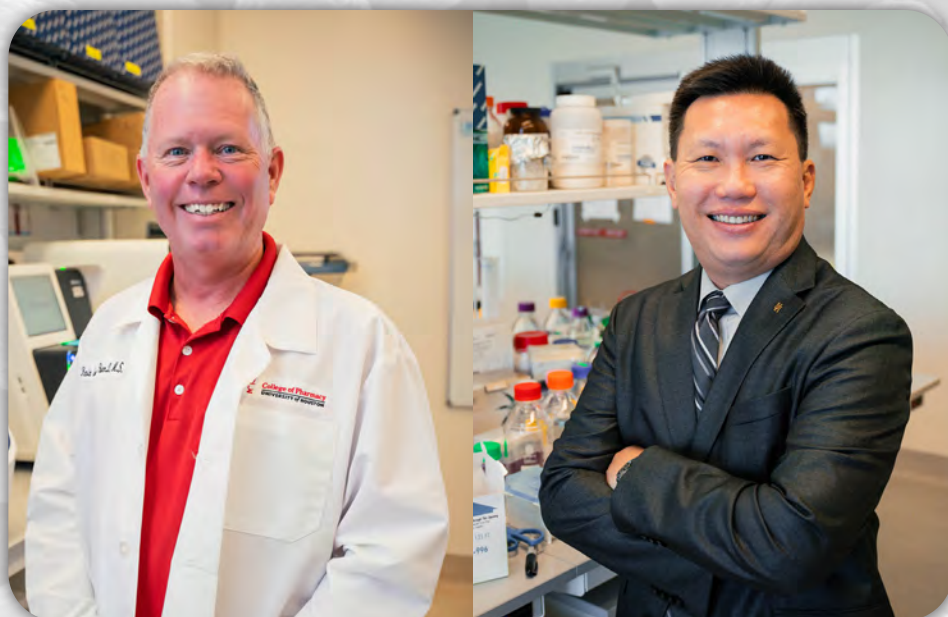
Ruan authored or coauthored over 100 articles in leading peer-reviewed journals, including *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *Nature Communications*, *Circulation*, and the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*. He served as the primary graduate advisor and mentor for 10 Ph.D. students and guided numerous M.D., Ph.D., and M.D./Ph.D. postdoctoral fellows, professional students, and undergraduates.





# Houston “IDols”

## Garey, Tam Among Leading Experts in Developing Antimicrobial Drugs, Strategies to Thwart Resistant Pathogens



Kevin Garey, Pharm.D., M.S., FASHP, FIDSA, FCCP, BCIDP, and Vincent H. Tam, Pharm.D., FIDSA, FIDP, BCIDP, are giving a whole new meaning to the expression of big fish in a little pond, if the pond in question is filled with life-threatening microorganisms.

From National Institutes of Health grants and invitations to update clinical practice guidelines to accolades from premier professional organizations, Garey and Tam are invariably part of the conversation in the infectious diseases community as relentless leaders in the hunt for better antimicrobial strategies and therapeutics.

Garey's expertise is largely focused on *Clostridioides difficile* infections (CDI), which commonly cause life-threatening, recurring bouts of gastrointestinal distress and diarrhea. Career highlights include helping his clinical site twice earn national recognition, co-developing a fellowship program that has trained more than 50 ID pharmacists, establishing one of the largest *C. diff.* biobanks, and leading multiple clinical trials on novel or optimized therapeutics for CDI. With a portfolio of more than 150 research articles, Garey also has been awarded over \$10 million in grants from the

NIH, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, and multiple companies in the pharmaceutical industry.

Over a period of five consecutive years, Garey has claimed at least one national recognition each year. Among his most recent honors are the 2025 Outstanding Mentor Award from the Society of Infectious Diseases Pharmacists (SIDP), 2023 Innovator Award by the Peggy Lillis Foundation for *C. diff.* Education and Advocacy, and 2023 Literature Award for Sustained Contribution—which Tam had won in 2019—from the ASHP Research & Education Foundation.

He earned consecutive honors from the American College of Clinical Pharmacy: recipient of the Russell R. Miller Award in 2022 and ACCP Fellow in 2021. Garey also was named a Fellow of the Infectious Diseases Society of America in 2020.

Tam also has established himself as a leader in infectious diseases translational research, with an emphasis on overcoming antimicrobial resistance.

Tam's research has directly contributed to changes in international guidelines and microbiology laboratory testing recommendations that have been endorsed by multiple

major infectious diseases, clinical pharmacy and critical care organizations. Incorporating Tam's own research, the updated guidelines radically shifted the antimicrobial agent polymyxin B from a status as “drugs of last resort,” due to its toxicity profile, to the preferred agent in its class.

In 2025, Tam was honored with the UH Excellence in Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity at the Professor level. He received the 2024 ACCP Therapeutic Frontiers Lecture Award and presented an accompanying lecture, “Personalized Combination Antimicrobial Therapy,” at the organization's annual meeting. The same year, he was elected SIDP Fellow.

Tam has received more than \$12 million in research support from nonprofit organizations, industry and federal agencies, including a new \$3.96 million NIH grant to develop a monitoring device and algorithm for optimizing combinatorial therapies for gram-negative bacterial infections. He also is co-inventor on U.S. patents for novel formulations for a last-resort antimicrobial drug and a novel rapid diagnostic system to help guide rational dosing of antimicrobials at the bedside.





# A Stake in Pharmacy's Future: UHCOP's Marvelous Mentors

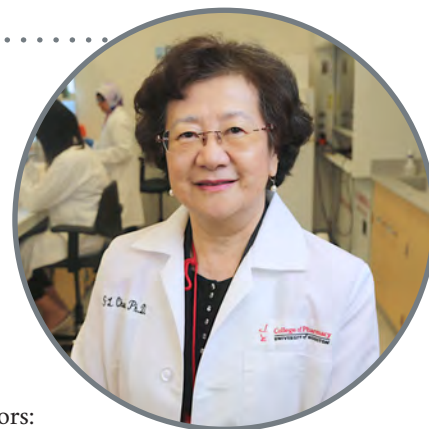




*Mentorship is central to excellence  
at UHCOP. Faculty guide  
students across all levels — graduate,  
Pharm.D. and undergraduate —  
fostering independence, research  
expertise and leadership. These  
profiles highlight award-winning  
mentors whose dedication, guidance  
and support have shaped careers,  
advanced research and inspired  
the next generation of pharmacy  
and science professionals.*

## DIANA S-L CHOW .....

An internationally recognized researcher and expert in the field of pharmaceuticals, Diana S-L. Chow, Ph.D., FNAI, Paula & John J. Lovoi Sr. Endowed Professor of Drug Discovery and Development, was bestowed with two mentorship honors: the UH Outstanding Graduate Mentor Award in 2021, consequently leading to her receiving the regional Outstanding Mentor Award from the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools in 2022.



A faculty member since 1981 and director of the Institute for Drug Education and Research, Chow has pioneered projects in novel drug delivery systems for treating cancer, infections and acute spinal cord injuries, as well as research on medication efficacy for space missions.

But it's the genuine friendships and close-knit relationships she has established that Chow says are the most rewarding to her in her 40-year career at UHCOP. Chow has trained over 40 Ph.D. students, numerous M.S. and Pharm.D./Ph.D. trainees, and dozens of post-doctoral fellows/visiting scholars.

Chow's colleague, UHCOP Associate Professor Meghana Trivedi, Pharm.D. ('03), Ph.D. ('04), BCOP, nominated her for UH's Outstanding Graduate Mentor Award, with droves of former students and mentees writing letters in support of her selection.

"Dr. Chow patiently and gradually builds within each trainee the qualities needed for being logical, analytical and resourceful, with ever expanding problem-solving skills, perseverance and life-long learning in scientific and career pursuits," Trivedi said.

Former students describe Chow as a guiding light in their journeys — someone they turn to for steady counsel in even the toughest moments and continue to rely on long after graduation.

## KEVIN W. GAREY .....

With a teaching career spanning over two decades and a dedication to mentoring future leaders in infectious diseases, University of Houston College of Pharmacy Professor Kevin Garey, Pharm.D.,





M.S., FASHP, FIDSA, FCCP, BCIDP, received the 2025 Outstanding Mentor Award from the Society of Infectious Diseases Pharmacists (SIDP).

Garey's mentorship began with the creation of UHCOP's Infectious Diseases Pharmacy Fellowship in partnership with CHI St. Luke's Health-Baylor St. Luke's Medical Center. Designed to cultivate independent thinkers and leaders, the program—co-developed with UHCOP Professor Vincent Tam, Pharm.D., FIDSA, FIDP, BCIDP—has trained over 50 pharmacists worldwide. Beyond the fellowship, Garey has mentored numerous Pharm.D. students during experiential rotations, welcomed visiting scholars into his lab and expanded mentorship to students in the Pharmaceutical Sciences Ph.D. program.

*"My approach to mentoring is to foster skill development, confidence, and networking opportunities to guide mentees into the profession and encourage independence,"* said Garey, chair of the Department of Pharmacy Practice & Translational Research and Robert L. Boblitt Endowed Professor of Drug Discovery.

Alumnus and award nominator Travis J. Carlson, Pharm.D., BCIDP, said, *"Dr. Garey has received countless invitations to write review articles on the topic of C. difficile infection; he has invited me to co-author seven of those review articles, the most recent of which was in 2023—four years after I finished my fellowship."*

Reflecting on his career, Garey noted, *"It affirmed in me the importance and joy of mentorship—and that it remains one of the greatest rewards of my professional career."*

## BRADLEY K. MCCONNELL •••••

Professor of Pharmacology Bradley K. McConnell, Ph.D., FAHA, FCVS, has dedicated his career to mentoring the next generation of scientists while advancing research in cardiac disease. His commitment to helping students master course material, develop research expertise, refine communication skills, and prepare for academic independence has earned him the 2023 UH Outstanding Graduate Mentor Award.

To enhance his mentoring, McConnell has participated in numerous professional development programs, including the Gulf Coast Consortia Research Mentor Training Workshops, UH's Innovative Teaching & Learning Symposiums, Cougar Chairs Leadership Academy, and UH's Faculty Success Program.



*"I experience great joy and happiness in training the next generation of scientists and seeing their success, both during the early stages of their training while in my lab as well as long after they graduate and in their independent careers,"* McConnell said.

McConnell was the 2016 recipient of the UH Undergraduate Research Mentor Award as well as member of the 2018 UH Group Teaching Award team, and he directs two undergraduate cardiovascular research training programs funded by the American Heart Association and NIH. Under his guidance, his graduate and undergraduate mentees have presented at local, national, and international conferences, received numerous awards, and published in high-impact journals, with several studies highlighted for their significance in cardiac research. Doctoral program alumni from his lab can be found continuing their research careers at such institutions as the University of Texas Medical Branch, University of California-San Francisco, Duke University and the pharmaceutical industry.

McConnell's commitment to integrating teaching, research and mentorship has established him as a conduit for success and role model for aspiring scientists at UHCOP and beyond.

## MEGHANA TRIVEDI •••••

Meghana Trivedi, Pharm.D. ('03), Ph.D. ('04), BCOP, has earned two prestigious honors recognizing her continued commitment to mentorship — the 2025 Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy Association (HOPA) Mentorship Award and the 2023 UH Undergraduate Research Mentoring Award.

Since joining UHCOP in 2010, she has mentored more than 80 trainees — ranging from junior faculty and postdoctoral fellows to Pharm.D., Ph.D., and undergraduate students — 58 of whom have been authors on peer-reviewed manuscripts and many of whom have presented at national and international conferences of such organizations as HOPA, the American College of Clinical Pharmacy, American Society of Clinical Oncology, and American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics.

*"Dr. Trivedi introduces concepts with logical explanations, ignites mentees' interests in the subject and cultivates appreciation of the value of knowledge gained through research,"* said colleague and HOPA Mentorship Award nominator Onyebuchi Ononogbu, Pharm.D., MPH, BCOP.

Trivedi developed the Pharm.D. curriculum's hematology-oncology module and its associated skills lab, serves as a clinical preceptor





in oncology-related rotations, and expanded undergraduate cancer career exposure through the NIH- and UH-funded programs—all while maintaining active translational research programs funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, Cancer Prevention & Research Institute of Texas, and other sources.

*“Dr. Trivedi’s mentorship transforms aspiring scientists into published, confident researchers, with 100% of her mentees pursuing advanced education,”* said Chow, one of Trivedi’s UH award nominators.

Alexis Ruiz, a first-generation student currently on the pre-med track in the UH Honors College, began working with Trivedi in 2021 through C-REP and credits her mentor for taking a chance on a student with no prior lab experience.

*“Because of Dr. Trivedi’s coaching and support, I gained hands-on research experience in oncology, learned advanced laboratory techniques, earned competitive research scholarships, and presented research at major conferences, including the American Association for Cancer Research,”* Ruiz said.

Former mentees describe her as a mentor who listens deeply, challenges thoughtfully, and celebrates success, while colleagues hail her as a pioneering scientist and role model. Through her leadership, Trivedi not only shapes careers but also strengthens the future of cancer research and pharmacy education.

#### DIVYA A. VARKEY •••••

Divya Varkey, Pharm.D., M.S., clinical associate professor and The Houston Program program director, was honored with the 2023 Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists (TSHP) Pharmacy Mentor Award. In their nomination letter, colleagues Garey and Matthew A. Wanat, Pharm.D., BCPS, BCCCP, praised Varkey’s commitment and passion for mentorship toward students, alumni and colleagues alike.

Since joining UHCOP in 2016, Varkey has led the M.S. in Pharmacy Leadership and Administration component of The Houston Program in Health-System. Varkey played an essential role in revising the curriculum to better prepare graduates for leadership roles across a wider range of pharmacy settings. She also spearheaded the charge to establish the Roger Anderson Pharmacy Leadership Endowment for THP and its trainees as well as the Roger W. Anderson Leadership Award to recognize fellow leaders who have made



significant contributions to the program’s success.

*“Her leadership tree that has spouted from this graduate program is impressive and has had an immense impact on pharmacy practice in Texas and beyond,”* Garey and Wanat noted. *“Divya is easily one of the most impactful mentors to students in both content of what she brings to our college and scope of mentoring activities.”*

Known for her accessibility and guidance, Varkey helps students navigate both professional and personal challenges, fostering growth, confidence and lifelong learning. Varkey’s commitment to servant-leadership and career development has left a lasting impact on the pharmacy community.

#### DAVID A. WALLACE •••••

Alumnus and Clinical Associate Professor David A. Wallace, Pharm.D.

(’98), exemplifies what it means to be a teacher who not only instructs but also supports, listens and guides students through their professional and personal growth. His efforts in mentoring the next generation of pharmacists earned him the 2021 Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacy (TSHP) Pharmacy Mentor Award.

A UHCOP faculty member since 1999, Wallace has mentored numerous students in the college’s Pharm.D. degree program and in The Houston Program as through his volunteer preceptorship at the nonprofit H.O.M.E.S. Clinic for Houston’s unhoused population.

Wallace invests countless hours helping students refine their ideas, encouraging them to explore their thinking and reach their own conclusions, skills former mentee and award nominator Eric Wucki, Pharm.D., MBA, M.S. (’20), BCPS, said he uses in his role today as director of Pharmacy 340B at Memorial Hermann Health System. Additionally, Wallace’s unwavering patience, empathy and commitment to his students sets him apart from other mentors Wucki has had in his career.

*“When COVID hit and a majority of my thesis project team members suddenly found themselves having to prioritize fighting the pandemic, Dr. Wallace took on the roles of these team members and in a time with abundant stress and uncertainty, was always the first to ask how I was doing as a person,”* Wucki said.

Wallace’s mentorship style—rooted in generosity and genuine care—has shaped not only individual careers but also the culture of excellence and support within the college.





# PHARMACY STARS ALIGN

*Diane Ginsburg, Alex Varkey Shine on National Stage  
for ASHP Whitney Lecture, APhA Presidency*





# TENACITY, COURAGE GUIDE GINSBURG T

Despite her extensive contributions to the profession, UHCOP alumna Diane B. Ginsburg, Ph.D., M.S. ('90), R.Ph., FASHP, DASPL, admits she was stunned by the suggestion of being nominated, much less selected, to receive the most prestigious honor of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists: the 2024 Harvey A.K. Whitney Lecture Award.

*"I still feel a sense of imposter syndrome because the names on that list are my mentors and heroes,"* Ginsburg said of the award established in honor of the organization's first president. *"It's usually given to people at the end of their careers, and I'm nowhere near that."*

Ginsburg reflected, *"To be considered among them, and then selected, is beyond anything I imagined."*

Her humility is best understood through her journey. Initially pursuing pharmacy because "pre-med" wasn't an undergraduate major at the University of Pittsburgh, Ginsburg soon discovered her passion for leadership and teaching during her residency at Houston Methodist Hospital and graduate studies at UHCOP.

Faced with a pivotal choice between clinical practice and academia, her mother's advice provided clarity: *"How many lives will you touch as a professor versus as a practitioner?"* The math was undeniable.

That decision launched a nearly 40-year academic career, culminating in her current roles as Associate Dean for Healthcare Partnerships, Clinical Professor, and G.D. Searle Endowed Fellow at The University of Texas at Austin College of Pharmacy. Along the way, she earned a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration and Leadership, authored numerous publications, served as editor and co-editor of multiple ASHP publications including ASHP's Preceptor's Handbook for Pharmacists, and delivered more than 600 presentations worldwide.

In addition to her acumen as a longtime professor and administrator, Ginsburg is a sought-after expert in health-system pharmacy, ethics, and legal and regulatory affairs.

Her service record is equally distinguished: ASHP President,





# TO HEIGHTS OF PHARMACY LEADERSHIP

Chair of the ASHP Research & Education Foundation, and leadership roles in state, national, and international organizations. Honors from all three alma maters and multiple organizations underscore her commitment to advancing pharmacy education and practice. She was UHCOP's 2024 Alumnus Pharmacist of the Year Award recipient and The Houston Program's 2022 Roger W. Anderson Leadership Award recipient.

So deep is her love for pharmacy, and the opportunities provided by her academic pursuits, that she also has established endowments at the three institutions.

*"If I had pursued the path I thought I would, becoming a patent attorney, I would have been miserable," she said. "Pharmacy has given me a life beyond anything I dreamed. My mom always said, 'The only limitations we have are those we impose on ourselves.' Don't limit yourself. Find some rocky road and walk it, even in stilettos."*

“  
*I believe with  
recognition  
comes  
responsibility.*  
”





# 20-YEAR ORBIT

Varkey Reflects on ASP-to-APhA Leadership Journey



## ALEX VARKEY

*Pharm.D. ('05), M.S., FAPhA*



The magic of his full circle moment—from serving as student president to professional president of the largest pharmacy organization in the nation exactly 20 years apart—is not lost upon Alex C. Varkey, Pharm.D. ('05), M.S., FAPhA.

Varkey holds the distinction as not only the first UHCOP student elected National President of the American Pharmacists Association-Academy of Student Pharmacists (APhA-ASP), but also the first alumni practitioner elected National President of APhA. He also is the first Indian-American to serve as national president in the organization's nearly 200-year history.

Varkey has amassed several other honors during his career, including being named APhA Fellow in 2018, the UHCOP Rho Chi Society Robert L. Boblitt Lecturer in 2018, UHCOP Phi Lambda Sigma James T. McCarty Leadership Lecturer in 2022, The Houston Program's Roger W. Anderson Leadership Award recipient in 2024 and most recently, The Ohio State University College of Pharmacy's 2025 Clifton J. Latiolais Leadership Award.

Between his top leadership posts as a student and practitioner with APhA, Varkey had maintained an active role in the organization, including service on a variety of committees that provided greater insights into its role and function as well as the issues facing the entire profession.

After losing an election for an at-large seat in 2015, he was appointed to fill an unexpired vacancy in the same position on the Board of Trustees three years later. He then was elected to a full term on the board where he served as the first chair of APhA's Well-Being Steering Committee, which



became a central focus in his public speaking engagements and published articles and continuing into his presidency. And the timing couldn't be more fortuitous.

*"COVID came during my at-large term, and the whole world seemed to change," Varkey said. "First, there was this public view of heroism for those of us in health care. Then, suddenly, it's like we were the villains."*

*"Pharmacists were continually working to keep up with all the updated guidance on vaccines, testing, and treatments, providing hundreds of millions of vaccines across the country and we were vilified for working within those guidelines. You saw pharmacists burning out at an alarming rate from the weight that they had to carry on their shoulders to help the country through the pandemic and not really be given additional resources or support for that."*

Varkey said while progress has been made in addressing burnout in the profession, more work needs to be done so that the profession remains strong and continues to make advancements in practice recognition.

After 17 years at Houston Methodist Hospital, Varkey recently decided it was time for a change: for himself, his family and the next generation of pharmacy leaders.

*"We were able to bring in a lot of new technology, put up pharmacy spaces in new buildings, get through a pandemic, a major hurricane, floods and so many different things," Varkey said. "I worked with these amazing, talented, young and hungry leaders that joined our leadership team over my tenure and they didn't have anywhere to go other than leave because I'm in the one position that's above them that could be the next step in their career."*

*"It got to the point where I felt I had contributed all I could, and it was time to think about the next half of my career while setting the stage for the next person to take on this fulfilling career opportunity at Methodist."*

With his official APhA responsibilities winding down, the timing – and opportunity – couldn't have been better to spend more time with his family and share his experiences with other health care organizations as senior director of client success for the health-system pharmacy consulting company, Visante.

*"Now I get to take all the things that I've learned to help other health systems demonstrate and showcase the value that pharmacy can have in advancing health care within their respective communities," Varkey said. "It seemed like the logical next step to remain involved with health-system pharmacy practice by playing a part in the journeys of many other health systems, which I think is really rewarding."*

Although genuinely humbled by awards and leadership platforms, Varkey is clear about his biggest professional achievement: playing a key role in the development of The Houston Program in Health-System Pharmacy Leadership and Administration.

*"I'm really proud to have been part of the team effort of starting it from the ground alongside so many people that I admire and look up to and seeing it grow to become what's arguably the premier program of its kind in the nation," Varkey said. "We've been able to recruit so many great residents over the years, and the graduates are going on to be the next leaders of TMC and in health care across the country, for the foreseeable future."*





## EVERY COOG'S CRAZY ABOUT A SHARP-DRESSED MAN

Alumnus Tony Ohonba Climbs into Cougar 100 with Olympus Stylings Custom Tailoring

Alumnus Osagie (Tony) Ohonba, Pharm.D. ('15), is a true believer in the adage of “the clothes make the man.” But dressing sharply is more than a statement to the world around an individual; it's also an outer reflection of a commitment to quality and confidence to scale the most challenging heights.

As founder and owner of Olympus Stylings LLC, Ohonba is turning heads with his bespoke custom-tailored menswear focused on the professional and wedding markets. And Olympus is more than more than a “side gig” to his current role as a pharmacy consultant for Omnicell. Olympus has been recognized two consecutive years on the Cougar 100, the UH Alumni Association's annual honor roll of 100 highly successful Cougar-owned or -led businesses.

Before entering the Pharm.D. program, Ohonba earned his bachelor's degree in biology from UH and was a member of the Cougar Football team for three years.

*“I've always had a fashion-forward mentality and, even in pharmacy school, was entrepreneurship-inclined,”* said the Nigeria-born Ohonba, who serves as UH Pharmacy Alumni Association vice president. *“After graduating and getting my pharmacy career going, I wanted an outlet to explore other passions. My philosophy has been you can either intentionally design the life you want to lead, or another life will be designed for you.”*

Ohonba credits owner of Houston-based Erick's Tailors, Wilson Medrano, for helping him find his niche in custom apparel. Now he's making suits for not only grooms but all the groomsmen and not only UH football players, but NFL players.

*“Not everybody wants a custom suit, but for those who do, we try to make it the best experience possible and help you feel the best version of you,”* Ohonba said. *“Everybody comes in with a budget and we work with that, because in the custom clothing arena, you have a lot of control when it comes to everything like material, patterns, etc., to create a unique, impactful appearance for that individual.”*

Ohonba said he sees parallels with custom apparel and pharmacy, albeit a white coat isn't likely to set the fashion world on fire.

*“It's all about building relationships, whether it's your patients or your apparel clients,”* he said. *“The whole intent of it is to develop lifelong clients; for example, we take care of alterations through the piece's lifetime, even as one's body type changes.”*

*“We have a lot of repeat clients and referrals, and a big part of that successful formula is building a rapport with clients—much like building a rapport with patients.”*



# COMPOUNDING, WOMEN'S HEALTH PERFECT MIX FOR THOMPSON

With a love for chemistry and math, Tara Thompson, Pharm.D. ('12), FACP, knew compounding was where she wanted, and needed, to be early in her educational pursuits. Her awakening came during pharmacy school at UHCOP when taking the compounding courses, which were the perfect mix of her academic affections. With training through Professional Compounding Centers of America (PCCA), a leader in the pharmacy compounding industry based in Sugar Land, Texas, Thompson loved being in the lab setting.

*"Compounding brings an element of investigation, creativity, trial-and-error, and exactness to everything about it,"* Thompson said. *"You still get to see the patient care side of pharmacy but also get to design and develop new drug preparations. Let's just say beakers, Erlenmeyer flasks, and graduated cylinders speak to my heart."*

Although back in Texas today, Thompson moved to Georgia after graduation due to her husband's work relocation. After initially working in community pharmacy, a chance encounter brought her back to her professional true love: compounding.

At Innovation Compounding in Georgia, Thompson moved through every stage of compounding including nonsterile and sterile compounding, counseling, and research and design. Initially brought on to build the Women's Health program, which included working with and developing many drug preparations for hormone replacement therapy (HRT), Thompson found herself in new territory.

*"This is not something we learned about in pharmacy school, so I delved into learning the ins and outs of HRT and women's health,"* Thompson said.

As she progressed in her career at Innovation, she began noticing several women's health conditions that she did not know existed such as vulvodynia, anorgasmia and

hypoactive sexual desire disorder, as well as gynecological dermatological conditions like lichens sclerosis. Thompson also learned there were little to no commercially available products for these and many other health conditions.

Surprised to learn organizations with whom she'd interacted—the International Society for the Study of Women's Sexual Health (ISSWSH) and the American Urogynecological Society (AUGS)—didn't extend membership to pharmacists, Thompson successfully campaigned for their inclusion.

In 2022, Thompson's manager at Innovation started Revelation Pharma Corp, a nationwide network of 503a/503b sterile



and nonsterile compounding pharmacies. With Innovation Compounding as the "flagship" model pharmacy for the Revelation network, Thompson was promoted to vice president of clinical and marketing services which oversees the clinical liaison team and marketing team.

Another milestone in Thompson's career was being named a fellow in the Alliance for Pharmacy Compounding (APC).

*"When I stood beside the other pharmacists and technicians who were being sworn in*

*beside me that day, I felt undeserving of being amongst such an amazing group of minds,"* Thompson said. *"We do what we do because we love it, and we love seeing the patient results and provider gratification when we find something that works for their patient."*

In both 2020 and 2022, Thompson was named among the Top Women in Health and Beauty by Drug Store News. The awards focus on women in the field of pharmacy and retail who are stepping outside of the box of the profession and making monumental changes in the field. However, the recognition was not for compounding but another passion project of Thompson's: the Sexual Health Pharmacist.

*"My platform surrounds patient advocacy and how much of a 'taboo' there is surrounding sexual health for women."*

In an effort to have candid discussions and encourage patients to "just ask" their most taboo questions, Thompson developed the podcast "JustASK!" with a friend who is a women's health mentor, sexual assault nurse examiner and sexual health counselor. Each month, JustASK! hosts an expert in sexual health, such as urologists, pelvic floor physical therapists, and sexual health counselors.

In addition to helping patients, Thompson has her eyes set on two additional goals.

*"I want to get more sexual health studies into curricula at pharmacy schools, medical schools and ancillary health care professions like physical therapy to better train the next generation on these particular health conditions that our patients are facing and our prescribers are asking us about. Second, I want to infiltrate some of these health care associations that are mainly prescriber-led and have majority membership and get pharmacists into the membership. We have a great place in medicine and it's time to start demanding a seat at the table."*



After several years of inactivity, the UH Pharmacy Alumni Association has been revived with the goal of strengthening alumni engagement and camaraderie with the college and among fellow graduates. PAA's new leadership has enthusiastically responded, hosting a successful reunion and joining in Orientation Week activities for new Pharm.D. students.

The PAA invites input and participation from alumni at [uh.pharmacy.alumni@gmail.com](mailto:uh.pharmacy.alumni@gmail.com) and the association has launched social media accounts on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram.



**President**  
*Shawn Ahmad*

Shawn Ahmad, Pharm.D. ('18), is a pharmacist at Stonegate Pharmacy and an active member of the Texas Pharmacy Association and Texas Pharmacy Foundation. He is dedicated to advancing reimbursement for pharmacists' clinical services and values the UH alumni network as a vital source of professional support, shared insight and lasting connection.



**Vice President**  
*Osagie Tony Ohonba*

Osagie Tony Ohonba, Pharm.D. ('15), has built a career spanning community, hospital and specialty pharmacy, distinguished by pivotal leadership roles. Now an entrepreneur, Ohonba continues to champion the profession by supporting networking, professional development and stronger engagement within the UHCOP alumni community.



**Secretary/Treasurer**  
*Aisha Jangda*

Aisha Jangda, Pharm.D. ('15), is a District Leader RX at CVS Health, overseeing 22 pharmacies across Sugar Land, Houston and Richmond. She is committed to elevating patient care in the retail setting and remains active in the UHCOP alumni community to highlight community pharmacy, strengthen leadership and expand opportunities for future pharmacists.



**Director-At-Large**  
*Krutina Garcia*

Krutina Garcia, Pharm.D. ('17), BCPS, ACO, B.S. ('07), has spent more than seven years with an Accountable Care Organization and worked in consulting for five years, applying her biomedical engineering background to merge technology with pharmacy in efforts to improve patient care. She also serves on local school district committees to support strong educational foundations for future generations.



**Director-At-Large**  
*Saba Syed*

Saba Syed, Pharm.D. ('08), M.S., EMBA, BCACP, BGCP, is a health care leader with more than 17 years of experience influencing national pharmacy quality standards through her work with the Pharmacy Quality Alliance and American Pharmacists Association. She also leads a career-development coaching practice and shares insights as a TEDx speaker, promoting resilience, inclusion and authentic leadership across the pharmacy profession.



# ALUMNI REUNION

As the Pharmacy Alumni Association (PAA) came roaring back to life in late 2024, the organization hosted a successful first Class Reunion in July 2025. The focus for the 2025 event—and future reunions—is on five-year class increments (2020, 2015, etc.), although alumni from any class are always welcome!

*To stay informed about reunions and other PAA events, follow the UH Pharmacy Alumni Facebook page or the Alumni & Friends page on the college website ([uh.edu/pharmacy](http://uh.edu/pharmacy)).*



HOUSTON  
**ALUMNI**  
ASSOCIATION

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PHARMACY ALUMNI



**Sumit Basu**, Ph.D. ('15), was recognized as a Fellow of the American College of Clinical Pharmacology.

**Ashley Beagle**, Pharm.D. ('15), BCPPS, pediatric, women's health, and internal medicine clinical pharmacy specialist at Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas, was recognized as the Beaumont Enterprise newspaper's 2025 "Best of the Best" for Pharmacist/Pharmacy.

**Joshua Blackwell**, Pharm.D., M.S. ('17), MBA, BCSCP, UT Southwestern Medical Center clinical pharmacy manager, ambulatory services, was named a 2025 Fellow of the Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists and represented Texas in the 2025 American Society of Health-System Pharmacists House of Delegates. He also currently serves as chair of TSHP's public affairs and advocacy council.

**Rodney Cox**, Pharm.D., M.S. ('11), director of specialty pharmacy operations at Longitude Rx, completed three years of leadership as president-elect, president and immediate past-president at the 2025 Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists Annual Seminar.

**Stephanie Crowley**, Pharm.D. ('19), M.S. ('21), BCPS, pharmacy operations manager at HCA Houston Healthcare Kingwood, earned the 2025 Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists Larry C. Nesmith Pharmacist Recognition Award.

**Niaz Deyhim**, Pharm.D., M.S. ('20), BCPS, Houston Methodist Hospital pharmacy administrative specialist and system director of the Longitudinal APPE Program, was installed as 2025-26 president of the Gulf Coast Society of Health-System Pharmacists.

**Craig P. Frost**, R.Ph. (B.S. '91), MBA, FACHE, delivered the Joyce A. Tipton Leadership Lecture, "A Journey towards Purpose and Authenticity: An Entrepreneurial Perspective," at the 2025 Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists Annual Seminar.

**Esteban Gallardo**, Pharm.D. ('11), CareAllies chief of pharmacy, was recognized as a 2025 Emerging Leader by Managed Healthcare Executive.

**Brandi Hamilton**, Pharm.D., M.S. ('16), BCPS, FAPhA, director of pharmacy at California Rehabilitation Institute in Los Angeles, was elected 2026-27 American Pharmacists Association President-elect. In 2025, Hamilton was inducted as a Fellow of APhA and



completed her two-year term as APhA National Speaker of the House.

## ★ ALUMNI ★ ACCOLADES

**Kalina Korzec**, Pharm.D., M.S. ('25), pharmacy manager at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston, Mass., was awarded a 2025 ASHP Foundation Pharmacy Resident Research Grant for her project, "Evaluation of Bundle Compliance and Impact on Outpatient Parenteral Antimicrobial Therapy Associated Outcomes in an Academic Health-System."

**Claire Latiolais**, Pharm.D., M.S. ('17), earned the 2025 Pharmacy Mentor Award from the Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists and elected director at-large of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists Pharmacy Practice Section of Pharmacy Educators executive committee.

**Donald "Donnie" Lewis**, R.Ph., B.S. ('75), was reappointed to the Texas State Board of Pharmacy for a term set to expire in 2031.

**Atra Mouser**, Pharm.D. ('22), M.S. ('24), was installed as 2025-26 chair of the Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists New Practitioners Section.

**Kimberly Nguyen**, Pharm.D. ('02), clinical associate professor and assistant dean for student and professional affairs, graduated from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Academic Leadership Fellows Cohort 21 in 2025.





**Phuoc Anne Nguyen, Pharm.D., M.S. ('15), BCPS, FTSHP,** received the 2025 Adela Schneider Pharmacy Leadership Award from the Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists and served as a Texas delegate in the 2025 American Society of Health-System Pharmacists House of Delegates.

**Sara Rogers, Pharm.D., R.Ph., ('12),** was selected to chair the Personalized Medicines Committee of the U.S. Pharmacopeia Council of Experts. Rogers also served as the 2025 Rho Chi Society UHCOP Beta Omicron Chapter's Robert L. Boblitt Lecturer.

**Julie Spier, R.Ph., B.S. ('86),** earned the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) 2025 Carmen A. Catizone Honorary

President Award in recognition of her dedication to NABP's mission and goals and her commitment to protecting public health. Spier has served on several NABP task



forces and committees, including task forces on institutional compounding model rules, mental health and well-being, and medication errors. [photo credit: NABP]

**Lelan Stice, R.Ph. ('95),** owner of Doctor's Order Pharmacy with locations in White Hall, Pine Bluff, Star City, and Hensley, Ark., was installed as 2025-26 president of the Arkansas Pharmacists Association.

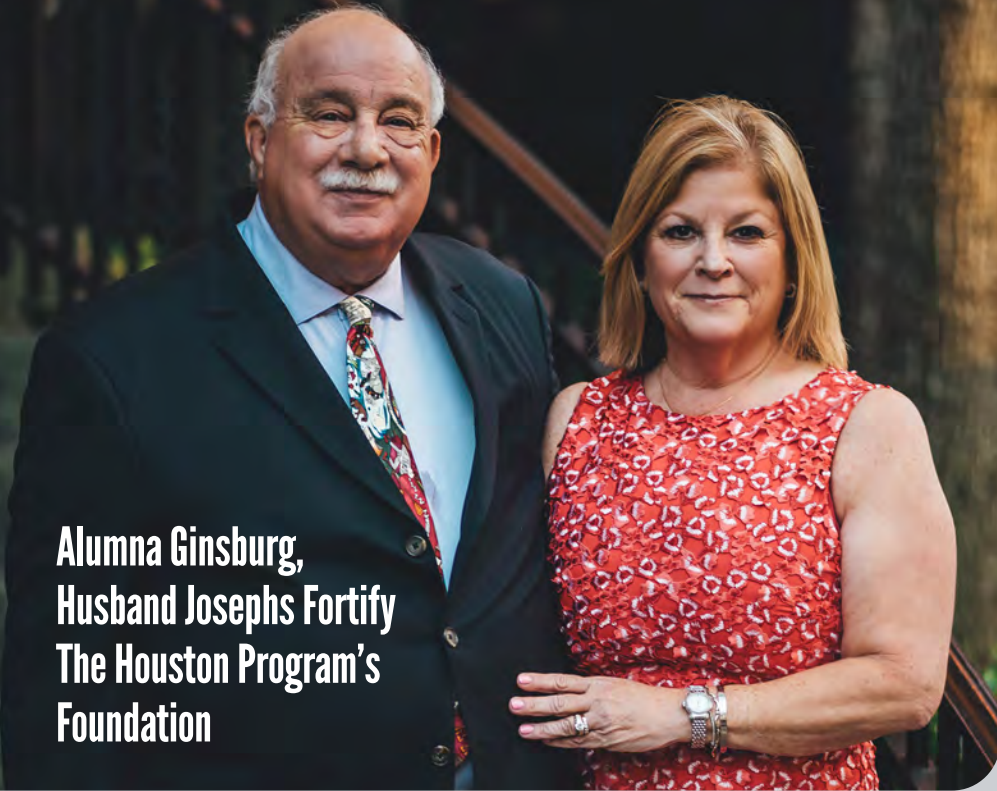
**Michael Toraño, Pharm.D. ('23), M.S. ('25), BCPS, CPHQ,** earned the Texas Society of Health-System Pharmacists Leo F. & Ann Godley Residency Fellowship Award.

**Abigail Wright, Pharm.D. ('20), M.S., BCGP, CDP, FASCP,** was named a 2025 Fellow of the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists and recipient of the organization's 2025 Next Gen-Rx Award.





# INVESTING IN FUTURE LEADERS



## Alumna Ginsburg, Husband Josephs Fortify The Houston Program's Foundation

Having experienced firsthand the sacrifices of residency training and the financial demands of graduate school, UHCOP alumna Diane B. Ginsburg, Ph.D., M.S. ('90), RPh., FASHP, DASPL, recently established an endowed scholarship with her husband, retired psychiatrist Jeffrey Josephs, M.D., to support students and residents in The Houston Program (THP).

The gift by Ginsburg and Josephs is the second endowed fund dedicated to participants in the two-year concurrent program, which culminates in an M.S. in Pharmacy Leadership and Administration from UHCOP and ASHP-Accredited PGYI/PGY2 residencies in Health-System Pharmacy Administration and Leadership (HSPAL) at one of seven Texas Medical Center partner institutions.

*"On the front end, it's committing to two years with a thesis or research work—it's not a light program," Ginsburg said. "They could*

*go straight into practice, but they chose this path. I would not call it a sacrifice—they're investing in their future.*

*"Although I'm not managing an institutional pharmacy, I still use lessons I learned in my graduate program and residency every day."*

Ginsburg earned her B.S. in Pharmacy from the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, her M.S. in Hospital Pharmacy from UHCOP, and her Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration and Leadership from The University of Texas at Austin. She currently serves as Associate Dean for Healthcare Partnerships, Clinical Professor in the Division of Pharmacy Practice, and G.D. Searle Endowed Fellow in Pharmacy at the University of Texas at Austin College of Pharmacy (UTCOP).

Her teaching and administrative career began at UHCOP while completing her master's degree and the inaugural residency at what is now Houston Methodist Hospital.

Josephs, a retired psychiatrist, served at Austin Travis County Integral Care, the mental health and intellectual disability authority for Travis County, Texas. A graduate of what is now the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education, he earned certifications from the American Board of Medical Specialties and the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology during his more than 40-year career.

Ginsburg expressed pride in THP's growth and culture, crediting pharmacy pioneers such as her mentor Roger W. Anderson, DrPH, R.Ph., FASHP, who transformed the pharmacy department at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center into a vital component of patient care.

*"You can see the program's culture reflected in its students and graduates; they carry it forward to improve patient care," Ginsburg said. "It's a preeminent program. I call it the 'Southern Buckeye Program' because so many Ohio State graduates helped start it."*

Although the original UHCOP/Methodist model may not have been envisioned as a leadership pipeline, its influence laid the foundation for THP and similar programs.

***"It was something they learned and passed on to us as early residents, and I see it reflected in today's practitioners,"***

***Ginsburg said.***

***"Philanthropy is all about passion. I want to keep investing in the program's future—so it would be hypocritical not to support it."***



# FUELING STUDENT SUCCESS: SANSGIRYS ESTABLISH 2 SCHOLARSHIPS

Sujit Sansgiry, Ph.D., and Shubhada Sansgiry, Ph.D., have blazed a trail of excellence with their achievements in academia and research, and their dedication to nurturing the future of pharmacy spans over two decades. Their combined passion for mentorship has created a multitude of opportunities for student growth and success within the field of pharmacy. With the establishment of two impactful endowment scholarships, the Sansgirys are continuing to shape future pharmacy leaders and ensuring their legacy resonates far beyond the classroom.

The endowments are focused on supporting graduate students in the Pharmaceutical Health Outcomes and Policy (PHOP) department, as well as Pharm.D. students involved in two influential student organizations, American Society of Managed Care Pharmacists (AMCP) and Industry Pharmacists Organization (IPhO).

The endowment for Pharm.D. students was particularly significant due to Sujit's active involvement with student organizations at the college. He initiated the UHCOP chapters of AMCP and IPhO and served as their advisor. *"I've seen how hard students work who are involved with AMCP and IPhO, and I felt empowered to help and recognize these student leaders for their contributions,"* said Sujit. Sujit is credited with starting the pharmacy administration graduate program which

went through various iterations and is now known as The Houston Program. He also initiated the Ph.D. in Pharmacy Administration which became the Ph.D. in PHOP. The Sansgirys have dedicated over two decades to nurturing students, serving as advisors to a multitude of graduate students.

*"We have excellent relationships with our graduate students, and they have provided us with many great memories,"* Shubhada said. *"As a token of our appreciation for all our interactions, we decided to set up this graduate student endowed scholarship to help other students for years to come."*

Both Sujit and Shubhada remember how crucial financial support was during their own challenging graduate studies. They both received financial aid and scholarships, working as Teaching and Research Scholars.

*"The stipend barely paid for our living and tuition expenses, and we used to work other jobs as there was no assistantship during the summer,"* Sujit said. *"Looking back, it would have helped if students had other avenues to get scholarships. Hence, we set up these opportunities for students."*

Their challenging experiences have given them a deep understanding of the obstacles many students face in securing funding for their education. Motivated by these experiences, they made it their mission to ensure that today's students have the financial resources needed to pursue their academic and professional goals without the burden of financial stress. By removing financial barriers, they hope to empower the next generation to "pay it forward" to thrive in their education and careers, just as they were once empowered by the support they received.

Both Sujit and Shubhada were born in Mumbai, India, and earned their bachelor's degrees from the University of Mumbai. They both specialized in pharmaceutical sciences with a focus on pharmacoeconomics and health outcomes at Idaho State University. Sujit completed an industry-sponsored post-doctoral pharmaceutical research fellowship at RxAmerica. Shubhada has received 53 grants and mentored over 40 medical students, clinical fellows, post-doctoral fellows, junior faculty, and staff in study design. Their combined efforts have had a transformative impact on the future of pharmacists and health care outcomes.

*"I always believed in the concept of endowment,"* Sujit said. *"As soon as I was planning to retire, I felt this last task was left before it was time to say goodbye to this college."*

*"It's a token of our appreciation, a way of giving back, and a way to ensure that the future of pharmacy education remains strong."*

**– Shubhada Sansgiry**





## SPLASH OF COLOR, CULTURE GRACES LOTT TERRACE AT HEALTH 2

Sometimes one only needs a breath of fresh air and a beautiful view to recharge for the day's next challenge. With their gift toward the Health 2 capital campaign, alumni and Mading Society members Paul ('84) and Angela ('84) Lott hoped to offer such a respite for UHCOP students on their named terrace on the building's 3rd floor. Thanks to the creative mind and talented brush strokes of UH Katherine G. McGovern College of the Arts alumnus Javier Rivera, the terrace has come to life in a vibrant melding of color, culture and connection to the roots of pharmacy in natural medicines. The traditional mortar and pestle, plants, and other symbols denoting the intertwining of nature and life are featured prominently in the mural.





# SPIRIT OF GIVING NEVER RETIRES

## Lemkes' College Support Continues with New Endowment

Although Professor Emeritus Thomas L. Lemke, Ph.D., retired from UHCOP nearly two decades ago, his love for and connection to the college remains as strong as it was during his 36 years of teaching, research and service.

Lemke and his wife, Patricia, recently established the Thomas (Tom) and Patricia Lemke Endowed Scholarship with eligibility open to any students within the college. As long-time members of the college's Mading Society of benefactors, they have provided support to the college and its students through a variety of avenues. An avid cyclist, Tom even mounted a three-month, 4,300-mile bike ride to raise the majority of funds to establish the Mortar and Pedal Scholarship Endowment.

First educated as a professional pharmacist, Lemke continued his education in research, earning a Ph.D. in medicinal chemistry in 1966 and initially working in the pharmaceutical industry. He joined UHCOP in 1970, swiftly rising to the rank of professor in only six years.

After Patricia graduated from Northwestern State College in Natchitoches, La., she enjoyed a rewarding and successful career in public education with many years spent educating students in second grade. Together, they share a deep belief in the transformative power of education, a value that continues to influence Lemke's legacy.

*"Through an endowment directed towards student scholarships, we are helping students reach their potential,"* Lemke said. *"Being able to concentrate on the learning process instead of financial obligations helps to make education a more enjoyable experience."*

During his tenure in the college, Lemke taught such courses as organic chemistry and medicinal chemistry and served in a variety



of administrative and service positions, including as faculty advisor to the Beta Omicron Chapter of the Rho Chi Society, associate dean for professional programs, director of assessment, and as chair or member of countless college and university committees.

He also was among the founders of the regional MALTO Medicinal Chemistry Meeting-in-Miniature, a venue for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to present their research and network, and a co-author of multiple editions of Foye's Principles of Medicinal Chemistry, which is considered by many as the gold standard within the field and an essential resource for pharmacy students.

Among the highlights of Lemke's career was the year he spent in the laboratory of 1987 Nobel Chemistry Laureate Jean-Marie Lehn, Ph.D., in Strasbourg, France. However, the most rewarding and important experiences throughout his career were the years spent teaching and working with students within UHCOP.

*"When I look back at my upbringing, I greatly appreciate the help that I received through an outstanding education,"* Lemke said. *"I can only hope that students receiving this financial support will also have a chance to achieve their dreams."*



# HONORING COMMUNITIES, SUPPORTING TRAINEES

Founded in 2018 on the heels of peak U.S. prescription opioid overdose deaths, the Prescription Drug Misuse Education and Research (PREMIER) Center aims to reverse the devastating effects of controlled substance misuse on families, communities, and the health care system. It is the first center at the University of Houston dedicated to prescription drug misuse research and education.

The PREMIER Center Director Douglas Thornton and wife Kelly are empowering the next generation of researchers and health care professionals to tackle prescription misuse challenges with compassion and innovation through the establishment of their endowment, PREMIER Center Trainee Success (PREMIER TRAINS). Its primary objective is to recruit the best post-doctoral fellows and graduate students from around the world, and to support these trainees of the center through scholarships, travel, professional development, and more.

*"The endowment was created to hopefully jumpstart other donors, including alumni of the program, to have a mechanism to give where their funds will be used directly on student success," Doug said. "If we were fortunate enough to receive donations from larger entities, we wanted to show we are confident enough to put our own money up to help train the next set of pharmacy and research leaders."*

Born and raised in southern West Virginia, Doug and Kelly earned their Pharm.D. degrees from West Virginia University School of Pharmacy, where Doug also completed a Ph.D. in Health Services and Outcomes Research. Doug completed his residency at Saint Mary's Medical Center with Kelly completing her residency at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, both located in Huntington, W. Va. The Thorntons witnessed firsthand how prescription drug misuse can profoundly impact individuals, their families, and entire communities.

*"The ripple effects of addiction extend far beyond the person struggling with it," said Kelly, a clinical staff pharmacist at Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center. "We hope the knowledge gained through PREMIER TRAINS will contribute to breaking down the stigma surrounding drug misuse and help create lasting, positive change where it's needed most."*

Both Doug and Kelly received financial support during their time in college from the state of West Virginia, West Virginia University (WVU), and private scholarships. The support provided Kelly with opportunities to attend conferences, which she said broadened her perspective and renewed her passion for using the knowledge she gained in her clinical program to help others. With Doug and Kelly also being able to attend college at a greatly reduced tuition rate through WVU's merit-based financial aid

program, giving other students a slightly easier path to a degree is something they both knew they wanted to do.

*"This endowment represents both a personal and shared commitment to creating a better future," Kelly said. "It's about honoring the communities we come from and the countless individuals and families affected by prescription drug misuse."*

Doug's research and outreach programs have been supported by more than \$10 million in awards to date from the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

“

***It's about honoring the communities we come from and the countless individuals and families affected by prescription drug misuse.***

***– Kelly Thornton***

”

The PREMIER Center has grown significantly in its first six years with eight post-doctoral fellows trained and four Ph.D. students graduated. Doug, who also serves on the Texas Opioid Abatement Fund Council created by the Texas Legislature, would like to see the center's faculty and trainees, including graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, double in size in 10 years. The ability for the center to provide widespread, positive impacts has only been limited by the resources available to support faculty, staff, and trainees.

Knowing the endowment will continue to make a difference long after they fill the Thorntons with both hope and gratitude.

*"We want the PREMIER Center to be a professional and research training environment that is competitive with any organization in the country," Doug said. "With adequate support, we can make it happen, right here at the University of Houston."*



**Kelly and Douglas Thornton**



# PAYING IT FORWARD

With a shared love of UH basketball and football, and a friendship of almost two decades in the making, the Wanat and Varkey families have forged an invaluable connection with UHCOP and its Pharm.D. students. Created from both the privilege and responsibility of “paying it forward,” The Wanat and Varkey Families Endowed Scholarship is a need-based scholarship for Pharm.D. students enrolled at UHCOP.

*“We wanted to provide financial support to students who have financial need without having any other overly restrictive requirements for the scholarship,”* said Matthew Wanat, Pharm.D., BCPS, BCCCP, FCCM, clinical professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice and Translational Research.

While the Wanats and Varkeys have a shared vision for the success of UHCOP students, their own journeys as students took different paths.

*“My wife, Dianne, nor I, received any scholarship money while in pharmacy school, and we graduated with a lot of student loan debt,”* Wanat said. *“This furthered our hopes to start a scholarship to support students with financial needs.”*

Alex Varkey, Pharm.D. ('05), M.S., FAPhA, had a different financial experience while in college.

*“I received several scholarships – it was the only way college and professional school was an option,”* Alex said. *“Creating this opportunity has been a lifelong goal, knowing the value scholarships played in my success.”*

The common theme of “paying it forward” is woven throughout their motivation for the endowment.

*“We stand on the shoulders of giants daily because of the mentorship and support we have received,”* said Divya Varkey, Pharm.D., M.S. *“This endowment is in honor of those who have given us so much, and we look forward to seeing the students who benefit from the scholarship continue to pay it forward in the future.”*

Matthew and Dianne met while Pharm.D. students at Northeastern University in Boston, Mass. After graduation,

Matthew completed a PGY1 Pharmacy Practice Residency and PGY2 Critical Care Pharmacy Residency at Houston Methodist Hospital in Houston, while Dianne worked first as a community pharmacy manager and then served as a sterile compounding manager at Advanced Pharma. She currently works as a Pharmacy Operations Manager for OptumRX Home Delivery Pharmacy.

Matthew serves as clinical pharmacy specialist in the cardiac ICU at the Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center and as the program director for the Fellowship in Academic Pharmacy at UHCOP. Additionally, Wanat is an assistant director of the Prescription Drug Misuse Education and Research (PREMIER) Center. Wanat is a past-president of the Society of Critical Care Medicine – Texas Chapter, and he was inducted as a Fellow of the American College of Critical Care Medicine (FCCM) in 2018.

“

*Creating this opportunity has been a lifelong goal, knowing the value scholarships played in my success.*

*– Alex Varkey*

”

Alex Varkey is a past president of the American Pharmacists Association. Before joining Visante as Senior Director of Strategic Accounts, Alex served as Pharmacy Operations Manager followed by Director of Pharmacy Services at Houston Methodist Hospital. After graduating from the UHCOP Pharm.D. program, he completed an M.S. in Health-System Pharmacy Administration (HSPA) from The Ohio State University and a two-year Administration Residency at Nationwide Children’s Hospital.

Divya Varkey is a clinical associate professor at UHCOP and the graduate program director for the M.S. in Pharmacy Leadership and Administration, the academic component of The Houston Program in Health-System Pharmacy Administration and Leadership in affiliation with several fellow TMC institutions. Additionally, Divya serves as a co-advisor for the UHCOP Student Society of Health-

System Pharmacists (SSHP) and Phi Lambda Sigma (PLS) chapters.

She received her Doctor of Pharmacy from Purdue University before completing a PGY1/2 HSPA residency at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and an M.S. in HSPA from Ohio State.



Alex and Divya Varkey | Dianne and Matthew Wanat



# 2022

## THE MADING SOCIETY



### The Mading Society's Class of 2022 inductees were:

Christopher M. and Nancy Lisowski Dembny  
The late Walter N. Kuntz Jr.  
John ('98) and Aimee Mohr  
The late Dan E. Morse ('60)  
Paige ('94) and Ronald Pitman

### The "Cougar Red Coat" honorees were:

Larry A. Harrison ('70)  
Dr. Michael W. Stavinoha ('77)  
Mustafa F. ('75) and Sanober Lokhandwala

#### Photo IDs:

Front row, from left: Nick and Maureen Kuntz, Sanober Lokhandwala, Christopher and Nancy Lisowski Dembny, Paige and Ronald Pitman;  
back row, Aimee and John Mohr, Mustafa Lokhandwala, Lamar Pritchard, President Renu Khator, Larry Harrison and Dr. Michael Stavinoha.



# 2023

## THE MADING SOCIETY

### The Mading Society's Class of 2023 inductees were:

Aloe Blacc  
Diane B. Ginsburg (MS '90) and Jeffrey Josephs  
Fehmida Karachiwala (B.S. '81) and the late Asif Karachiwala  
Douglas and Kelly Thornton  
Meghana Trivedi (Pharm.D. '03, Ph.D. '04) and Vihang Narkar (Ph.D. '02)  
Roy (BS '69) and Rosie Sandoval

### The "Cougar Red Coat" honorees were:

June Chin and the late Sunny Chin (B.S. '71)

#### Photo IDs:

Dean Lamar Pritchard with inductees Kelly and Doug Thornton,  
Dean Lamar Pritchard with inductees Rosie and Roy Sandoval,  
June and Jessica Chin





# 2024

## THE MADING SOCIETY

### The Mading Society's Class of 2024 inductees were:

Mark Bradford

*(in honor of 1961 alumnus Robert "Bob" Bradford Scholarship Endowment)*

Sujit S. and Shubhada Sansgiry

Dominic (Pharm.D. '11) and Christine Nguyen Vu

Louis and Sandra Williams

### The "Cougar Red Coat" honorees were:

Doug C. Eikenburg and Kathy Ryan

### Photo IDs:

Mark Bradford, Robyn Schultheis, Robert Bradford,

Matt Schultheis, and Courtney Long

Dean Lamar Pritchard with inductees

Christine Nguyen Vu and Dominic Vu

Sandra and Louis Williams with

Dean Lamar Pritchard





# 2025

## THE MADING SOCIETY

### The Mading Society's Class of 2025 inductees were:

Brothers Donald Lackey, B.S. ('81), R.Ph., and Kip Lackey  
Kimberly Nguyen, Pharm.D. ('02), R.Ph.,  
Nancy Ordonez, Pharm.D. ('98), R.Ph.,  
and Noel Han, M.D.  
Elizabeth Coyle Rogers, Pharm.D., R.Ph.,  
and Glenn Rogers  
Omar Sakkal, Pharm.D. ('05), B.S. ('00), R.Ph.,  
and Megan Sakkal

### The "Cougar Red Coat" honorees were:

Bruce Biundo, B.S. ('61), R.Ph., and  
Ann Biundo



## UHCOP WELCOMES NEW DEVELOPMENT OFFICER FOR ALUMNI, DONOR ENGAGEMENT

UHCOP has rolled out the welcome mat for its new Assistant Director of Development Abby Sayers, who has been part of the University of Houston Advancement team for three years. Sayers brings a strong background in planned giving and donor engagement, with a focus on building meaningful relationships that connect alumni and friends to the university's mission.

Originally from Auburn, Alabama, she earned both her B.A. and M.A. in history from Auburn University. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with friends and family, cheering on her Auburn Tigers and the Coogs, playing trivia and board games, and reading. Powered by curiosity and caffeine, she believes there's always more to learn.

A lifelong advocate for higher and public education, she is excited to support the College of Pharmacy's students, faculty, and programs in her new role.





# IN MEMORIAM

## *College Community Mourns Passing of Distinguished Alumni and Faculty*



**Celso Cuellar, Jr.**  
(1941-2024)

Celso Cuellar Jr., B.S. ('65) passed away on Nov 13, 2024, at the age of 83. With a career spanning more than 50 years, Cuellar started his pharmacy career at one of the Mading Drugs stores in Clear Lake and later held leadership positions with Target and Kmart pharmacies. Cuellar also owned an independent pharmacy in his hometown of San Antonio for 16 years and supported the opening of several Target pharmacies across South Texas.

Cuellar was recognized with a 50-year service certificate from the Texas State Board of Pharmacy and served as treasurer of the Bexar County Pharmacy Association for many years. At UHCOP, Celso served several years on the Dean's Advisory Council and was the 2016 Alumnus Pharmacist of the Year Award recipient.

A "Red Coat" honoree of the Mading Society, he established the Lourdes M. and Nicanora C. Cuellar Presidential Endowed Fellowship in honor of his sisters and the Celso & Matiana Cuellar Presidential Endowed Scholarship in memory of his parents, and, following his passing, the Celso Cuellar Jr. Endowed Scholarship through his estate. Cuellar also provided support to several other scholarship campaigns and the Health 2 capital campaign.



**Ken Euler**  
(1937-2024)

Professor Emeritus Kenneth L. Euler, Ph.D., passed Dec. 13, 2024, at the age of 87. After graduating from the University of Washington with a Ph.D. in pharmacognosy, he was hired as a faculty member at the University of Maryland. During his two years in Maryland, he met fellow faculty member Carl Driever, Ph.D., who would become a lifelong friend and UHCOP colleague when they both joined UHCOP in 1967.

Keenly interested in natural products and medicinal plants, Euler taught those subject areas in the medicinal chemistry courses of the college's undergraduate pharmacy and contributed to the medicinal chemistry course content in the Pharm.D. program. He was also credited with building a robust compounding lab, rejuvenating the herbal courses, and establishing the college's long-standing relationship with then-Professional Compounding Centers of America (PCCA).

Euler's collaborative research was published in the Journal of Natural Products and the Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences.



**Shara L. Zatopek**  
(1951-2025)

Shara L. Zatopek, B.S. ('74), M.A., passed on April 23, 2025, at the age of 74. A pharmacist, educator and leader in the profession, Zatopek served for 30 years as a faculty member and administrator at UHCOP.

At the college, Zatopek held assistant and associate dean positions over such areas as operations, academic/student affairs and admissions and taught in numerous courses of the professional program curriculum, including pharmacy practice, skills, law and management, as well as more than 100 sessions of pharmacy continuing education.

She served many years on the college Dean's Executive Council, Dean's Advisory Council, and countless committees and task forces, including the steering committees that developed the Pharm.D. and the TX-PHARM nontraditional Pharm.D. program.

Outside of the college, Zatopek was a leader in state and national pharmacy organizations, including serving as national president of Phi Lambda Sigma (PLS) and holding board positions with the Texas Pharmacy Association (TPA), Texas Pharmacy Foundation, Houston Area Pharmacy Association (HAPA), and UH Pharmacy Alumni Association.

Her national and state honors included 1991 Outstanding Pharmacist Service Award and 1995 National Advisor of the Year from the APhA-ASP, 1994 National Faculty Leadership Award from PLS, 1995 Pharmacist of the Year Award from HAPA, and 1997 Pharmacist-Educator of the Year Award from TPA.

From the college, she was recognized among the college's "50 Outstanding Alumni" during the UHCOP 50th anniversary celebrations, received the UH Outstanding Faculty Service Award in 1995, and the 1996 Faculty Leadership Award from UHCOP's PLS Upsilon Chapter. Upon her retirement from the college in



2016, Zatopek also was recognized with the UHCOP Meritorious Achievement Award.

A generous benefactor, she established three student scholarship endowments: the Shara L. Zatopek Scholarship, the Leland Zatopek Scholarship in memory of her father, and the Red, White & Blue Scholarship to benefit students who served in the military.



**Johnnie Fadal**  
(1937-2025)

Johnnie Fadal Jr., B.S. ('60), passed Oct. 19, 2025, at the age of 88. Fadal practiced community pharmacy full-time for four decades until 2000, but continued working relief to extend his career beyond the half-century mark.

Although he was signed by the Pittsburgh Pirates to play professional baseball, homesickness and an obligation to follow his father's advice led him to stay in Texas and become a pharmacist like three of his uncles.

Not long after graduating from UHCOP, Fadal returned to his native Waco to work for an independent community pharmacy, which was later purchased by Eckerd Drug. Fadal continued to work for Eckerd for nearly 40 years, with his final "white coat days" spent at an independent pharmacy in nearby Robinson, Texas.

Fadal was a long-time member of the Mading Society with his wife, Carole. The Fadals' support for the college includes a named scholarship endowment.



**Romi Ghose**  
(1969-2025)

Professor Emeritus Romi Ghose, Ph.D., passed June 26, 2025, at the age of 56. Ghose joined the college as an assistant professor of pharmaceuticals in 2006 and was promoted to associate professor in 2014. Before her UHCOP appointment, Ghose served in instructional and postdoctoral fellow positions at Baylor College of Medicine. She earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Calcutta in India, and her Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind.

Ghose's research was focused on drug-metabolizing enzymes

in inflammation as well as gastrointestinal toxicity and hepatotoxicity. She was the recipient of multiple grants from the National Institutes of Health, the Inflammation Research Foundation, and UH. Ghose coauthored more than 70 publications in such journals as *Nature Scientific Reports*, *The FASEB Journal*, *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, *Drug Metabolism and Disposition*, the *British Journal of Pharmacology*, and *Life Sciences*, as well as two book chapters. In addition, she coauthored more than 50 abstracts and delivered oral presentations of her research at scientific meetings.

During her career at UHCOP, Ghose served as faculty advisor for six Ph.D. students/alumni and on the dissertation committees of 10 other UHCOP Ph.D. students. She also mentored several Pharm.D., graduate and undergraduate students and postdoctoral fellows on laboratory rotations. She also served as course coordinator for two Pharm.D. courses and taught in several Pharm.D. and Ph.D. courses.

Ghose is survived by her husband, Sujoy, and son, Shomik.



**Carl W. Drier**  
(1938-2025)

Professor Emeritus Carl W. Drier, Ph.D., passed Oct. 11, 2025, at the age of 87.

After earning his undergraduate and Ph.D. degrees from Purdue University, Drier joined UHCOP in 1967.

Although a pharmacologist by education and research pursuits, Drier served as a member of the college's clinical pharmacy faculty, incorporating more basic clinical knowledge and practical clinical skills into the curriculum. In the early 1970s, Drier even became a faculty preceptor and developed experiential rotations with the now Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center. He would later become clinical coordinator for all clinical internships.

Drier also is credited for helping with the Pharmacy Care Lab redesign at the college's former TMC campus and his prominent role in the development and initial rollout of the Pharm.D. curriculum in 1997 before his retirement two years later.

He also authored or coauthored research published in the *American Journal of Hospital Pharmacy (AJHP)*, *Cancer Treatment Reports*, the *International Journal of Neuropharmacology*, the *Journal of Dairy Science*, the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology*, and *Life Sciences*.

Drier was a member of the college's Mading Society of benefactors.





# A MESSAGE FROM DEAN PRITCHARD

*The late, great philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “It’s not the destination, it’s the journey.” As I officially step down as Dean of the University of Houston College of Pharmacy, I’m struck by the realization that – no offense to Mr. Emerson – both points are true: Sometimes it is the destination AND the journey.*

*When I arrived at UHCOP in 2009, I knew I had our work cut out for us. Our college facilities’ best days were behind them and ill-suited to house modern research laboratories and advancements in instructional technologies. However, I was fortunate to have an energetic, visionary leader in UH President Renu Khator, a supportive Board of Regents, and a cadre of motivated alumni, faculty and friends of the college to help carry the load. With our shared goals to make sure it was beyond dispute that UH was home to the best college of pharmacy in the state and among the elite institutions in the country, we banded together, dug in our heels, and carved a new path for our college.*

*From the big Texas welcome to these last few months of farewells, the friendship, love and respect that the UHCOP community has shown my wife Judy and myself made this sometimes slippery, sometimes rugged terrain a little easier to walk on this journey. And the destination is not about me; my role has been to lead our College through the dark forest of detractors and naysayers toward a better, more sure future. In this new place, we’ve built a new foundation on consistently high first-time NAPLEX pass rates, national leaders in the profession and sciences, perpetual individual and group awards of excellence in teaching, research and service, and a state-of-the-art academic/research home worthy of the college’s legacy.*

*But for the college, for the next leaders, for the next generation of alumni, a new journey — and a new higher destination — await. To the students, alumni, faculty, staff and friends, I wish you godspeed and Go Coogs!*



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