The UHCOP Chapter of the Industry Pharmacists Organization (IPhO) earned the “Top Overall Chapter” title for the 2022-23 academic year at the national organization’s 2023 Annual Meeting Sept. 8-10.

In addition to its dominating chapter win with 21 out of a possible 22 points in the IPhO Recognition of Chapter Activity Programs, the chapter also earned “Best Practices” honors for its fundraising and social media programs.

During the year, the chapter hosted networking, mock interview and summer internship workshops as well as talks with industry professionals and current interns/fellows from such organizations as Amgen, Eli Lilly, EMD Serono, GSK, Ipsen, Novartis/TJU, Novo Nordisk and Precision-VALUE.

Chapter members also traveled to Fort Worth to tour the facilities of Alcon and sent Valentine’s Day cards to residents of a Houston senior center.

The chapter’s “Social Media Best Practices” included high-quantity, high-quality posts about chapter activities, industry insights and job openings as well as sharing posts from the national accounts. Among its "Fundraising Best Practices" were selling chapter T-shirts – at a net profit of 85% – to help fund activities and guest speaker honoraria and hosting international food sales that also promoted cultural awareness.

The University of Houston is an EEO/AA institution.
College Appoints First Assistant Dean for Assessment and Accreditation

Brian Dzwonek, Ed.D., has been appointed as college’s first assistant dean for assessment and accreditation.

His responsibilities include the design, development and implementation of strategies, tools, and processes to assess student academic performance, faculty teaching effectiveness, course effectiveness, and overall effectiveness of the Pharm.D. program in compliance with the college’s Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education accreditation.

Dzwonek earned a bachelor’s degree in biology from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. He earned a Master of Education degree from South Dakota State University, followed by a Doctor of Education degree from the University of South Dakota. Before joining UHCOP, he served as the assistant dean for assessment and quality improvement at the University of Houston Tilman J. Fertitta Family College of Medicine.

Pharmacy Month Extravaganza

In celebration of American Pharmacists Month and National Pharmacy Week, members of multiple UHCOP organizations showcased the skills and knowledge pharmacists bring to the community during the Pharmacy Extravaganza on the UH campus Friday, Oct. 20. Organizations’ members educated over 300 fellow UH students on health topics such as HPV, medication safety, smoking cessation, and kidney and heart health. In addition, Pharm.D. students distributed Narcan, administered seasonal flu immunizations, and conducted blood pressure and blood glucose screenings.

Jacob McPherson, Pharm.D. (’21), Ph.D. candidate, has been selected as the 2023-24 fellow of the Gulf Coast Consortia T32 Texas Medical Center Post-Doctoral Program in Antimicrobial Resistance. Professor Kevin Garey, Pharm.D., M.S., FASHP, FIDSA, FCCP, serves as McPherson’s graduate advisor.

ThinhPhuong Le, Pharm.D. (’17), Ph.D. student, has been awarded a one-year, $76,727 Postdoctoral Biomedical Informatics and Data Science Fellowship from National Library of Medicine (NLM) for her project, “Resistance Development to C. difficile RNA Polymerase Antibiotics.” Le is working under the mentorship of UHCOP Professor Kevin Garey and Rice University Professor Todd Treangen, Ph.D.

The UHCOP Rho Chi Society Beta Omicron Chapter welcomed Sarah Lake-Wallace, Pharm.D., M.S., FTSHP, director of medication safety at Memorial Hermann Health System, as the 2023 Robert L. Boblitt Lecturer Oct. 23. Lake-Wallace presented “Accidents and Inspirations Lead You to Your Destination – Creating Pharmacy Care through Creativity and Humility.”

Nine faculty members have received promotions, effective Sept. 1: Bernadette Asias-Dinh, Pharm.D., clinical associate professor; Krishna Boini, Ph.D., associate professor with tenure; Austin De La Cruz, Pharm.D., clinical associate professor; Kimberly Nguyen, Pharm.D., clinical associate professor; Alexander Statsyuk, Ph.D., associate professor with tenure; Meghna Trivedi, Pharm.D., Ph.D., professor with tenure; Gomika Udugamasooriya, Ph.D., professor with tenure; Matthew Wanat, Pharm.D., clinical professor; and Yang Zhang, Ph.D., professor with tenure.

Austin De La Cruz, Pharm.D., BCPP, clinical associate professor, has been recognized by the American College of Clinical Pharmacy’s Series Editors of the Ambulatory Care Self-Assessment Program for his work as a contributing author on the series.

Julianna Fernandez, Pharm.D., BCPS, BCGP, clinical associate professor, presented “Incorporating Social Services for a Holistic Approach to Pain Management in the Older Adult,” in the Geriatric Practice Research Network sessions at the American College of Clinical Pharmacy 2023 Annual Meeting Nov. 11-14 in Dallas.

Natalie Rosario, Pharm.D., MPH, BCACP, clinical assistant professor, has been appointed to the Association for Prevention Teaching and Research’s Healthy People Curriculum Task Force (HPCTF) Clinical Prevention and Population Health Curriculum Framework Workgroup. She also has been appointed scholarship co-chair of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy’s Health Disparities and Cultural Competency Committee.

College Appoints 9 New Faculty Members Across 3 Departments

Department of Pharmacy Practice and Translational Research

Aayna Shamsi, Pharm.D., clinical assistant professor, is a 2017 alumna of UHCOCP’s Pharm.D. program as well as its 2022-23 Fellowship in Academic Pharmacy. As a fellow, she was engaged in didactic, skills-based and experiential teaching capacities, in-patient and outpatient care settings, and research in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Shamsi worked in the community pharmacy setting for five years where she pursued several leadership and teaching roles within her company. She is now conducting research on the role of emotional intelligence on student outcomes.

Cole Wilder, Pharm.D., M.Ed., BCPS, BCCCP, clinical assistant professor, earned a bachelor’s degree in biochemistry from Carson-Newman University (College) in Jefferson City, Tenn., a Pharm.D. degree from Appalachian College of Pharmacy in Oakwood, Va.; and a master of education degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Texas at Tyler. He also completed a PGY1 Pharmacy Residency at Ballad Health (formerly Wellmont) Bristol Regional Medical Center in Bristol, Tenn., and additional post-graduate training in emergency medicine at Tampa General Hospital in Tampa, Fla.

Wilder’s clinical research interests include health disparities, with a particular focus on mitigating barriers to care experienced by rural populations, developing pharmacist-driven interventions to address STIs and substance use disorder in medically underserved rural areas.

Tasneem Bawa-Khalfe, Ph.D., associate professor, is a joint appointee with the Center for Nuclear Receptors & Cell Signaling at UH’s College of Natural Sciences & Mathematics. She earned her Ph.D. in pharmacology from UHCOCP. Focused on studying how cancer cells exploit select post-translational modification (PTM) systems to drive cancer progression, Bawa-Khalfe’s research is supported by a five-year, $1.8 million R01 grant from the National Cancer Institute as well as a mentored training grant from the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

Ravi Singh, Ph.D., assistant professor, earned his Ph.D. degree in molecular, cellular and developmental biology from The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. His postdoctoral training was at Baylor College of Medicine, and he served as an assistant professor at the Medical College of Wisconsin before joining UHCOCP. His current research investigation, “Identify a new non-canonical role of MEF2Dα2 protein isoform in skeletal muscle metabolism,” is supported by a two-year R21 grant from the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases.

Rongjin Sun, Ph.D., research assistant professor, earned a master’s degree in pharmacy from Jiangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Jiangxi, China, and a Ph.D. degree in pharmacology from Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine in Guangzhou, China. He recently completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the laboratory of UHCOCP Professor Ming Hu, Ph.D.

Sun’s research interests are focused in three areas: mechanisms, biomarkers and prevention of drug-induced liver/intestinal toxicity; manipulating the local bioavailability of drug candidates or drugs for improved efficacy and reduced side effects via regulation of the transporters and enzymes; and studying the PK characterization of drugs and deploying PK/PD modeling analysis and biostatistics services for potential anti-cancer drugs.

Department of Pharmacological and Pharmaceutical Sciences

Rad bod Darabi, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor, earned his M.D. from Zahedan University of Medical Sciences in Zahedan, Iran, and a Ph.D. of Pharmacology from Iran University of Medical Sciences in Tehran, Iran. He completed postdoctoral fellowships at Lillehei Heart Institute at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

The main interest of Darabi’s lab is to use pluripotent stem cells for skeletal muscle regeneration in muscular dystrophies and muscle injuries. Darabi serves as investigator or co-investigator on grants totaling over $3.1 million from the U.S. Department of Defense and the National Institutes of Health, with an additional $2.1 million in past support from the NIH and the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

Lianjie Miao, Ph.D., research assistant professor, earned his Ph.D. degree from Nanchang University in China and studied at Albany Medical College in Albany, N.Y., as a visiting student, where he also completed a postdoctoral fellowship. Miao is studying the function and formation of the Tunneled Nanotube-Like microstructure between cardiomyocytes and endocardial cells in the heart during early cardiac morphogenesis as well as the heterogeneity of the pro-epicardium and the origin of pacemaker progenitor cells by single-cell sequencing and cell lineage tracing.

Department of Pharmaceutical Health Outcomes and Policy

Dipali Rinker, Ph.D., LPC, research assistant professor, earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Trinity University in San Antonio, a master’s degree in clinical psychology from the University of Houston-Clear Lake, and a Ph.D. in public health from the University of Texas Health Science Center.

Her research projects have focused on alcohol use and problem gambling among college students, colon cancer screening in veterans, nicotine dependence, and eating disorders. Rinker has served as coordinator, co-investigator and principal investigator on grants funded by such organizations as the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Center for Responsible Gaming.

Moosa Tatar, Ph.D., assistant professor, earned a master’s degree in economics, planning and analysis of economic systems from Azad University, Science and Research Branch, in Tehran, Iran; a Ph.D. in public sector economics at the University of Mazandaran in Babolsar, Iran; and a Ph.D. in health services research, administration and policy from University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, Neb.

In addition, he completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the Center for Value-Based Care Research at Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. He also served as a visiting scholar at the University of Utah and the University of Missouri-Columbia.

His research focuses on the use of large-scale empirical datasets to explore public health issues and evaluate health policies. The goal of his research is to achieve health equity, eliminate disparities and improve health.


