

Buffalo Pharmacy

MAGAZINE

VOLUME 8 | 2025



ASSEMBLING A PHARMACEUTICAL **DREAM TEAM**

Drug Discovery, Development
and Evaluation Hub Welcomes
Seven New Scientists **p6**

BUFFALO-TAIWAN EXCHANGE
BROADENS OPPORTUNITIES **p12**

SHAPING THE FUTURE
OF ANTIBIOTICS **p18**

MAGER HONORED WITH
LIFETIME AWARD **p28**

EDITORIAL TEAM

Katie Brigham

Associate Director, Communications,
Marketing and Outreach
Office of Communications

Samantha Nebelecky

Assistant Director,
Communications and Marketing
Office of Communications

Rebecca Brierley

Retired Assistant Dean,
Communications and Alumni Relations

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Suzanne Crean

Devon Dams-O'Connor

Bert Gambini

Laurie Kaiser

Judson Mead

UBNow Staff

PROOFREADING

G&A Services

PHOTOGRAPHY

Douglas Levere

University at Buffalo,
Office of University Communications

Meredith Forrest Kulwicki

University at Buffalo,
Office of University Communications

Nancy J. Parisi

Social Documentation Photography

Joseph Priore

Priore Photography & Video

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Dave Donati/Lynda H. Donati

Green Soup Design

Buffalo Pharmacy Magazine is an annual publication of the University at Buffalo School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences.

Inquiries/Change of Address/

Email Updates:

University at Buffalo
School of Pharmacy and
Pharmaceutical Sciences
Office of Alumni Relations
284 Pharmacy Building
Buffalo, NY 14214-8033

716-645-6965

phm-alumni@buffalo.edu

pharmacy.buffalo.edu

Message From The Dean

The year 2024 was, by any measure, an extraordinary one for the University at Buffalo's School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. We welcomed the largest entering classes in our history across all three of our advanced degree programs: PharmD, PhD and MS. Our school led the university in year-over-year enrollment growth in each degree category—professional doctorate, PhD, MS and BS.

For the first time, and to our great pride, every PharmD graduate who sought a residency was successfully placed. We also surpassed a major milestone, with our extramural research funding exceeding \$20 million for the first time. Additionally, we welcomed seven exceptional new faculty members as part of the expansion of UB's Drug Discovery, Development and Evaluation Hub, with further growth planned in the year ahead.

These achievements are the result of building on our school's longstanding legacy of excellence, fueled by the tireless efforts and dedication of our faculty and staff. Equally important are the significant investments made by both the university and the state of New York, which have had a profoundly positive impact. I am confident that our remarkable progress has been accelerated by our enviable organization and geographical location.

While the quantitative accomplishments I have highlighted are impressive, they tell only part of the story. In the pages that follow, I am excited to share with you the even more compelling narratives—of groundbreaking work, collaborative innovation and exceptional contributions being made by a community of talented individuals across all our mission areas. As always, I welcome the opportunity to engage in conversations regarding the great work being done here in Buffalo.

With best regards,



Gary M. Pollack, PhD
Professor and Dean





COVER STORY

Assembling a Pharmaceutical Dream Team

Drug Discovery, Development and Evaluation Hub Welcomes Seven New Scientists



FEATURE STORY

International Experience

Buffalo-Taiwan Exchange Broadens Opportunities

DEPARTMENTS



CELEBRATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS Commencement • Spring Celebration
• Welcome Week • Brierley, leader in strategic communications and alumni relations, retires
• NCPA President visits SPPS • Why is UB Blue?



INNOVATIONS Rare Disease Day symposium • Refugee education and health literacy sessions
• Shaping the future of antibiotics



STUDENT LIFE SPPS AMCP wins multiple awards • PhD scholars receive top level university recognition
• Perri receives predoctoral research fellowship • Pharmacy students make an impact abroad
• Learning and Engagement Communities establish official houses • Student Accomplishments



ACCOLADES Hoefer named SUNY Online Teaching Ambassador • Faculty Leaders • Tsuji named Edelman Endowed Chair • Robinson receives SUNY Chancellor's Award • Daly and Jacobs receive IPRO Quality Award • Mager honored with lifetime award • Kruszynski leaves legacy of service and dedication



ALUMNI ABSTRACTS Pharmacist by training, engineer by experience • The best friend • Disability advocate discusses inclusive practices in pharmacy • Lasezkay receives UB Distinguished Alumni Award

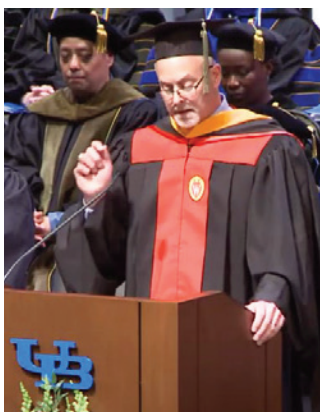
2024 COMMENCEMENT

The University at Buffalo School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences celebrated our 2024 Commencement on May 18 at the Center for the Arts on the North Campus, honoring **166 GRADUATES** from the PharmD, BS, MS and PhD programs.

Lee C. Vermeulen, BS '90, MS, FCCP, FFIP, executive vice president and chief executive officer, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (ACCP), delivered the commencement address.

Vermeulen earned a BS degree in pharmacy from SPPS and an MS degree in pharmacy administration from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison). He has held a variety of executive positions at UK HealthCare, the University of Kentucky health system, and at UW Health, the health system of UW-Madison, as well as academic appointments as professor of medicine and pharmacy at the University of Kentucky and clinical professor of pharmacy at UW-Madison. He is an active health services researcher with more than 80 peer-reviewed publications and is the recipient of multiple awards, including Pharmacist of the Year from the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin, the Winston J. Durant Lecture Award from the University of Wisconsin, the Willis G. Gregory Memorial Award from SPPS, and the Donald E. Francke Medal from the American Society of Health-system Pharmacists.

- DEGREES CONFERRED:
- 9 BS
 - 34 MS
 - 2 BS/MS
 - 116 PharmD
 - 5 PhD



Lee C. Vermeulen, BSPHarm, MS, FCCP, FFIP, executive vice president and chief executive officer, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (ACCP), delivering the commencement address

“It took a lot of skill, talent and effort to come back from the brink of COVID, and we had every excuse to remain insular, keep our heads down, and focus on grades. But instead of doing that, we all made our mark on the school, and we will continue to make our marks on the pharmacy world.”

—Daniel van Oss, president, PharmD Class of 2024



Bachelor of Science graduating students



PharmD graduating students

SPRING CELEBRATION: Graduation and Awards Luncheon

Our 2024 Spring Celebration: Graduation and Awards Luncheon program took place on May 17 at Banchetti by Rizzo's in Buffalo. The event honored our 2024 PharmD and Pharmaceutical Sciences graduates and celebrated 49 award winners, including two faculty members, two staff, three preceptors and 42 students. These individuals were recognized for their outstanding contributions to our school's mission, the pharmacy profession and the pursuit of academic excellence during the 2023–2024 academic year.



Student graduates and award winners



Student graduates and recipients of Merck Manual Award for Academic Excellence



Student graduates and award winners

WELCOME WEEK



August 22–29, 2024

During our 2024 Welcome Week, we introduced incoming pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences students to our school with a series of events including a multiday orientation program, White Coat Ceremony for first-year PharmD students and our annual school-wide picnic.

ORIENTATION



Pharmaceutical Sciences graduate students at orientation

During orientation, our PharmD Class of 2028 and pharmaceutical sciences students were introduced to key aspects of their academic journey. They reviewed school policies, had the opportunity to interact with student organization representatives, and connected with faculty and staff who will support their growth and development throughout their time at SPPS.

SCHOOL PICNIC



Students enjoying school picnic on the Pharmacy Building lawn



Students playing games on the Pharmacy Building lawn at school picnic

WHITE COAT CEREMONY



Students from the PharmD Class of 2028 reciting the Oath of a Pharmacist at White Coat Ceremony



PharmD Class of 2028 at White Coat Ceremony

Our annual White Coat Ceremony marks the beginning of our PharmD students' journey into the profession of pharmacy practice. It symbolizes a commitment to providing high-quality, compassionate patient care and highlights the importance of scientific learning and inquiry. Our 2024 ceremony welcomed 143 PharmD students, one of our largest PharmD classes on record, to the UB family.

“White Coat Ceremonies are milestone events for academic programs as well as for the students in those programs. For us, it marks our embrace of a new cohort of student pharmacists, students who are going to be future professionals and colleagues. For students, it marks the transition from being an undergraduate or graduate student to being a professional doctoral student.”

—Gary Pollack, PhD, dean



BRIERLEY, LEADER IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND ALUMNI RELATIONS, RETIRES

BY SAMANTHA NEBELECKY

After 23 years at the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Rebecca Brierley, assistant dean for communications and alumni relations, retired in January 2025.

Brierley joined SPPS in 2001 and held various key roles, including assistant to the associate dean of clinical education and research (2001–2003), director of the Office of External Affairs and senior advisor to the dean (2003–2012), and serving as assistant dean, communications and alumni relations since 2012.

Throughout her tenure, Brierley has been a driving force at SPPS, leading numerous school-wide initiatives in two key areas: strategic communication planning and oversight and alumni relations planning and oversight.

Brierley's other school-wide accomplishments include the Pharmacy Building New Build Project Planning and Oversight, a 10-year, \$70 million capital project; the oversight of the Faculty-Staff Award nomination process that resulted in more than 20 successful professional awards; and direction of the Annual Student Scholarship Golf Tournament, a 16-year outreach program that generated over 80 student awards.

She has been recognized for her exemplary service with multiple awards, including the State University of New York Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Professional Service in 2018 and the SPPS Staff Member of the Year Award in 2022.

As Brierley embarks on this new chapter, her legacy of dedication and leadership will undoubtedly leave a lasting impact on our SPPS community.

“On behalf of the entire SPPS family, I want to express our gratitude for all that Becky has done for the school over the years.”

—Gary Pollack, PhD, dean

NCPA PRESIDENT VISITS SPPS, SHARES VISION FOR COMMUNITY PHARMACY



BY SUZANNE CREAN AND SAMANTHA NEBELECKY

In spring 2024, the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences welcomed Lea Wolsoncroft, RPh, president, National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA), for a discussion of the future of community pharmacy.

Joined by past NCPA presidents Stephen Giroux, BS '81, and Bradley Arthur, Wolsoncroft toured the Pharmacy Building and met with faculty from the Department of Pharmacy Practice.

The highlight of Wolsoncroft's visit was her presentation on "The Future of Community Pharmacy," addressing the challenges community pharmacists are currently facing.

"NCPA is the voice and face of independent community pharmacy," says Gary Pollack, PhD, dean, SPPS. "SPPS recognizes and supports the unique and vital role these pharmacies serve as our nation's front-line health care providers, ensuring the health and well-being of our communities. We were

so pleased to have NCPA President Wolsoncroft and past presidents, Giroux and Arthur, here at UB."

Wolsoncroft's visit concluded with a Q&A panel with PharmD students and alumni. "This forum allowed our students to interact with national leaders during uncertainty," said Anthony Pattin, PharmD, clinical associate professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, and one of our school's specialists in community pharmacy practice. "NCPA is working hard to ensure a bright future for our student pharmacists interested in career options in community pharmacy practice. We are grateful to have NCPA's engagement on campus for our students."



SPPS meeting with past NCPA presidents and Lea Wolsoncroft, RPh, president, NCPA (center)

Why is UB blue?

BY BERT GAMBINI

The School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, originally known as the Department of Pharmacy, and the Medical Department, today's Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, often receive credit for helping to establish UB's blue-and-white color scheme.

But there is also another influential contributor.

University Archives holds the foundational evidence of the blue-and-white origin story. The information is catalogued under "Colors, Songs and Mottos."

Among the pages in that catalog is the story of the Pharmacy Department preparing in 1888 to graduate its first class. Pharmacy was the second school to emerge under the University at Buffalo umbrella following the Medical Department, founded in 1846.

"Whether by intent or accident is not known to me and whether from '46 or not is not known, but so far as the memory of this man runneth, medical diplomas have been tied with white ribbon," Willis G. Gregory wrote in 1906 for the "Iris," the university's first general student yearbook.

Gregory was both a physician and pharmacist. An 1882 graduate of the Medical Department, he owned a drugstore in Buffalo and was among the Pharmacy Department's first faculty members. He became dean in 1890, serving in that capacity for 46 years, the longest leadership tenure in our school's history.

"How shall we tie our diplomas?" Gregory asked rhetorically in that same Iris piece, remembering pharmacy's quandary of 1888.

That year marked the first time the university would grant a diploma other than that of medical doctor. To avoid any potential commencement confusion, pharmacy tied its diplomas with a blue ribbon to distinguish its diplomas from those in medicine.

"And so the White and Blue [sic] came to be the colors of the University at Buffalo," concluded Gregory.

But there's more.

Pharmacy obviously had other ribbon color options, and though Gregory never explained why blue became the distinctive choice, one of the 19th century's scientific breakthroughs might be partly responsible.

That discovery wasn't on the order of Charles Darwin's publication of "On the Origin of Species," but there was a British scientist in the mid-1800s who learned how to artificially create a deep shade of blue that previously required valuable natural components. The accidental discovery altered the economics of the color wheel, and made a pigment once rare, more common.

The timing of that discovery [of synthetic blue] might align nicely with the [ribbon color] decision," says Tim Cook, UB professor of chemistry. "There are many other natural sources for all these other colors, and blue was underused, appealing for UB to snag."

Blue would, by the early 20th century, become even more accessible.

"Cu phthalocyanine is important because it's relatively easy to make," says Cook. "It uses earth abundant materials, and its chemical properties are amazing for its widespread application as a pigment."

"And so," returning to Gregory's quote, "the White and Blue [sic] came to be the colors of the University at Buffalo."



ASSEMBLING A PHARMACEUTICAL

DREAM TEAM

Drug Discovery, Development
and Evaluation Hub Welcomes
Seven New Scientists

BY DEVON DAMS O'CONNOR | PHOTOS BY DOUGLAS LEVERE

Creating an environment where groundbreaking pharmaceutical and translational science thrives requires the strong presence of several important elements: talent, collaboration, funding and support—all in the same place.

That's the idea behind the UB School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences' Drug Discovery, Development and Evaluation (DDDE) Hub, a dedicated research engine in the fields of pharmaceutical research and translational sciences. It's the only pharmaceutical think tank of its kind in the country, and it has the potential to accelerate the discovery of treatments for life-altering diseases from COVID-19 to cancer.

Brain-powering the DDDE Hub are seven new faculty members who were recruited from some of the top institutions in the U.S. for their exceptional research expertise. All seven joined SPPS between March 2024 and January 2025.

The new hires strengthen several areas of research leadership SPPS has developed over decades, while adding new dimensions and interdisciplinary approaches to its drug discovery and therapeutic research capabilities.

"Historically, we've been extraordinarily strong in pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics," says Gary Pollack, PhD '84, dean of the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. "Those sciences were developed and matured here. The goal of the DDDE Hub is to expand and highlight other important areas of pharmaceutical sciences work in drug discovery and formulation development by bringing in faculty who are already

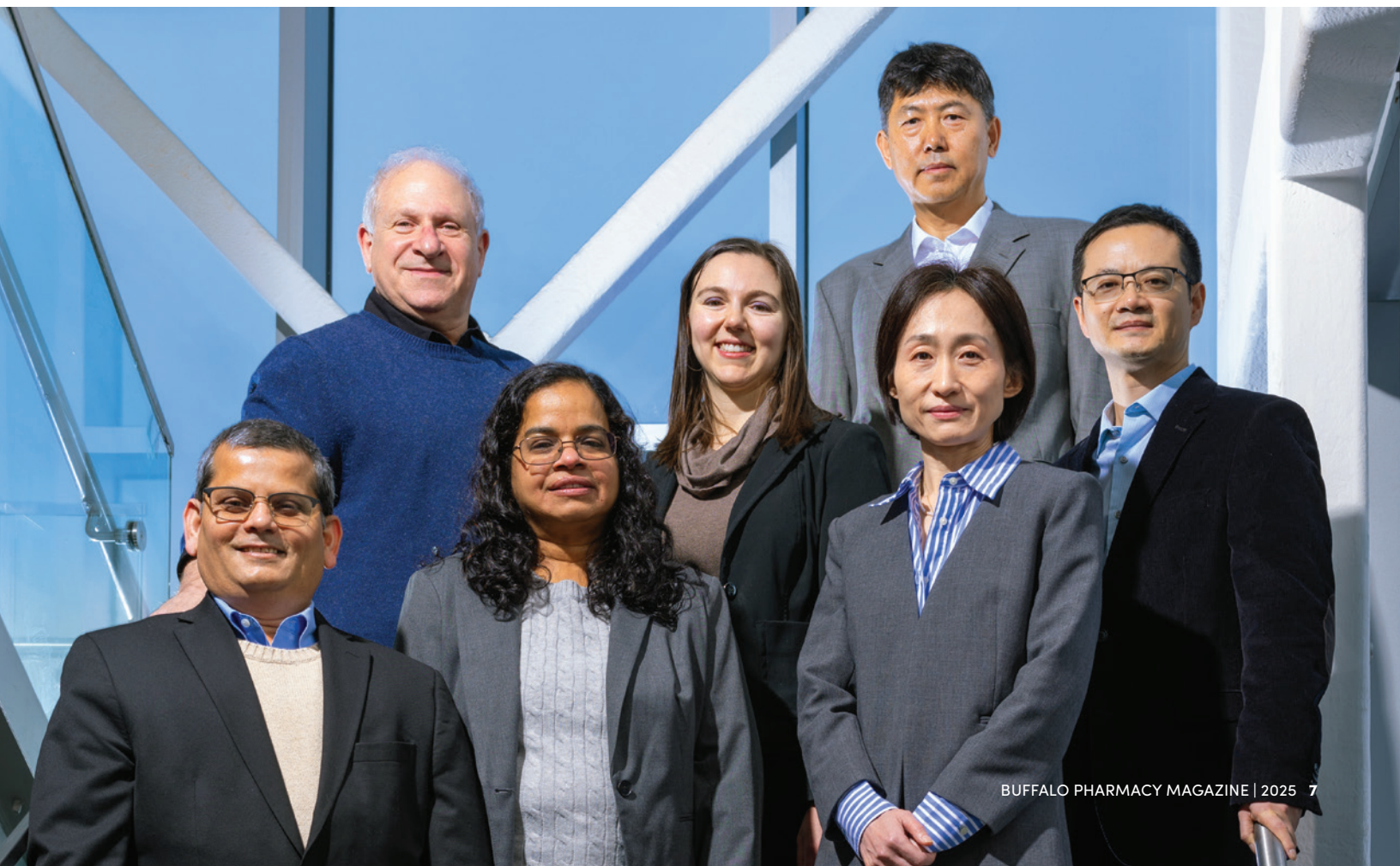
established in those areas."

"Forming the DDDE Hub is a continuation of the transformational work we have undertaken as a school in recent years," says Donald Mager, PharmD '00, PhD '02, chair and professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences. "Last year, we simultaneously expanded our faculty while introducing new divisional structures that reflect our longstanding expertise, which has positioned us well to launch this focused research hub."

Filling seven positions with high-caliber candidates in less than a year signaled an unprecedented evolution and rapid expansion for SPPS. This entailed tremendous effort that called for teamwork, vision and strong professional relationships within the broader research community.

"Everyone at the school was involved," explains Pollack. "In order to be successful, it had to be a team effort. Everyone pitched in to articulate our vision and our culture, and to recommend colleagues who would be a good fit."

"We had a vision of creating dream teams," echoes Brian Tsuji, PharmD, professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice; associate



dean, Clinical and Translational Sciences; division head, Division of Clinical and Translational Therapeutics; and Edelman Endowed Chair in Experimental Therapeutics. “We spoke with hundreds of candidates who would bring us to the next level—the gamechangers. Our message was, ‘You can be a part of this thing we’re building, and it won’t happen without you—you are a critical piece to the pioneering transformation at UB.’”

“Last year, we simultaneously expanded our faculty while introducing new divisional structures that reflect our longstanding expertise, which has positioned us well to launch this focused research hub.”

—Donald Mager, PharmD, PhD

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

One of the primary purposes of the DDDE Hub is to consolidate into one coordinated effort the drug discovery, development and evaluation activity happening across the university in chemistry, medicine, pharmacy and public health. By creating one collective access point at UB, the Hub also helps facilitate further collaboration with medical research institutions outside the university.

For Philip Lazarus, PhD, division head, Division of Molecular Biosciences, and professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration was one of the most attractive aspects of coming to UB.

“The Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, Roswell Park—we didn’t have anything like those at my previous posts,” says Lazarus. “My work is in basic drug metabolism in the cancer field and tobacco field, and there are so many opportunities for collaboration here in both [areas].”

Within four months of arriving at SPPS, Lazarus had already submitted a grant

application with Sanjay Sethi, MD, professor and chief, Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine; assistant vice president, Health Sciences; deputy director, UB Clinical and Translational Science Institute at the Jacobs School, to fund a clinical trial that examines how cannabinoids, especially CBD, may inhibit the enzyme that metabolizes nicotine in order to help cigarette smokers smoke less.

Zhenjia Wang, PhD, SUNY Empire Innovation Associate Professor, Division of Drug Delivery and Pharmaceutical Bioengineering, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, relies heavily on collaboration for his work in cell-based nanoparticle drug delivery.

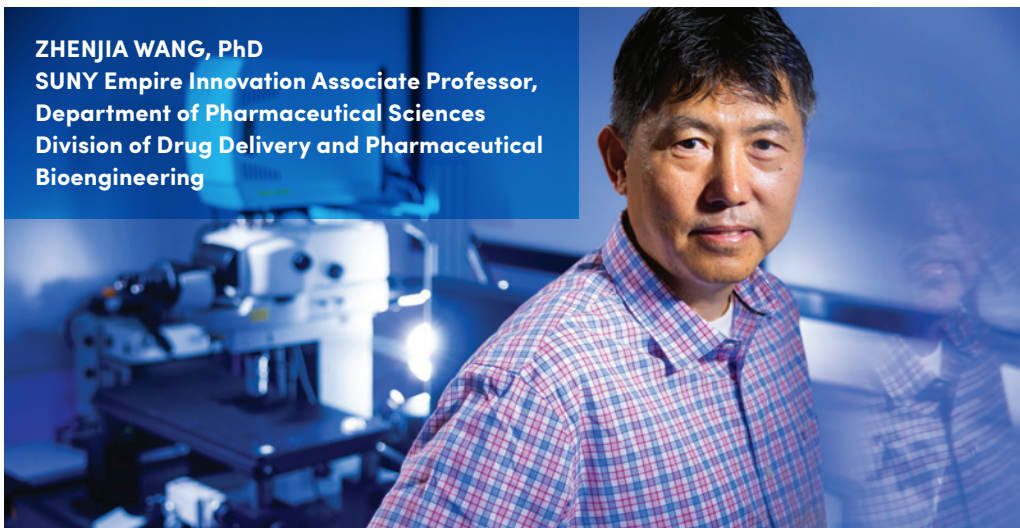
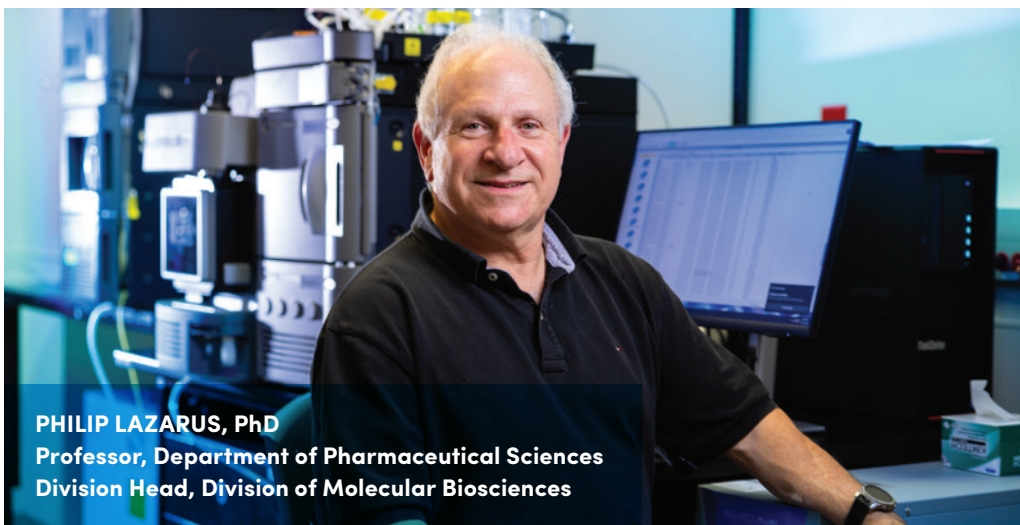
“My research is interdisciplinary by its nature,” Wang explains. “I focus on the drug delivery, but I need the rest of the equation. Grants in this arena always ask for collaborations, and those are easy to find at UB.”

Wang recently submitted two National Institutes of Health (NIH) research project grant (R01) applications with faculty at the

Jacobs School. The first is in collaboration with Marc Halterman, MD, PhD, senior associate dean and executive director of the Office of Research, Department of Neurology, to work on how neutrophils could mediate the delivery of nanotherapeutics across blood brain barriers to improve the treatment of glioblastoma, a deadly brain cancer. For the second NIH submission, he partnered with Elsa Bou Ghanem, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, to study how delivering DHA (Omega 3) to the lung could resolve inflammation to improve the treatment of acute respiratory distress syndrome.

Yanan “Nancy” Zhao, MD, PhD, professor, Division of Clinical and Translational Therapeutics, Department of Pharmacy Practice, was also drawn to UB for its collaborative culture. She made the difficult decision to leave a research position she held for 18 years in a highly competitive environment to pursue new opportunities at SPPS.

“When I came to UB for my interview, it was such a friendly environment where all





YANAN "NANCY" ZHAO, MD, PhD
Professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice
Division of Clinical and Translational Therapeutics



LIANG CHEN, MD, PhD
Professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice
Division of Clinical and Translational Therapeutics

the people welcomed my expertise," says Zhao. "People here work like they're a huge family. It really struck me how every PI wants to collaborate and find a niche to overlap our different research interests."

Just as she arrived at SPPS, Zhao, an internationally recognized infectious disease and antimicrobial researcher, was awarded a five-year, \$3.9 million R01 grant from NIH to develop drugs to treat deadly, antibiotic-resistant bacteria. This is one of the largest NIH grants awarded to the school and among the largest across the university. For more on the grant, see "Lifesaving Science: How UB is Shaping the Future of Antibiotics" on page 18).

The project's coinvestigator, Liang Chen, MD, PhD, an expert in bacterial genomics and genetics and a longtime collaborator of Zhao, was recruited to UB at the same time within the Division of Clinical and

Translational Therapeutics in the Department of Pharmacy Practice.

Resources, Support and Leadership

Along with the prospect of continuing his decades-long collaboration with Zhao and fostering long-term interdisciplinary collaborations, Chen says SPPS's stability, renowned NIH funding and support make it a compelling destination for researchers.

Rather than tuition and grants, which fund faculty expansion at other universities but can fluctuate from year to year, the DDDE Hub has received steady funding from several sources, including a portion of the \$100 million that New York State committed in 2023 to help the university significantly increase its research capabilities by 2030. It also secured funding from the SUNY Empire

Innovation Program as New York's flagship university.

"That external investment is attractive to recruits, especially outside of New York State," explains Pollack. "They can see that we'll be able to afford equipment upgrades, graduate students and so on—they're not in it alone; they've got support."

Chen says he appreciates the outstanding resource availability here and the evident support from the school's leadership.

"There's tremendous opportunity for collaboration and professional development here," says Chen. "And there's so much support. When I interviewed, I met with the dean and the entire administrative team. Everyone was so helpful, assisting me through onboarding and the process of relocating my lab. I feel honored to join this team."

Strong leadership from the university and within the school was something Bhaskar Das, PhD, division head, Division of Drug and Biotherapeutic Discovery and professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, sought out in a new role.

"This is part of a larger effort in the university's aspirations to be among the top 25 public research universities in the country. Many of our candidates met with the provost, who made it clear that the DDDE Hub is an element of something much bigger across the university."

—Brian Tsuji, PharmD

"I was looking for this kind of environment," says Das. "Strong support in a stable environment where we can contribute to society. Your boss needs to understand your work, the science and its impact. The dean has a vision."

Sasmita Das, PhD, research professor, Division of Drug and Biotherapeutic Discovery, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, also felt encouraged by Dean Pollack's genuine interest in work that could have a big impact.

"When I met with leadership to interview for the position, I saw how excited the dean was about what I was working on," says Das. "I felt this was a place where I could work on my interests."

Having leadership support from the top is crucial to meeting the ambitious goals UB has established, explains Tsuji, the Edelman Endowed Chair in Experimental Therapeutics and professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice.

"This is part of a larger effort in the university's aspirations to be among the top 25 public research universities in the country," Tsuji says. "Many of our candidates met with the provost, who made it clear that the DDDE Hub is an element of something much bigger across the university. Having that support is huge."

Reputation and Prestige

Anne Talkington, PhD, assistant professor, Division of Pharmacokinetics-Pharmacodynamics and Systems Pharmacology, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, describes her research as taking medical problems and turning them into mathematical problems to understand how simulated cancer patients might respond to different drug parameters.

She was interested in joining the faculty at SPPS because of the school's rich history in pharmacokinetics and pharmacokinetics modeling.

"In my graduate studies, I worked with a number of faculty who had either trained at UB or had close ties to UB, and I had read a number of papers coming out of this department," Talkington explains. "I'm excited to be able to lean on the expertise of the department on the pharmacoengineering side to increase the translational impact of the models I'm working on."

The Future of Pharmaceutical Discovery

With the DDDE Hub still in its infancy, there's a lot of work yet to be done securing research funding, initiating collaborations and managing the growing pains that come with welcoming more than 50 new faculty, support staff and postdocs and finding them a place to sit.

"Now we need to deliver on our promise of cultivating competitive science to improve

the care of patients," says Tsuji.

In the years to come, the DDDE Hub will become a catalyst to create opportunities to expand academic programming outside the school. Plans include developing a PhD program that sits atop the Hub and connects SPPS with other UB schools and affiliated medical institutions in the region.

"Professionals really need to work across

disciplines to advance their work and maintain funding," explains Pollack. "This type of program would not only make us more attractive to leading researchers. It would also give students additional avenues to experience the kind of impactful education they came to UB to pursue. And we can't be more excited about that."



BHASKAR DAS, PhD
Professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences,
Division Head, Division of Drug and Biotherapeutic Discovery



SASMITA DAS, PhD
Research Professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences
Division of Drug and Biotherapeutic Discovery



ANNE TALKINGTON, PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences
Division of Pharmacokinetics-Pharmacodynamics and Systems Pharmacology

This 3D tumor model uses magenta spheres for cancer cells and blue for infiltrating T cells to simulate tumor-immune interactions. Talkington conducted this work in part at the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

MEET THE DDDE HUB DREAM TEAM

Liang Chen, MD, PhD

**Professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice
Division of Clinical and Translational
Therapeutics**

Chen is an internationally recognized infectious disease and antimicrobial researcher, leading studies in bacterial genomics utilizing rapid molecular detection and genomic platforms.

RESEARCH FOCUS:

Bacterial genomics and genetics, with particular focus on multidrug-resistant gram-negative bacilli (MDRGNB), methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), and multidrug-resistant mycobacteria. His research integrates genomic sequencing, bioinformatics and clinical epidemiology to address the growing threat of antibiotic resistance. By unraveling the molecular mechanisms driving resistance, he aims to leverage cutting-edge genomic and genetic tools to develop innovative therapeutic strategies against multidrug-resistant pathogens.

Bhaskar Das, PhD

**Professor, Department of
Pharmaceutical Sciences
Division Head, Division of Drug
and Biotherapeutic Discovery**

Das is a leading expert in the development of new therapeutic and diagnostic agents focused on brain development and diseases.

RESEARCH FOCUS:

Boron based small molecules design and synthesis and the use of these compounds as potential therapeutic and diagnostic agents for various diseases. These new reactions are used globally to synthesize different organic compounds, and new compounds are utilized as potential therapeutic and diagnostic agents for different disease areas. Das also collaborates with academic and industry colleagues in their drug discovery programs to design and synthesize novel pharmacological agents.

Sasmita Das, PhD

**Research Professor, Department
of Pharmaceutical Sciences
Division of Drug and
Biotherapeutic Discovery**

Das is a classically trained organic chemist with extensive experience in drug and diagnostic discovery.

RESEARCH FOCUS:

The development of novel technologies, utilizing Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML), to support drug discovery and development for obesity and obesity related diseases (neuropathy and retinopathy), focusing on the design and synthesis of small-molecular and natural product-based probes. These probes are used to identify new biomarkers and develop new therapeutic and diagnostic agents, targeting mitochondrial oxidative stress and metabolic pathways.

Philip Lazarus, PhD

**Professor, Department of
Pharmaceutical Sciences
Division Head, Division of Molecular
Biosciences**

Lazarus is recognized as an expert authority in how individual genetic variants play a role in cancer risk and drug toxicity and effectiveness.

RESEARCH FOCUS:

The Lazarus lab was one of the first to study gene-environment interactions and their role in head and neck as well as lung cancer risk. He has performed numerous studies on nicotine metabolism and addiction, and conducted seminal studies focusing on the role of cannabinoids and marijuana in drug-drug interactions and drug metabolism. In addition, his laboratory has studied the pharmacogenetics of breast cancer agents, including serum estrogen receptor modulators and aromatase inhibitors.

Anne Talkington, PhD

**Assistant Professor, Department of
Pharmaceutical Sciences
Division of Pharmacokinetics-
Pharmacodynamics and Systems
Pharmacology**

Talkington recently completed a National Research Council Fellowship at the National Institute of Standards and Technology focusing on pharmacokinetics, applied mathematics and mathematical modeling.

RESEARCH FOCUS:

Leveraging modeling and simulation to improve drug design and delivery strategies along with opportunities to integrate techniques from model learning and optimization with innovative developments in therapeutic design.

Zhenjia Wang, PhD

**SUNY Empire Innovation Associate Professor,
Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences
Division of Drug Delivery and
Pharmaceutical Bioengineering**

Wang is a preeminent expert in the development of neutrophil-based therapeutics to improve therapies for cancer and inflammatory diseases.

RESEARCH FOCUS:

Apply molecular biology, immunology, material sciences and bioengineering to understand and devise better ways to deliver drugs to improve current therapies. Specifically, his studies are focused on the development of neutrophil-based therapeutics to improve the therapies of cancer and inflammatory diseases (such as stroke, sepsis and ARDS). The research is supported by NIH.

Yanan "Nancy" Zhao, MD, PhD

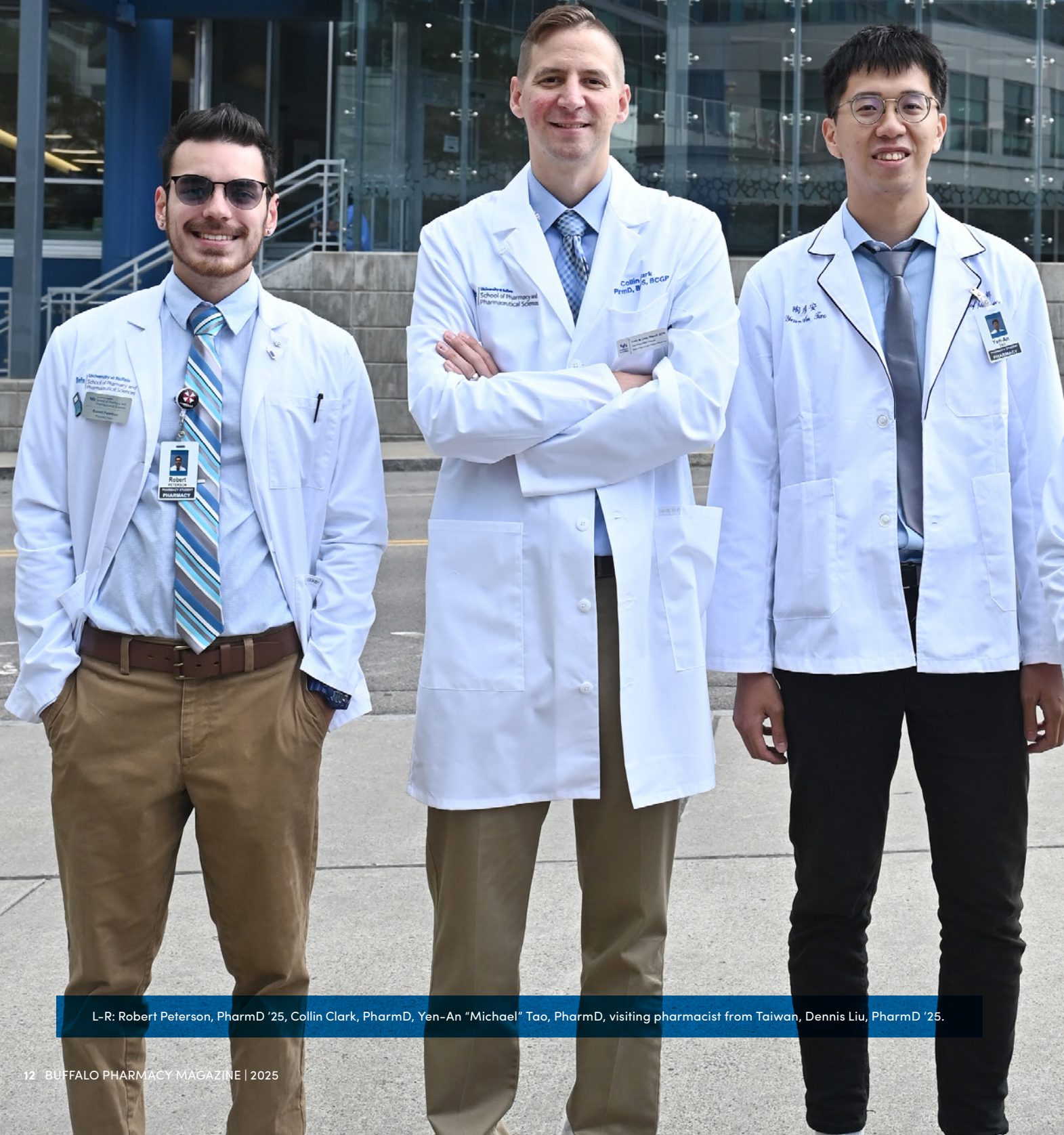
**Professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice
Division of Clinical and Translational
Therapeutics**

Zhao is an internationally recognized infectious disease and antimicrobial researcher leading high-impact, federally funded research in drug discovery and development.

RESEARCH FOCUS:

Preclinical development of antibacterial and antifungal drugs and molecular diagnosis of various infectious diseases and associated drug resistance. Expertise in molecular diagnostic assay design and preclinical drug development focusing on in vitro screening and characterization, and in vivo efficacy and PK/PD evaluation.

BUFFALO GENERAL MEDICAL C



L-R: Robert Peterson, PharmD '25, Collin Clark, PharmD, Yen-An "Michael" Tao, PharmD, visiting pharmacist from Taiwan, Dennis Liu, PharmD '25.



International Experience

Buffalo-Taiwan Exchange Broadens Opportunities

BY DEVON DAMS-O'CONNOR

Where traditional Eastern medicine and Western medicine intersect. How cultural norms influence care decisions. The potential for research to improve patient care. How another country's health care system impacts its clinical practice.

These are just some of the striking perspectives made possible through a special exchange program between the UB School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences and Taipei Medical University (TMU) along with its three affiliated hospitals in Taiwan: Taipei Medical University Hospital (TMUH), Wan Fang Hospital (WFH) and Shuang Ho Hospital (SHH).

In October 2015, senior leaders from the University at Buffalo and the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences met with their counterparts at TMU to discuss a mutual interest in creating a formalized clinical and educational exchange program between the two institutions. These discussions culminated in the signing of an agreement, solidifying their partnership to increase interdisciplinary and intercultural understanding of pharmacy practice within the U.S. and Taiwanese health care systems.

Since it began, the relationship has presented opportunities for students and faculty from both institutions to experience pharmacy practice through an international lens.

Continued on page 14.

“The ultimate goal is to take things we’re doing well here, and they’re doing well there, and share them so both institutions can grow in their knowledge and practice,” explains Gina Prescott, PharmD, director of global and community outreach and clinical professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice.



L-R: Dennis Liu, PharmD '25, Yen-An “Michael” Tao, PharmD, visiting pharmacist from Taiwan, Robert Peterson, PharmD '25, Collin Clark, PharmD.

“The ultimate goal is to take things we’re doing well here, and they’re doing well there, and share them so both institutions can grow in their knowledge and practice.”

—Gina Prescott, PharmD

Ties to Taiwan

Chi-Hua “Richard” Lu, PharmD '18, MS, research scientist in the Department of Pharmacy Practice, was the first student to visit Taiwan in 2015. He earned his bachelor’s degree in pharmacy at TMU, then came to UB for his PharmD and stayed, joining the SPPS faculty in 2021. As a UB PharmD student, Lu traveled back to Taiwan to visit TMU and to complete clinical rotations during his time there.

A formal exchange program with TMU was formalized in 2017, allowing students, faculty and clinicians from Taipei and Buffalo to travel halfway around the world to experience pharmacy in a new setting. More than 10 SPPS students traveled to Taiwan for experiential rotations between 2016 and 2019. The program ground to a halt in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and remained on pause until Taiwan lifted its pandemic restrictions, some of the strictest in the world. The exchange program resumed in 2023 and has grown ever since. Key partners at TMU have been Hsiang-Yin “Shawn” Chen, PharmD, MS, director of the TMU School of Pharmacy, professor and vice dean of the TMU College of Pharmacy, who has helped spark faculty and student participation in the program from the beginning; and Elizabeth H. Chang, PharmD, PhD, director of the TMU Department of Clinical Pharmacy and associate professor, who coordinates clinical rotations in Taipei.

“Taipei Medical University is one of the top-ranked pharmacy schools in Taiwan,” explains Lu. “Their degree program is aligned with what we do in the United States, and a lot of their faculty and clinical pharmacists earn their PharmD at schools in the United States. They’re uniquely qualified to show our students valuable experiences in clinical pharmacy in Taiwan during their six-week rotations.”

UB PharmD Students Travel to Taipei

Two UB PharmD students to visit Taiwan recently were Wenxin Zhang, PharmD '23, and Amenda Ni, PharmD '24, who completed clinical pharmacy rotations at TMUH in 2023. Both were interested to see how Taiwan’s universal health care system and patient experiences differ from what they had seen in the U.S.

Ni says that while she saw many advantages to universal health insurance, ranging from low-cost medications and the ability to see doctors (including specialists) at a reduced price, wait times to see doctors are typically very long because Taiwanese hospitals serve as one-stop shops for primary care, specialists, imaging, testing, pharmacy and more. Ni says patients in Taiwan can’t get specialty or novel medications without a long wait. This is because such prescriptions must go through a process similar to prior authorization required by U.S. health insurance companies. In Taiwan, however, prior authorization has to travel through an entire governmental health care system.

Zhang adds that even if some of the medications are approved for dispensing, the high cost isn’t always covered. And as in the U.S., many patients in Taiwan choose to pay out of pocket for the prospect of positive outcomes.

“Some specialty medications need to be imported in individual cases, including medications used for beauty and height,” she explains. “In one of the discussions with



the inpatient pharmacist at TMU, we learned that many parents care a lot about their children's height and are willing to pay the entire cost of a medication administered at the time of puberty to meet certain height goals, similar to how people in the U.S. will pay out of pocket for Zepbound or Wegovy for weight loss."

Ni was also interested to learn more about how hospitals in Taiwan incorporate traditional Chinese herbal medicine along with Western medicine.

"I remember, in the hectic hospital pharmacy side, one of the cough medicines was a little brown bottle that had an odd place among all the other fast movers," she explains. "This cough medicine was a traditional herbal medicine and was commonly prescribed."

During a one-day rotation in the hospital's traditional medicine pharmacy sector that Ni found especially eye-opening, she had the opportunity to learn how doctors and patients use traditional remedies to treat colds and flu, in cancer therapies, and to help prevent certain conditions.

Clinicians Broaden Their Practice

Clinicians and students from Taipei visit SPPS to experience the U.S. health care system and participate in research opportunities and clinical settings that aren't available in Taiwan.

Yen-An "Michael" Tao, PharmD, a pharmacist from SHH in New Taipei City, Taiwan, came to SPPS last summer for all those reasons. He worked with Lu to examine

literature and contribute to a review article of the diabetes medication semaglutide. He says there aren't many research activities at hospitals in Taiwan because pharmacists are too busy—SHH has nearly 1,000 beds. Moreover, without pharmacy technicians, the pharmacists themselves handle dispensing for the entire hospital. Through his experiences at SPPS, he's hoping to bring back ideas for how to improve the focus on research at Taiwanese hospitals.

"I want to improve the culture after I go back to Taiwan," explains Tao. "By doing our own research, we can identify problems and solve them to improve the practice. In learning with Dr. Lu, I've gained some passions to start working on more research."

Yen Jung "Annie" Chang, MS is an infectious disease pharmacist at SHH. She came to SPPS in summer 2023, drawn by the chance to gain new perspectives on teaching and learning.

"As an Asian, I'm used to the learning process 'being given,'" explains Chang. "Most of the time, teachers would tell me what to do, what to write, what to test or even what to think. When I first got to UB, Professor Raymond Cha [clinical associate professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice] taught me in a totally different way. He asked me to read whatever I want, find some topics that I'm interested in, and discuss with him after finishing the work. It was really hard at the beginning, because I didn't know what to read! But after some discussion, I realized that he wanted me to find some questions in the studies that could be topics or projects for research."

Chang also appreciated her time shadowing Prescott, director of global and community outreach and clinical professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, while in the classroom. Here Prescott encouraged her students to be active participants by asking questions that helped them talk through solutions and think logically for themselves.

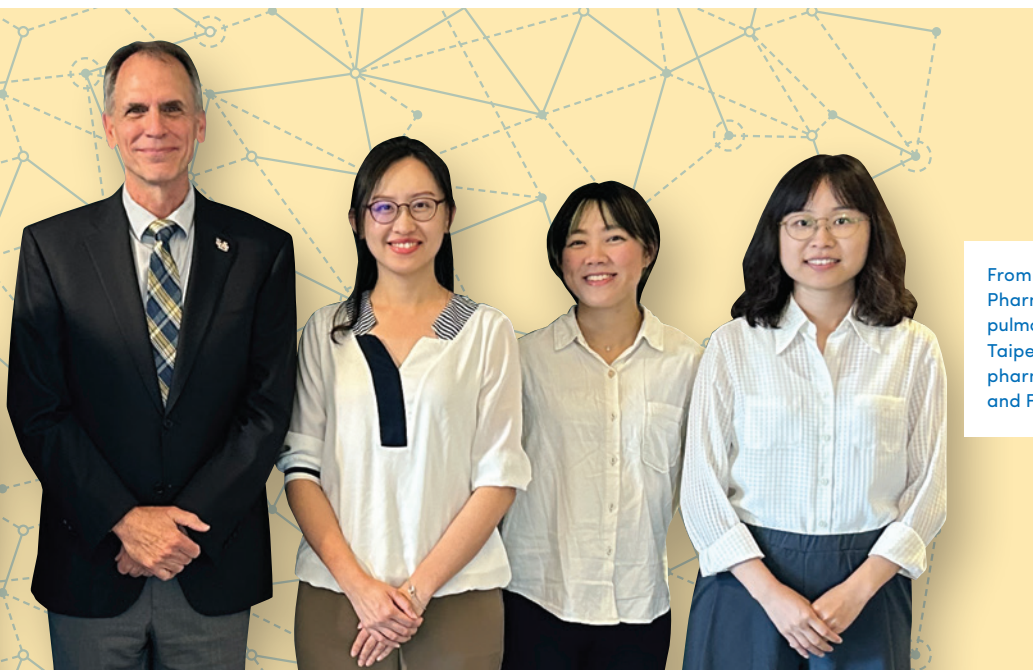
Taiwanese PharmDs Advance Studies at UB SPPS



PharmD students from TMU presenting research at UB SPPS during spring 2024 visit. L-R: Yi-Sin "Cynthia" Huang, I-Ching "Laura" Lai, Po-Yuan "Andrew" Chen, and En-ling "Ann" Chen.

PharmD students from TMU also gain valuable research and clinical shadowing experience at SPPS. Po-Yuan "Andrew" Chen and I-Ching "Laura" Lai visited SPPS for four weeks in spring 2024 to immerse themselves in completely new health care environments in the U.S.

Chen completed his Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE) exchange in Buffalo, splitting his rotation between working at Evergreen Health Clinic with Qing Ma, PharmD, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice, and in the pharmacy at Buffalo General Medical Center with Collin Clark, PharmD, clinical assistant professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice.



From L-R: Chi-Hua "Richard" Lu, PharmD, MS, Gina Prescott, PharmD, Gary Pollack, PhD, Wen-Chen "Irene" Lee, PharmD, pulmonary pharmacist at Taipei Municipal Wanfang Hospital in Taipei, Taiwan, Yen Jung "Annie" Chang, MS, infectious disease pharmacist at Shuang Ho Hospital in New Taipei City, Taiwan, and Fan-Ying Chan, PhD student at TMU.

“While working toward my PharmD, I was consistently impressed by the high standards and advancements in pharmacy practice I heard about in the U.S., especially in areas such as comprehensive medication management and collaborative patient care, which have set exemplary benchmarks in the field,” explains Chen. “My exchange experience at UB sparked a strong interest in clinical trials, alongside deepening my understanding of patient-centered care and effective communication.”

Chen graduated in 2024 from TMU, obtained his pharmacist license and is now a pharmacist at SHH in Taiwan.

In her second year of pharmacy school, Lai was inspired to visit UB during a presentation by a student who had participated in the program (and by the prospect of seeing Niagara Falls). During her shadowing rotation at SPPS, she worked at Jericho Road Community Health Center with Prescott and Christ Ange “Angel” Cellino, PharmD, MBA, clinical assistant professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice, and at Oishei Children’s Hospital with Nicholas Fusco, PharmD, division head, Division of Education and Teaching Innovation, and clinical professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice. What stood out most about her experiences were the cultural nuances present in attentive patient care.

“One unique aspect of my rotation was that it coincided with Ramadan, which really opened my eyes to how cultural practices can affect disease management,” says Lai. “I

remember Dr. Cellino taking extra time to ask patients about their fasting and mealtimes, then adjusting insulin doses based on their schedules since fasting can significantly impact blood glucose levels. It’s a perspective I hadn’t fully grasped back in Taiwan, where the society is more homogenous.”

Elevating Education and Clinical Research: New Fellows

En-Ling “Ann” Chen, PharmD, MPH, was a TMU PharmD exchange student who completed a four-week research rotation at SPPS in spring 2024 with David Jacobs, PharmD, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice. She went back to Taiwan to graduate, then returned to SPPS in August 2024 to begin a clinical pharmacy fellowship in public health with Jacobs, Prescott and Christopher Daly, PharmD, MBA, clinical associate professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice. Her fellowship project is designed to see how community pharmacy is uniquely positioned to connect people with community resources and services.

“Community pharmacists play an important role in helping people improve their outcomes,” says Chen. “This is why I like this fellowship so much—we focus on many different aspects, including clinical care, teaching and research, and it’ll allow me to see where my passions lie in this work.”

Hao-Wen “Steve” Hsu, PharmD, is also at SPPS for postdoctoral work. He began a

medication safety and health outcomes fellowship in September 2024. A TMU graduate, Hsu heard about the caliber of the pharmacy school from a UB alumnus he met during an international clinical rotation at Hartford Hospital in Connecticut.

Hsu’s fellowship research will focus on prescription concerns for elderly patients, including using database analysis to improve how clinicians identify which medication out of several prescriptions is causing a side effect, and adjusting meds to prevent side effects rather than prescribing additional medications to treat them.

Strengthening Ties with Colleagues in Taiwan

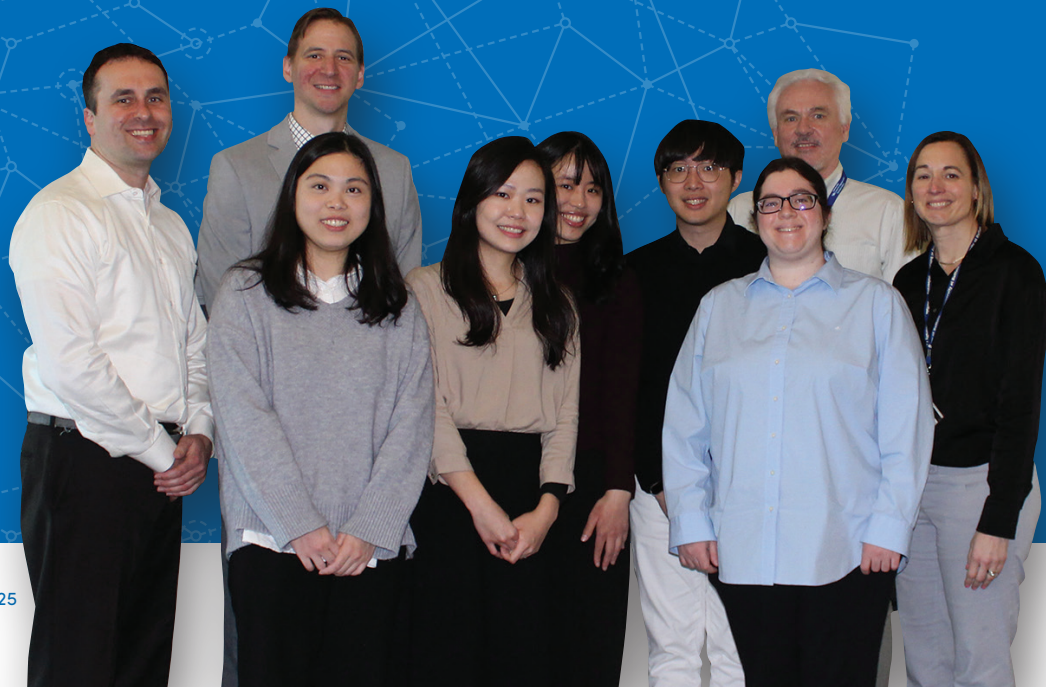
SPPS and TMU are currently working together to identify more opportunities for SPPS faculty to teach at TMU. Prescott and Lu have both spent time at TMU as visiting professors, an experience Prescott hopes more of her colleagues can have in the future.

“I would anticipate program growth,” explains Prescott. “Their institution is very involved in clinical pharmacy, and we’ve had discussions about cross-instructional clinical research as their pharmacy services become more robust.”

As UB broadens international opportunities for both students and faculty, the Buffalo-Taiwan exchange at SPPS will be key in setting an example for successful collaboration with global institutions.

PharmD students from TMU meeting with UB SPPS faculty and staff during spring 2024 visit.

L-R: David Jacobs, PharmD, PhD, Collin Clark, PharmD, Yi-Sin “Cynthia” Huang, En-ling “Ann” Chen, I-Ching “Laura” Lai, Po-Yuan “Andrew” Chen, Yael Marks, PharmD, Tim Hartigan, PhD, Gina Prescott, PharmD.



Pharmacy cohosts Rare Disease Day symposium



BY LAURIE KAISER

Feb. 29, the rarest of days, provides the perfect opportunity to spotlight rare diseases, which affect approximately 300 million people worldwide. Rare Disease Day is an international initiative aimed at raising awareness through patient experiences and advancing care and research.

Last year, the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, in collaboration with the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, hosted the Rare Disease Day symposium, “Care for Rare: From Bench to Bedside.”

Mary Riedy, PharmD, clinical assistant professor and the Margaret Hempling McGlynn Endowed Chair in Clinical Pharmacy in the Department of Pharmacy Practice, played a key role in organizing the event. Riedy works with a multidisciplinary team to treat patients with rare genetic and metabolic disorders and teaches an interprofessional course, Rare Genetic Disorders.

“You don’t have to be an expert in the field to encounter a patient with a rare disease,” Riedy explains. “It’s crucial for health professions students to understand the challenges faced by patients and caregivers, regardless of their future role or area of expertise.”



Pharmacy students and faculty at Rare Disease Day symposium.

The event featured opening remarks from Margaret Hempling McGlynn, BS '82, president of the Hempling Foundation for Homocystinuria (HCU) Research and co-founder and president of HCU Network America, and a discussion of rare disease research by Yeh-Hsing “Sima” Lao, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences.

UB also participated in the global “Light Up for Rare” campaign, illuminating landmarks in Buffalo in stripes of pink, green, blue and purple, the signature colors of Rare Disease Day.

UB SPPS Outstanding Research

Leading AACP 2023 Research Measures

#6

GROWTH RATE FOR SCHOOLS WITH \$10M+
(26% increase from FY 2022)

#9

FUNDING PER FUNDED INVESTIGATOR
(\$980K)

#12

FUNDING PER FACULTY FTE
(\$381K)

#21

OVERALL RESEARCH (5 SPOT INCREASE FROM FY 2022)

Refugee education sessions improve pharmacy education and health literacy



BY SAMANTHA NEBELECKY

Over the past year, the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences led several education sessions aimed at improving medical health literacy among newly arrived refugees in the United States.

Our Refugee Medication Health Literacy Program is one of the few programs in the country dedicated to educating displaced refugees on medication management through the use of culturally sensitive materials. This community-driven outreach initiative supports newly arrived refugees in Western New York, helping them navigate the U.S. health care system.

Small group sessions cover essential topics such as understanding medication side effects, interpreting medication labels, and determining pediatric dosing and proper use of dosing tools. Participants also have the opportunity to ask questions and feel more comfortable working with pharmacists.

“The program teaches our students how to work with patients who have limited health literacy, how to recognize their different needs, as well as how to work with an interpreter to understand different cultural perspectives on health,” says Gina Prescott, PharmD, director, global



Pharmacy students educating newly arrived refugees in Buffalo on medical health literacy.

and community outreach and clinical professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, who leads the sessions.

Looking ahead, Prescott plans to expand the program by collaborating further with the International Institute of Buffalo and English language schools in the Western New York region. Her goal is to introduce additional programming on topics that include preventative health and non-communicable diseases.

A photograph of four scientists standing in a laboratory. From left to right: a man in a light blue checkered shirt and glasses, a woman in a dark blue blazer over a white top, a man in a dark blue suit and glasses, and a man in a dark blue suit and glasses. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows laboratory equipment, shelves with bottles, and a clean, professional environment.

Lifesaving Science: How UB is Shaping the Future of Antibiotics

L-R: Nicholas Smith, PharmD, PhD, Yanan "Nancy" Zhao, MD, PhD, Liang Chen, MD, PhD, Brian Tsuji, PharmD.

The UB School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences is a leader in addressing global health challenges like antimicrobial resistance and infectious diseases. From pioneering antibiotic therapies to creating novel drug candidates, our school is at the forefront of clinical research and improving patient care.

To grow our leadership in antimicrobial research and therapeutics, SPPS established the Edelman Endowed Chair in Experimental Therapeutics last fall, supported by the late Linda Edelman, BS '66. Brian Tsuji, PharmD, professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, associate dean, Clinical and Translational Sciences, and division head, Division of Clinical and Translational Therapeutics (CTT), was named the inaugural chair. For details, see "Tsuji Named Edelman Endowed Chair in Experimental Therapeutics" on page 26.

The following stories highlight the efforts of our faculty and researchers driving progress in this critical field.

UB pharmacy professors developing antibiotics to fight resistant bacteria

Zhao awarded \$4M NIH grant to overcome growing number of health care infections

Each year, over 1 million infections occur in U.S. health care facilities, resulting in nearly 100,000 deaths and up to \$33 billion in excess costs, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Gram-negative bacteria are the primary culprits, increasingly resistant to antibiotics, explains Yanan “Nancy” Zhao, MD, PhD, professor of pharmacy practice in the Division of CTT.

Zhao is developing a novel antibiotic class called biamyxins (BMX) to address the urgent need for new treatments. “The antibiotic pipeline is nearly depleted, and options for multidrug-resistant infections are scarce,” says Zhao, an internationally renowned infectious disease and antimicrobial researcher leading high-impact federally funded research in drug discovery and development.

Last year Zhao was awarded a five-year, \$3.9 million NIH research grant—one of the largest ever for the pharmacy school. Liang Chen, MD, PhD, professor of pharmacy practice in the Division of CTT, is a co-investigator on the project. “This grant is critical for improving care for patients with resistant bacterial infections,” says Brian Tsuji, PharmD.

Biamyxins work by binding tightly to the bacterial outer membrane, allowing them to effectively kill bacteria, even those resistant to colistin, a last-resort antibiotic. Zhao’s team has made innovative structural designs to improve BMX’s efficacy against resistant gram-negative pathogens while reducing toxicity. “Renal toxicity is a major issue with polymyxin-class antibiotics,” Zhao

says. “We’re aiming to overcome that with our compounds.”

Preliminary results in rodents have been promising. The lead compound has demonstrated strong activity against resistant bacteria and low toxicity to human cells. “We’re optimistic about advancing to the investigational new drug enabling stage,” Zhao says, which is key for predicting safety and determining starting doses for clinical trials.

Smith lands \$3.6M grant to develop phages cocktail to fight bacteria

Team is investigating mix of viruses that are effective and less harmful to human cells

While pursuing dual doctoral degrees in pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences at the University at Buffalo, Nicholas Smith, PharmD, PhD, assistant professor of pharmacy practice, became interested in combining drugs to treat drug-resistant infections. His interest was sparked by the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance, which the World Health Organization warns could cause 10 million deaths and \$1 trillion in health care costs by 2050.

“I started to think about what the next frontier could look like,” says Smith.

“Bacteriophages, or phages, seem really interesting, and I thought they might be part of the future.”

Smith’s focus on phages, viruses that infect bacteria, led to a five-year, \$3.6 million research grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) for his project, “Pharmacokinetics and Pharmacodynamics of Mechanistically

Aware Phage Cocktails.” Smith is collaborating with Dwayne Roach, PhD, from San Diego State University, and UB co-investigators Liang Chen, MD, PhD, Gene Morse, PharmD, and Troy Wood, PhD,

to create effective phage cocktails.

Phages target bacteria precisely and are less harmful to human cells, but their use has been mostly experimental. “There are many unanswered questions about how phages work in the body and how to dose them effectively,” Smith says. Over five years, Smith’s team, including pharmacy students, will study how phages distribute in the body and how effective they are in treating infections.

“The urgency of finding new treatments for drug-resistant infections motivates our team. The potential of precise, effective phage therapy is exciting.”

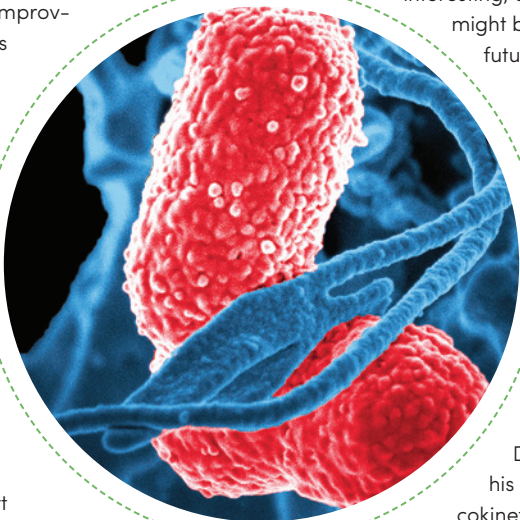
—Nicholas Smith, PharmD, PhD

Currently, phages are used only in compassionate cases where patients have no other options due to resistance, allergies, or toxicity. Smith’s team will study clinically successful phages to determine proper dosing. “These infections often affect vulnerable patients, such as those with COPD, cystic fibrosis, or cancer,” Smith says. “Treating the infection can be crucial to allowing other therapies to proceed.”

The team’s first phase is selecting and combining phages, followed by developing and testing cocktails and preparing for human trials using in vitro assays and computer modeling to determine optimal dosing. “With multiple phages, the combinations become complex. We need computational tools to guide our research,” Smith says.

Smith says he feels honored to lead this work. “The urgency of finding new treatments for drug-resistant infections motivates our team,” he says. “The potential of precise, effective phage therapy is exciting.”

Other team members include Thomas Nguyen, PharmD; Brian Ho, PharmD; Jacob Sanborn, BS; and pharmacy students Leeha Mahmood, Jingxiu Jin, Karishma Patel, Liem Nguyen, Yan Pan, Haniya Alam, and Claire Han.



SPPS AMCP wins multiple awards at 2024 AMCP Nexus

BY SAMANTHA NEBELECKY

The SPPS student chapter of the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy (AMCP) won several individual and chapter awards at the 2024 AMCP Nexus conference held in Las Vegas, Nevada. The SPPS AMCP student chapter promotes managed care pharmacy by applying evidence-based medication strategies to improve both member and population health outcomes while optimizing health care resources.



SPPS AMCP student chapter honored with 2024 AMCP Chapter of the Year Award at 2024 AMCP Nexus conference held in Las Vegas, NV. L-R: Brianna Bialy, PharmD/MBA '25, Macy Meng, PharmD/MBA '25, Emily Diep, PharmD/MBA '25, Xintian Wu, PharmD '26, Lokhay "Shelby" Chan, PharmD/MBA '25, Britney Yip, PharmD '25, and Ny Ako Ndrianjasoazanany, PharmD '26.

2024 AMCP Chapter of the Year Award

SPPS won the 2024 AMCP Chapter of the Year Award for the second consecutive year. This award recognizes student chapters that create innovative managed

care programming and make an impact on the managed pharmacy community. SPPS was recognized for hosting engaging events, including a managed care game night featuring activities like "The Price is Right" and "Is that a Drug or a Pokemon?" These activities sparked discussions on

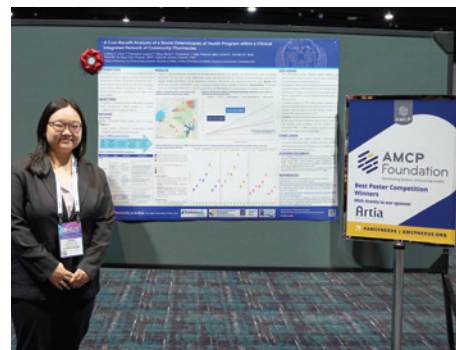
utilization management and the role of managed care in optimizing patient health. Along with the award, SPPS received a personalized plaque and a \$1,000 chapter grant.

AMCP Chapter Growth Challenge Winners

SPPS also took first-place in the AMCP Chapter Growth Challenge, awarded to the chapter with the highest increase in membership. SPPS achieved the largest membership growth among all student chapters for the 2023–2024 academic year, with a 196% increase. The award included a \$500 chapter grant, discounts on student admission to AMCP 2025 and discounts on a managed care certificate program for all chapter members.

Chan awarded AMCP Foundation 2024 Best Student Pharmacist Poster

Lokhay "Shelby" Chan, PharmD/MBA '25, won the AMCP Foundation 2024 Best Student Pharmacist Poster for her research, "A Cost-Benefit Analysis of a Social Determinants of Health Program within a Clinical Integrated Network of Community Pharmacies." The award recognizes research based on scientific merit, innovation and practicality. Chan's study concluded that social determinants of health (SDoH) screening and referral programs implemented in community pharmacies yield positive economic outcomes, demonstrating the value of integrating SDoH into clinical pharmacy services.



Lokhay "Shelby" Chan, PharmD/MBA '25, awarded AMCP Foundation 2024 Best Student Pharmacist Poster.

SPPS PHD SCHOLARS RECEIVE TOP-LEVEL UNIVERSITY RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT

BY REBECCA BRIERLEY

As one of the nation's top pharmaceutical sciences PhD programs, the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences proudly recognizes incoming PhD students who have received prestigious awards, fellowships and honors. These students will help support and drive cutting-edge research in such areas as drug discovery and development, biotherapeutics, and novel delivery systems.

"PhD students are the fuel that drives our research programs forward and represent a crucial component of our leadership in drug discovery and development," says Gary Pollack, PhD, dean, SPPS. "UB's support for graduate students, ranging from financial support to the provision of outstanding professional development opportunities, is key to the success of our students and, ultimately, our research agenda."

Kyle Lu

Lu is the recipient of multiple elite UB awards, including the Presidential Fellowship, Initiative for Maximizing Student Development Award and the SPPS Fung Laboratory Graduate Fellowship. These honors are awarded to only the highest-caliber students, preparing them for doctoral-level leadership across campus and across the academy.



"It is an honor to be a recipient of multiple prestigious awards. I am very excited to begin my program and explore research directions in drug discovery and development. I hope to use the awards I've received to establish myself as a well-rounded scientist and to create a positive environment for my peers around me." —Kyle Lu

Elizabeth Brown

Brown is the recipient of the Arthur A. Schomburg Fellowship, awarded to high-achieving doctoral students who have overcome challenges or obstacles in their pursuit of higher education.



"My prior research has focused on cellular senescence in cancer cells, but I am eager to transition to the field of pharmacogenetics. I am enthusiastic to start and confident that studying at this prestigious institution will enhance my academic and professional growth. The Schomburg Fellowship is a high honor, which will allow me to fully dedicate my time and energy to my coursework and future research." —Elizabeth Brown

Maxwell Ilnickis, Haoyang Zhang, Connor Hauff

Ilnickis, Zhang and Hauff are recipients of Graduate School Fellowships, which offer up to \$50,000 in funding to support outstanding graduate students.



"I chose SPPS as it was the birthplace of pharmacokinetics. My primary interest will be focusing on pharmacokinetic parameters of monoclonal antibodies. I hope I can synthesize new immunomodulating drugs during my time in this program and use these funds to advance my research." —Maxwell Ilnickis



"I hope to integrate myself in a lab supporting my interests of a more computational neuroscience background to help create new pharmaceutical treatments for neuro disorders. I am looking forward to the numerous opportunities this program offers in gaining both industry and research-based skills, while allowing me to learn and grow." —Haoyang Zhang



"I am very thankful to receive this fellowship and am excited about the opportunities and experiences available at UB. I am looking forward to expanding my knowledge of pharmaceutical sciences, specifically in the area of drug delivery." —Connor Hauff

Perri receives AFPE Pre-Doctoral Research Fellowship in Pharmaceutical Sciences

BY SAMANTHA NEBELECKY

Jonathan Perri, PhD student, has been awarded the American Foundation for Pharmaceutical Education (AFPE) predoctoral research fellowship in pharmaceutical sciences.

The fellowship supports exceptional students who demonstrate the potential to become leaders in the pharmaceutical industry, academia, government and nonprofit sectors. Awardees submit research proposals that are evaluated based on their research plan, experience,



academic performance and leadership qualities.

Perri's research project proposal, "Nanoparticle-Based Approaches to Generate Integrated Immune Responses in Immune Deficient Solid Tumors," focused on creating more effective immunotherapies for solid cancers. His project involved developing targeted lipid nanoparticle drug carriers that engage both immune cell and tumor cell surface markers to encourage their association.

"The ultimate goal of my project is to improve the effectiveness of immune-based anticancer therapy in solid cancers," says Perri. "To achieve this, I propose that ligand-targeted nanoparticle drug carriers loaded with immune-stimulatory drugs can promote the invasion of cytotoxic immune cells into solid tumors, while also engaging anticancer activity directly through nanoparticle targeting ligand binding."

Perri's proposal was selected for its research plan feasibility, approach and his demonstrated academic leadership. He was awarded a \$10,000 stipend to support his PhD studies.

Pharmacy students make a difference during medical trips abroad

BY SAMANTHA NEBELECKY

For Livia Chase, PharmD '24, participating in a medical trip to Ghana was a meaningful experience that reinforced the importance of providing compassionate patient care.

"This medical outreach trip to Ghana taught me so much more than just how to provide medical care to individuals," says Chase. "This trip helped push me out of my comfort zone and reinforced the importance of patient sensibility in my eyes."

Chase was one of several PharmD students from SPPS who participated in short-term global health experiences in Ghana and Belize during their January 2024 winter break. Our Global Health Initiatives program, now in its 11th year, offers students invaluable hands-on experience beyond the classroom.

These short-term global health experiences are an annual collaboration among UB's health sciences schools, giving pharmacy students the opportunity to work alongside students from medical, nursing, dental and public health programs, learning the importance of interprofessional teamwork in delivering quality health care.

Katherine Beikirch, PharmD '26, who participated in the trip to Belize, reflects, "My experience in Belize was eye-opening and I learned more in a few days than I could have possibly learned in school. I am now more confident working with an interdisciplinary team and with patients of diverse backgrounds."

Pharmacy students preparing medication in Belize.



Olivia Chase, PharmD '24 (center), counseling patient in Ghana.



SPPS Learning and Engagement Communities establish official houses

BY SAMANTHA NEBELECKY

In spring 2024, the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences officially established six Learning and Engagement Communities (LEC) to enhance student belonging.

Our SPPS LECs and their respective houses create supportive environments in which students, faculty and staff collaborate to explore the profession of pharmacy, build

connections outside the classroom, and access valuable resources, advice and social activities.

Each house focuses on fostering relationships, supporting well-being and promoting both personal and professional growth.

Our LECs were created in response to feedback emphasizing the need for more opportunities for student-faculty interaction outside the classroom. The six new LEC houses—Legacy, Advocacy, Virtue, Humanity, Integrity

and Equity—are each named after a core tenet of the Oath of a Pharmacist, the pledge of professionalism that serves as an ethical compass for pharmacists throughout their careers. The houses are distinguished by unique colors and led by SPPS student house leaders.

Overall UB SPPS LEC House logo.

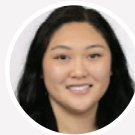


Student Accomplishments

Passion and opportunity often pave the way to success. We celebrate the hard work and remarkable achievements of our students and recent graduates, along with the collaborative efforts that make these accomplishments possible. Here are just a few of our standout students.



Shufang Liu, PhD '24, recognized by the Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences as an Outstanding Early Career Scientist for 2024.



Macy Meng, PharmD/MBA '25, selected for the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy Student Pharmacy Program sponsored by Gilead Sciences, Inc.



Nicole Kayrala, PharmD '26, elected regional delegate for Region 1 of the American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Student Pharmacists.



Martha Balthasar, BS '24, recipient of a UB Excellence in Research, Scholarship and Creativity award for her project titled, "Predicting Clinical Monoclonal Antibody Disposition via Physiologically Based Pharmacokinetic (PBPK) Modeling Incorporating Bivalent Bonding."



Desiree Herman, PharmD '26, elected midyear regional meeting coordinator for Region 1 of the American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Student Pharmacists.



Bao Ly, PhD student, recipient of a UB Excellence in Research, Scholarship and Creativity award for his project titled, "Cytotoxic Evaluation of Uncharacterized Alkaloids and Semisynthetic Pyranoacridone Alkaloids for Antitumor Activities."



Sophia Osmond, PharmD '25 (left) and **Kaitlyn Healy, PharmD '25 (right)** winners of the SPPS American Society of Health System-Pharmacists Clinical Skills Competition sponsored by the Student Society of Health-System Pharmacists.



Amanda Kocher, PharmD '26, first-place winner of the SPPS American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Student Pharmacists Annual Patient Counseling Competition.



Kaitlyn Vu, PharmD '27, second-place winner of the SPPS American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Student Pharmacists Annual Patient Counseling Competition.

Hoefer named SUNY Online Teaching Ambassador

BY UB NOW STAFF

Carrie Hoefer, PhD, MBA, associate dean, Undergraduate and Online Pharmacy Programs, was named a SUNY Online Teaching Ambassador for 2024.

This designation recognizes SUNY faculty members who are “exemplary online educators, who are enthusiastic and effective in online teaching, and who can be positive and strong advocates for online teaching in our SUNY community.”



Nominated by Jennifer Rosenberg, PhD, associate dean for student success and engagement and director of admissions, Hoefer

was one of several SUNY faculty members honored as Online Teaching Ambassadors at the SUNY Online Summit, held Feb. 28–29, 2024.

Hoefer joined the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in 2023 to help develop our online programs. She leads the development, implementation, marketing and evaluation of our online bachelor’s and master’s degree programs, focusing on strategic online course development and course content. Additionally, she supports faculty members in developing online curricula and assists with school-wide assessment efforts to evaluate online program outcomes and growth.

This past year, Hoefer successfully launched our first online degree program—a two-year online version of the pharmacometrics and pharmacotherapy graduate program—and two online pharmaceutical sciences micro-credential programs designed for both UB and nondegree students, the first online versions of micro-credential programs offered at the university.

Faculty Leaders

Our faculty members are dedicated to fostering collaboration and advancing pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences. We proudly recognize those appointed to key leadership roles at the university and in prominent professional organizations, and we look forward to the impact they will have on both the national and global stages.



1. Donald Mager, PharmD, PhD, chair and professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, appointed vice president of the International Pharmaceutical Federation.



2. Nicole Cieri-Hutcherson, PharmD, assistant director, experiential education and clinical associate professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, elected president of the New York State Council of Health-system Pharmacists.



3. Nicholas Fusco, PharmD, division head, Division of Education and Teaching Innovation and clinical professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, appointed interim executive director for interprofessional education for UB Health Sciences, serving from February to October 2024.



4. Ashley Woodruff, PharmD, director of interprofessional education and clinical associate professor, Department of Pharmacy, elected chair of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Technology in Pharmacy Education and Practice Special Interest Group.



5. Collin Clark, PharmD, clinical assistant professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, inducted as chair of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy Geriatrics Practice and Research Network.



6. Nicole Albanese, PharmD, assistant dean for student success and engagement and clinical associate professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, inducted as chair-elect of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy Endocrine and Metabolism Practice and Research Network.

Tsuji Named Edelman Endowed Chair in Experimental Therapeutics

New Endowment to Advance Groundbreaking Research in Antimicrobial Research and Patient-Centered Therapeutics

BY REBECCA BRIERLEY



The School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences is proud to announce the establishment of the Edelman Endowed Chair in Experimental Therapeutics, made possible through the generous support of the late Linda Edelman, BS '66.

Edelman was a devoted pharmacist who wished for her legacy to provide sustained support for the advancement of pharmacy practice. The newly endowed chair will lead cutting-edge scientific research focused on accelerating the discovery of novel therapeutic agents into effective treatments for antimicrobial resistance (AMR)—a growing global health threat recognized by the World Health Organization. This strategic investment aims to drive innovative research to bridge the development of novel treatments and catalyze drug development to treat AMR and other infectious diseases.

Brian Tsuji, PharmD, professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, associate dean, clinical and translational sciences, and division head, Division of Clinical and Translational Therapeutics, has been appointed the inaugural holder of the Edelman Endowed Chair in Experimental Therapeutics. A leading expert in infectious disease treatment, Tsuji is internationally renowned for his groundbreaking work in developing innovative antibiotic therapeutics to improve patient care. He is currently the principal investigator on two \$3.8 million National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants studying AMR. His laboratory has pioneered key pharmacokinetic-pharmacodynamic relationships for a multitude of antibiotics, guiding dose selection in Phase 1, 2 and 3 clinical trials that were instrumental in bringing these drugs to market and defining their clinical use.

Tsuji expressed his gratitude for the appointment, saying, "I am so very grateful to Linda for supporting the school and my research team's work. We will now be

able to make critical new strides in solving bottlenecks in infectious diseases and devise novel solutions for patients who have no treatment options—this is the work that drives us."

The appointment will further elevate Tsuji's work in supporting an emerging UB research center: The Center of Infectious Diseases Next Generation Therapeutics (IDagen). Tsuji and research leaders from across the university are joining forces to launch this new center, which will lead to the discovery of novel therapies to combat emerging pathogens and improve patient outcomes. Coupled with a variety of new NIH R01 research grants led by IDagen faculty, the creation of this center aims to position UB and SPPS at the

"We will now be able to make critical new strides in solving bottlenecks in infectious diseases and devise novel solutions for patients who have no treatment options—this is the work that drives us."

—Brian Tsuji, PharmD

forefront of infectious disease research and establish it to become a national research hub for infectious disease therapeutics.

Tsuji acknowledges these strategic endeavors would not be possible without the support of Dean Pollack, the dedicated faculty and staff at SPPS and the hard work of his talented team of students and laboratory scientists. He is especially grateful to his mentors, including Alan Forrest, PharmD, a renowned pharmacometrician and former SPPS faculty member.

SPPS and the university are profoundly grateful to Linda Edelman for making it possible to advance critical research in AMR and patient-centered therapeutics.

Robinson receives SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Professional Service

BY UBNOW STAFF

Sara Robinson, PhD, director of undergraduate advisement and recruitment, is the recipient of a 2024 State University of New York (SUNY) Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Professional Service.



This prestigious award recognizes exceptional professional staff members who demonstrate a sustained commitment to excellence, continuously striving to improve themselves, their campuses and ultimately, the State University of New York.

Robinson advises approximately 400 pre-pharmacy and pre-

pharmaceutical sciences students, guiding them on academic guidelines, university policies, admission requirements and transitional life challenges. She is also responsible for maintaining the UB Learns pre-pharmacy advising portal, coordinating combined-degree programs with other schools, recruiting faculty to mentor first-year students and organizing open house events for prospective students.

Robinson's dedication to student success and professional development has earned her numerous accolades, including the SPPS Staff Member of the Year Award and the SPPS Educator of the Year Award, among others.

Daly and Jacobs recognized with IPRO Quality Award

BY SAMANTHA NEBELECKY

Christopher Daly, PharmD, MBA, and David Jacobs, PharmD, PhD, along with their team, were honored with a 2024 IPRO Quality Award for their innovative Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) pharmacy program implemented within New York Community Pharmacy Enhanced Services Network member pharmacies.



IPRO's Quality Awards recognize health care providers and stakeholders in New York State for exceptional health care quality improvement projects developed in partnership with the IPRO Quality Innovation Network-Quality Improvement Organization.

Their project, titled "Effectiveness of a Social Determinants of Health Pharmacy Program Implemented in

Community Pharmacies," aimed to broaden the role of community pharmacies in addressing public health issues by incorporating SDoH screenings and referrals into pharmacy services. From January to December 2023, the team conducted more than 1,000 screenings, with 64% of those taking place in rural areas across the state. The program demonstrated a high efficiency rate and a 26% resolution referral rate. Common social needs identified included food insecurity, housing instability and health care access.

Their project provided valuable insights into the growing potential of community pharmacies to improve public health by addressing SDoH, especially in underserved areas. It also highlighted how pharmacy interventions can enhance health care delivery and promote health equity.



Mager honored with lifetime award from International Society of Pharmacometrics

BY LAURIE KAISER

DONALD MAGER, PHARM.D, PH.D, chair and professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, has been honored with the 2024 Lewis B. Sheiner Lecturer Award from the International Society of Pharmacometrics (ISoP).

Established in 2008, the Sheiner Award recognizes exceptional and outstanding lifetime career achievements and leadership in the field of pharmacometrics. It is the society's highest recognition.

A research leader in systems pharmacology and pharmacodynamics, Mager was presented with the award during the 2024

American Conference on Pharmacometrics held in Phoenix, Arizona. As the Sheiner awardee, he also delivered a lecture on pharmacometrics.

"We are immensely proud of Don for receiving this prestigious award," said Gary Pollack, PhD, dean of the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. "His career-long contributions in pharmacokinetics, pharmacodynamics and systems pharmacology have supported

the development of important therapeutic agents and advanced the discipline of pharmacometrics more broadly. Don's innovative scholarship and dedication to educating the pharmaceutical science leaders of the future will have a lasting impact on drug discovery and development for years to come."

Throughout his career, Mager has made significant contributions to theoretical concepts and mathematical models for target-mediated drug disposition, signal transduction and combinatorial therapeutics, with a focus on anticancer and immunomodulatory agents.

This past year, he was appointed vice president of the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), a global organization dedicated to advancing pharmacy, pharmaceutical sciences and pharmaceutical education. As vice president he will serve a 4-year term, working with the FIP Board of Pharmaceutical Sciences to achieve its strategic goals and advance its mission.

"Don's innovative scholarship and dedication to educating the pharmaceutical science leaders of the future will have a lasting impact on drug discovery and development for years to come."

—Gary Pollack, PhD, dean

Mager has also served on the board of directors/regents of ISoP and the American College of Clinical Pharmacology (ACCP), and has held significant leadership roles at the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists (AAPS) and the American Society for Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics (ASCPT).

Additionally, Mager has served on the Pharmaceutical Sciences and Clinical Pharmacology Advisory Committee of the Food and Drug Administration, is an associate editor of *Pharmaceutical Research* and is on the editorial advisory boards of several journals. He has contributed articles to more than 180 peer-reviewed publications and book chapters. He is a former president of ISoP and ACCP and a fellow of ISoP, ACCP, AAPS and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).





IN MEMORIAM: **Kruszynski leaves behind legacy of service and dedication**

BY SAMANTHA NEBELECKY

MARY KRUSZYNSKI, beloved friend and staff member at SPPS for 24 years, passed away on Sept. 4, 2024, at the age of 65. She leaves behind a legacy of service, compassion and dedication.

A member of the SPPS staff since 2000, Kruszynski began her SPPS career as an administrative assistant for the nontraditional PharmD Program, where she supported all aspects of residency and fellowship activities in the Office of Post Graduate Education. In 2022, she was promoted to business operations coordinator in the Office of Finance and Administration. In this role, she supported school-wide business and operational areas, including finance, procurement, human resources and research administration.

“I had the pleasure of knowing Mary for over 20 years,” says Kristin Gniazdowski, senior assistant dean, finance and administration. “She was a dedicated professional who consistently excelled and provided exceptional service in everything she did. Mary was warm and generous, and she will be deeply missed as both a friend and colleague.”

Kruszynski was a passionate supporter and advocate for the Alzheimer’s Association and for 8 years served as a liaison and member of the steering committee for the UB Employees Campaign for the Community/SEFA. In 2019, she received the Unsung Hero Award for the UB Employees Campaign in recognition of her vital and significant work behind the scenes. In 2023, she received the prestigious William R. Greiner SEFA Award given in memory of the late UB President William R. Greiner. This award honors an individual who demonstrates the same commitment and passion for the UB Employees Campaign for the Community/SEFA as did President Greiner.

“She was a dedicated professional who consistently excelled and provided exceptional service in everything she did.”

—Kristin Gniazdowski



Mike Levitt, BS '75 (left) meeting with members of UB Chapter of Industry Pharmacists Organization (IPhO) at SPPS in spring 2024. **Top row, L-R:** Mike Levitt, BS '75, Nina Zheng, PharmD '27, Sean Kawa, PharmD '27. **Bottom row, L-R:** Yuzhe (Leo) Zhang, PharmD '27, Klaudi Lekaj, PharmD '27, Euibeom (Paul) Shin, PharmD '26.

Pharmacist by training, engineer by experience

BY JUDSON MEAD

After what he calls a “satisfying and challenging” career in pharmaceutical manufacturing, Mike Levitt, BS '75, has this good word for pharmacy students: “The PharmD degree is an incredible foundation for a career that can go in a thousand directions.” He’s been there.

And thanks to Levitt and his wife, Pam, BA '74, from now on, a PharmD student at UB with need who is active in the community will benefit from the scholarship they’ve established this year with a generous endowment.

In 1975, Mike Levitt was finishing his BS in pharmacy and working at Benson’s Pharmacy on Kenmore Avenue not far from the UB South Campus. He was newly married and planning to get a doctorate in education to develop and do research in continuing education for pharmacists and other health professionals. But New York State eliminated the money he was counting on for a graduate stipend.

So when a visiting speaker from Eli Lilly told him he’d make a good salesman, Levitt changed plans. A decade and a half later he was running three Lilly production plants in Puerto Rico.

He had been a pharmacist in the making—with a few stops and starts—from the age of 13 when he went to work in a neighborhood drugstore on Burnside Avenue in Bronx, New York.

“I sold cosmetics, I helped count out tablets and capsules,” he says. The pharmacy, at least then, was an important community fixture. “It was a place where you got advice on how to use medications and other health matters.”

Levitt enrolled at the City College of New York with the idea that he’d go to medical school. But he was not, in his words, “ready for college.” He drew a winning number in the 1969 Selective Service lottery and, not protected by a college deferment, enlisted in the Army where he trained as a

mechanic to work on tanks and later worked in nuclear decontamination.

After completing his active duty (he continued to serve in the National Guard for another 14 years), Levitt enrolled at the Columbia University School of Pharmacy (no longer with Columbia University). When the school announced that it would be closing, he and a few classmates transferred to UB. He met Robert Cooper who taught pharmacy practice and who became his mentor. “I learned how to be a professional from Bob Cooper,” Levitt says.

A few years later, when he was calling on an account for Lilly at the Robert Parker Hospital in Sayre, Pennsylvania, a patient there developed a critical need for a unique concentration of insulin that was available only from Lilly in Indianapolis. Lilly immediately sent one of its corporate jets to deliver the medication the next day at no cost.

“Lilly’s culture formed my guiding vision—responsibility to the patient,” he says.

In 1977, Lilly offered Levitt a job in its growing toxicology division. “I’m not sure I could have spelled toxicology,” Levitt says of this move out of sales. But the assignment opened doors. “This was where I learned how to write and where I learned how to direct other people. Lilly had great mentors.”

He did a tour of duty in Lilly’s human resources, which he describes as an introduction to Lilly’s management culture, and then moved into manufacturing.

Levitt was eventually overseeing five plants with some 1,000 production and technical workers when Lilly asked him to oversee the reduction of their European workforce. He couldn’t bring himself to do it.

So he left for another company. “I was probably the first person in manufacturing to leave Lilly before retirement.” It had been a good home.

He held corporate officer positions in a succession of pharmaceutical companies until his wife, Pam, who was then living in the couple’s 14th house, forcefully suggested they not move again. So they stayed where they’d landed, outside Atlanta, Georgia, and Levitt became a consultant.

For 20 years he strategized, trained, coached and managed domestic and international companies in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. He retired in 2023.

Today, Mike Levitt calls himself “a pharmacist by training and an engineer by experience.” When he surveys the pharmacy world today from an engineering perspective, he thinks fully automated pharmaceutical manufacturing is the next big development. But as a pharmacist, he is troubled that the current model in retail pharmacy isn’t as personal as it was when he started his career.

“We’re in unique times with RNA vaccines and cell therapy,” he says, “but still the majority of patients don’t know how to keep themselves healthy.” He sees the need for pharmacies to restore communication and counseling—to reestablish community relationships—in order to improve health outcomes.



That the scholarship Mike and Pam Levitt have endowed will go to a student who is active in the community is a step in that direction.

L-R: Priya Karintholil, PharmD '26, President, IPhO, UB Chapter, Klaudi Lekaj, PharmD '26, President-Elect, IPhO, UB Chapter, Mike Levitt, BS '75.



UB Pharmacy Class of 1988 honoring Ann Duquin at 2023 alumni reunion

The best friend

BY JUDSON MEAD

In early 2025, a UB PharmD student who has demonstrated a commitment to the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences and the profession of pharmacy through active participation and leadership in student organizations will be named as the first recipient of the Ann Duquin scholarship. This worthy student will have the outline of a large heart to fill.

Ann Duquin was a member of the SPPS class of 1988, when she was Ann Schuler. She was a community pharmacist for most of her career. Her last job was as an overnight pharmacist at Walgreens on the corner of North Street and Delaware Avenue, in downtown Buffalo, seven nights on, seven nights off. She was the mother of three girls, an organizer of adventures, a Girl Scout troop leader in her “free” time, someone, as a friend puts it, with endless energy who always ready for new experiences. Sadly, she died in July 2023. She was 57.

Right away, her closest pharmacy classmates and others raised the funds to endow the scholarship memorializing Ann.

Early in their first year of pharmacy study, the Class of 1988 elected officers to serve for the three years of their program. Rob DiCenzo was elected president, Steve Piscitelli as vice president and Ann Schuler as secretary-treasurer.

She was also editor of the class yearbook, an ever-present photographer, active in Kappa Psi, the pharmaceutical fraternity.

DiCenzo is now dean of the School of Pharmacy in the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. Piscitelli is vice president for clinical development at Dermavant Sciences in Hillsborough, North Carolina.

She was the one who made sure things worked. “Rob and I would have great ideas,”

Steve Piscitelli says with a laugh. “Like, let’s sell T-shirts, let’s sell candy. But it was always Ann who got it done.” The three were the kernel of a group of friends whose bonds never loosened.

Terry Fullerton, ’88, shared a house with DiCenzo and Piscitelli, making him an almost-charter member of the core group. Now a vice president and clinical development team leader with Pfizer in Groton, Connecticut, he played in a bar band for several years with Ann’s first husband, tightening the bonds.

When Terry Fullerton started dating his future wife Christina Schulz, ’96, she joined the core friends who were still in Buffalo.

The Fullertons moved to Philadelphia in 1998 but they and Ann stayed in each other’s lives. Terry is the godfather of Ann’s second daughter. Ann was the godmother to Terry and Christina’s daughter. She was Aunt Ann to the Fullerton children. The families visited back and forth every year. Their children grew up together.

The original core group—Ann, Steve, Rob, Terry, spouses, children—vacationed together regularly. Ann and Christina, who has also spent most of her career in community pharmacy, talked constantly about the challenges in their

work and the changing environment for community pharmacy.

“She was the sister I never had,” Christina says. “She was a ton of fun. Life with her was never boring!” Linda DiCenzo ’88, says that when she and Ann achieved the status, they celebrated being grandmothers.

For all that, “Ann was not touchy-feely,” Terry says. “She could be brutally honest.” And resilient. In the face of vicissitudes in her life, she would say, “Yeah, so there’s that,” Christina remembers as an emblem of Ann’s strength.

Bernadette Thomas, ’89, a close Buffalo friend, remembers fun in the everyday details of their lives—how she and Ann and a third friend in their early days working together at a Fay’s Drug were known as the “Trio of Trouble.” How she and Ann once sat at a bus stop watching the buses pass, waiting for one displaying a health care advertisement featuring a photo of Ann’s children. Being close.

The Fullertons were packing for a trip to visit Ann in July of 2023 when she died. She’d been seriously ill for a year. Her funeral was filled with her friends. They spent the rest of that day at her home as she would have wished, reliving their pasts together in the photographs in Ann’s neat archives.

Terry and Christina wanted to create a lasting memorial for Ann. Terry discussed their idea with Steve Piscitelli who had endowed a scholarship a few years

before. Steve wanted to be part of the effort. Terry and Christina pledged to make it happen.

Steve pledged to help.

“We’ve been blessed with good fortune and it was the pharmacy school that set us up for success,” Terry says.

They also wanted to open up the fundraising to other class members who were friends or had fond memories of Ann from pharmacy school.

As it happened the fall of 2023 was their 35th class reunion. It was a bittersweet time. The returning Class of 1988 gathered for a group picture around a portrait of Ann. Terry let everyone know about the possibility of creating an endowment in Ann’s name. The class responded. A year later the endowment is in place.

Now, with the inauguration of the scholarship in her name, Ann Duquin will live not only in the hearts of her friends but in the future of a special UB pharmacy student every year—one she would surely have liked.



MAXIMIZE YOUR UB IMPACT WITH TAX-SMART GIVING OPTIONS

You can make a difference for UB's School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences and do something good for your family!

Including UB in your will is a meaningful way to have an impact! There are also other ways to support the school.

Consider these options:

- Donate appreciated stock to avoid capital gain taxes
- Make a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) from your IRA to reduce your tax obligation
- Establish a charitable gift annuity and receive guaranteed income for life

Learn how your gift can make an impact today.

Contact us: dev-pg@buffalo.edu or 877-825-3422.



UB Pharmacy alum and disability advocate discusses inclusive practices in pharmacy

BY SAMANTHA NEBELECKY

Kruti Shah, PharmD '11, clinical operations pharmacist, RUSH University Medical Center, visited SPPS in spring 2024 as part of our PharmDiverse Speaker Series, which focuses on advancing equity, diversity and inclusion within pharmacy and the pharmaceutical sciences.

Diagnosed with bilateral hearing loss at a young age, Shah is a passionate advocate for individuals with disabilities, working to raise

awareness and promote disability-affirming care within the pharmacy profession.

Shah's presentation, "Ableism to Advocacy: Making an Impact and Roundtable Discussion," discussed her work with Docs with Disabilities, an initiative aimed at changing perceptions, policies and procedures related to disability in health professions. The initiative focuses on creating inclusive educational environments for trainees with disabilities and increasing the representation of disabled clinicians and scientists in the biomedical workforce.

Following her presentation, Shah participated in a roundtable discussion with faculty from the Department of Pharmacy Practice and students, focusing on inclusive practices for individuals with disabilities. Her visit left a lasting impact, inspiring our SPPS community to embrace diversity and champion inclusivity within the field of pharmacy.



Kruti Shah, PharmD '11 (top left) leading roundtable discussion on inclusive practices in pharmacy with SPPS faculty, staff and students.



Lasezkay receives UB Distinguished Alumni Award

BY SUZANNE CREAN

George Lasezkay, BS '74, PharmD '78, was honored with a 2024 University at Buffalo Distinguished Alumni Award. This award is given to alumni who have made a significant impact on the university at large and also to the programs and students at the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences.

Lasezkay is the president and chief executive officer of Clearside Biomedical Inc., a company focused on treating retinal disorders using suprachoroidal drug delivery. In 2021, his company received FDA approval for the first and only ophthalmic drug product to be approved for suprachoroidal administration.

For eight years he provided strategic direction to key UB Pharmacy School initiatives through his service on the Dean's Advisory Council, and he was instrumental in contributing to the development of curricular offerings to support our PharmD/JD degree.

Lasezkay was recognized at the UB Alumni Association Achievement Awards Ceremony in October 2024.

THANKS A BILLION!

One historic campaign, over 82,000 donors and more than \$1 billion

The University at Buffalo is celebrating the largest fundraising campaign in university history! Because of the generosity of alumni, donors and friends, more UB students will realize their dreams. More faculty will discover solutions to complex challenges. And UB will continue to change our world for the better. Learn more at buffalo.edu/campaign.

**BOLDLY
BUFFALO**
THE CAMPAIGN FOR UB



Office of Communications
288 Pharmacy Building
Buffalo, NY 14214-8033

Best Pharmacy Schools

U.S. News & World Report 2024 Pharmacy Rankings

TOP **20**
No. **1** NYS