

Pitt Pharmacy

University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy | Spring / Summer 2025



Alumni Leading *the* Way

Pitt Pharmacy

Spring / Summer 2025

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IN GOOD COMPANY

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University of
Pittsburgh

School of Pharmacy

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Message from the Dean



Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2025 edition of Pitt Pharmacy Magazine!

It is my distinct pleasure to share with you the incredible stories and accomplishments of our remarkable Pitt Pharmacy community.

In this edition, we are especially excited to recap our signature event – the RxTravaganza, which returned to the Cathedral of Learning this past November. This gala, held on campus every other year, brings our community together in celebration of our outstanding alumni, both seasoned and emerging, who are shaping the future of the profession in extraordinary ways.

While inspiring, these are not the only stories you will read about our exceptional alumni. In fact, this entire issue is dedicated to highlighting the various ways that our alumni are leading the way throughout the field of pharmacy.

Of course, you will also find awards, accolades, and a celebration of our recent graduates – all of which showcase the ongoing accomplishments of our community.

Thank you for staying connected to Pitt Pharmacy. Your support is deeply appreciated, and your stories continue to shape our shared legacy. We are proud of all you do and excited for what lies ahead.

Hail to Pitt!

Amy Seybert, PharmD

Dean, University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy

Dr. Gordon J. Vanscoy Endowed Chair of Pharmacy

SCHOOL OF PHARMACY LEADERSHIP

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Wen Xie, MD, PhD

Chair, Department of Pharmacy and Therapeutics:

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Awards & Accolades



Drs. Pater and Schonder with awards at Pathways to Student Success Conference



NABP
LEADERSHIP
AWARDS

Kimberly A. Burns, RPh, JD
recipient of the

2024 Henry Cade Memorial Award

Kimberly A. Burns, RPh, JD

FACULTY

Big Win at 2024 Pathways to Student Success Meeting

Pitt Pharmacy Professional Development and Co-Curriculum Teams won in three out of the five categories they were nominated for at the 2024 Pathways to Student Success meeting: Highest Engagement, Most Completed Activities, Suitable Innovator Award.

Pathways to Student Success is the annual user conference for those looking to discover innovative ways to improve student engagement, create personalized programming for students, and learn more about the future of co-curricular learning and assessment. Our students recently made the transition to the Pitt Pharmacy Professional Dashboard, powered by Suitable. The Professional Development Team includes: Kristine Schonder, PharmD, Karen Pater, PharmD, Colleen Culley, PharmD and Candace Stone.

Xie Appointed Vice Chair of AACP Research and Graduate Affairs Committee

Wen Xie, MD, PhD, was appointed Vice Chair of the American Association of Colleges and Pharmacy (AACP) Research and Graduate Affairs Committee for the 2024-2025 academic year. The committee consists of members who represent multiple research disciplines in pharmacy education. Their duties include assistance with the development of the Association's research, graduate, and scholarship agenda. Xie is Chairman of the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Joseph Koslow Endowed Professor in Pharmaceutical Sciences at the School of Pharmacy and Professor of Pharmacology and Chemical Biology at the School of Medicine.



Wen Xie, MD, PhD

Burns Receives 2024 Henry Cade Memorial Award

Associate Professor Kimberly A. Burns, RPh, JD, received the 2024 Henry Cade Memorial Award for her commitment to shaping the future of pharmacy education. Awarded by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy® (NABP®), each year, this award is one of the Leadership Awards presented to individuals who have worked with “unwavering ded-

ication to ensure NABP's continued service to the regulation of pharmacy practice and to the state boards of pharmacy in protecting public health.”

Burns was chosen for her extensive involvement in support of NABP examination programs including the Foreign Pharmacy Graduate Examination Committee Certification Program and developing the Uniform Pharmacy Jurisprudence Examination.



Martha Ndung'u, PharmD



Sandra Kane-Gill, PharmD, MS



Katie Suda, PharmD, MS

Ndung'u Named to Pittsburgh Business Times' 30 Under 30

Martha Ndung'u, PharmD, has been named to the 2025 Pittsburgh Business Times' list of 30 Under 30! She joins a distinguished group of eleven other Pitt students, alumni, and faculty named to the list, each recognized for their leadership and community impact.

Ndung'u (PHARM '19), is an assistant professor in the School of Pharmacy. She is a co-director of the Area of Concentration in Global Health at the School of Pharmacy and is a site coordinator of the PGY2 Global Health residency at the Birmingham Clinic

Dean Seybert Recognized as the 2024 ACCP Education Award Recipient

Dean Amy Seybert (PHARM '96) is one of the 2024 recipients of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy, (ACCP) Education Award! The ACCP Education Award recognizes an ACCP member who has made substantial and outstanding contributions to clinical pharmacy education at either the professional or post-graduate level.

Kane-Gill and Suda Elected to ACCP Positions

Sandra Kane-Gill, PharmD, MS was elected as an American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) Regent and Katie Suda, PharmD, MS was chosen as an ACCP Foundation Trustee. Kane-Gill is the Associate Dean of Faculty Affairs and Program Innovation and a professor at the School of Pharmacy. Katie Suda has a secondary appointment in the Department of Pharmacy and Therapeutics.

Other big wins for Pitt Pharmacy at the 2024 American College of Clinical Pharmacy Annual Meeting include:

- JACCP Outstanding Reviewer: Dr. Amy Donihi
- Pharmacotherapy Outstanding Reviewer: Dr. Kristine Schonder
- 2024 ACCP Research and Scholarship Academy Graduate: Dr. Julie DiBridge Clarkson (PHARM '15)
- 2024 ACCP Teaching and Learning Academy Graduate: Dr. Sophia Herbert (PHARM '19)
- Dr. Martha Ndung'u begins her role as chair of the Global Health PRN



Dr. Sophia Herbert, PharmD and
Dr. Julie DiBridge Clarkson, PharmD



Brian Potoski, PharmD



Christine Ruby-Scelsi, PharmD

Potoski Co-Authors Guidelines

Associate Professor Brian Potoski (PHARM '99), co-authored the 2024 Infectious Diseases Society of America Guideline Update on the Risk Assessment, Diagnostic Imaging, and Microbiological Evaluation of Complicated Intra-abdominal Infections in Adults, Children and Pregnant People. This significant contribution highlights our commitment to advancing knowledge and leading the way in the field of pharmacy.

Yarabinec Received 2024 Faculty Advisor Award of Excellence

Ashley Yarabinec (PHARM '11), received the 2024 Faculty Advisor Award of Excellence from the Professional Fraternity Association. This national award recognized Yarabinec's outstanding dedication to the students of our Kappa Psi Pharmaceutical Fraternity chapter, where her guidance has empowered them to lead and grow.

Yarabinec is an assistant professor and the Associate Director of Experiential Learning at Pitt Pharmacy.

Ruby-Scelsi Named the 2024 Geriatrics Teacher of the Year

Congratulations to Dr. Christine Ruby-Scelsi (PHARM '94) on being named the 2024 Geriatrics Teacher of the Year! This annual award, from the Pennsylvania Geriatric Society, honors both a physician and a healthcare professional who have made significant contributions to the education and training of learners in geriatrics and to the progress of geriatrics education across the health professions.

Dr. Christine M. Ruby-Scelsi is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Pharmacy and Therapeutics and Division of Geriatric Medicine, Schools of Pharmacy and Medicine. She is also a Clinical Pharmacy Specialist in Geriatrics with an active practice at the Senior Care Institute, a hospital-based ambulatory clinic located at UPMC-Shadyside.

Smithburger Chosen to Receive 2024 ACCP Critical Care PRN Education Award

Pamela Smithburger (PHARM '07) was chosen by the ACCP Critical Care PRN to receive the 2024 Critical Care PRN Education Award. This award is given to a pharmacist who has demonstrated excellence in the classroom or clinical



Pamela Smithburger, PharmD, MS

training site, conducted innovative research in clinical pharmacy education, demonstrated exceptional dedication to clinical pharmacist continuing professional development, and/or shown leadership in the development of clinical pharmacy education programs.

Smithburger is an Associate Professor at the School of Pharmacy, and program director for the PGY2 Critical Care Residency.



Christian Fernandez, PhD



Larry Kobulinsky



Lori Pickel and Amy Hayden

Exciting Research News - Xie Makes Strides Against Liver Fibrosis

Dr. Wen Xie, professor and Joseph Koslow Endowed Chair at Pitt Pharmacy, along with his team, made groundbreaking strides in the fight against liver fibrosis. Their latest study, published in *Science Translational Medicine*, uncovered new insights into this serious condition and suggested a promising new treatment approach.

Christian Fernandez Awarded NIDDK Grant

Dr. Christian Fernandez, Associate Professor at Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences and a member of the Center for Pharmacogenetics at Pitt Pharmacy, was awarded a research grant from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). This four-year grant, titled "Mechanistic Study of PEG-asparaginase-Induced Liver Injury," will provide a total of \$1.59 million over the grant period.

This project investigates a novel mechanism of liver injury caused by the anti-leukemia drug PEGylated asparaginase (PEG-ASNase). Success in this research could extend the therapeutic benefits of PEG-ASNase to adult pa-

tients, improving survival rates for acute lymphoblastic leukemia and addressing a significant clinical challenge in cancer therapy.

STAFF

Kobulinsky Receives Society for Simulation in Healthcare Certification

Instructional Development Specialist, Larry Kobulinsky, received the Society for Simulation in Healthcare Certified Healthcare Simulation Operations Specialist (CHSOS) certification. This recognition continues to show Pitt Pharmacy's dedication to innovation and excellence in education.

Pickel and Hayden Win Staff Recognition Award

Pitt Pharmacy staff members Lori Pickel and Amy Hayden were chosen as recipients of the Senior Vice Chancellor of Health Sciences Research Administration (HSRA) Staff Recognition Award.



Prerna Dodeja, PharmD

STUDENTS

Dodeja Selected for Uppsala Pharmacometrics Summer School

Prerna Dodeja (PHARM '21), a PhD candidate, has earned a spot at the Uppsala Pharmacometrics Summer School in Sweden. Selected from a competitive global pool, she is one of just 30 PhD students invited to participate in this elite program. The summer school, renowned for its advanced training in pharmacometric modeling, provides participants with intensive coursework, hands-on workshops, and opportunities to collaborate with leading experts in the field.



Annaliese Harp, Saranya Muthumula, Nina Yang

Pitt Pharmacy Students Serve on Phi Lambda Sigma International Committees

Pitt Pharmacy students Annaliese Harp, Saranya Muthumula, and Nina Yang served on Phi Lambda Sigma (PLS) international committees this past academic year. Harp and Muthumula built relationships with pharmacy schools outside of the United States, laying the groundwork for the establishment of international chapters while serving on the International Affairs Committee. Yang played a crucial role in assessing current demographics and selection criteria for PLS membership as part of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion taskforce.

Students Advocate on Capitol Hill

A group of our students, faculty, and fellows traveled to Washington D.C. in August of 2024, to visit the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) and advocate on Capitol Hill. The group, all members of APhA, advocated for patient access to pharmacist services with the APhA advocacy team. They toured APhA headquarters, visited nine different representatives, and shared their stories.

Neverette Awarded Fellowship

Noah Neverette, second-year graduate student in the Clinical Pharmaceutical Scientist Program, was awarded a K. Leroy Irvis Fellowship from the University of Pittsburgh. This fellowship is currently in its 31st year and is named after the late K. Leroy Irvis, a 1954 Pitt law school graduate, who was the first Black Assistant District Attorney in Allegheny County and a member of the Pennsylvania State House representing Pittsburgh for 30 years. Each year, schools select distinguished applicants who have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement, and among other qualifying criteria, come from an educational, cultural, or geographic setting that is underrepresented in graduate studies within their field in the United States or specifically at the University of Pittsburgh. The fellowship provides a 12-month stipend during doctoral studies, a full tuition scholarship, mentoring, and individual medical insurance. Noah entered the PhD program in 2023 and currently studies antiretroviral clinical pharmacology under the advisement of faculty member, Aaron Devanathan, PharmD, PhD, AAHIVP.



Pitt Pharmacy arrives at APhA



Pitt Pharmacy arrives at APhA



Noah Neverette



Walter Nieves-Canabal



Samantha Bailey



Carla Medina-Gil

Pitt Pharmacy Students Selected for Summer Internships at the FDA

Pitt PharmD student Walter Nieves-Canabal and PhD student Samantha Bailey were selected among many applicants to complete summer internships at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Nieves-Canabal co-lead an FDA initiative aimed at enhancing industry understanding of critical safety calculations and performed in-depth analysis of extensive datasets. His bachelor's degree in industrial microbiology from the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez Campus prepared him for this exciting opportunity.

Samantha Bailey led a research project that evaluated the labels of FDA-approved drugs from 2019-2023 to understand dose adjustment recommendations for patients with co-occurring intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as renal impairment and drug-drug interactions. This work highlights the impact of these combined factors on pharmacokinetics and will help guide future dose adjustment recommendations in complex patient populations.

Medina-Gil Awarded Second Place in Poster Presentation NPhA/SNPhA National Convention

Carla Medina-Gil was awarded second place in the NPhA/SNPhA Poster Presentation at this year's National Pharmaceutical Association, Inc./Student National Pharmaceutical Association National Convention.

Carla presented her impactful project, "Promover la Alfabetización en Salud: Assessing the Impact of Pharmacy Children's Books in English-Speaking and Spanish-Speaking Youth," a passion project regarding two children books authored and illustrated by Pitt Pharmacy alumni Shay Roth, PharmD and Jaccie Hisashima, PharmD, and translated into Spanish by Carla herself. The purpose of the project is to increase health literacy around diabetes and asthma.

Pitt Pharmacy Wins Big at Pennsylvania Pharmacists Association (PPA) Western Regional Meeting

At this year's Pennsylvania Pharmacists Association (PPA) Western Regional Meeting, our students were honored with the 2024 Government Relations and Advocacy award — which was accepted by Anneliese Harp and Julie Lazzaris for their leadership during the 2023-2024 school year. This award recognizes exceptional efforts in legislative advocacy and advancing the pharmacy profession,

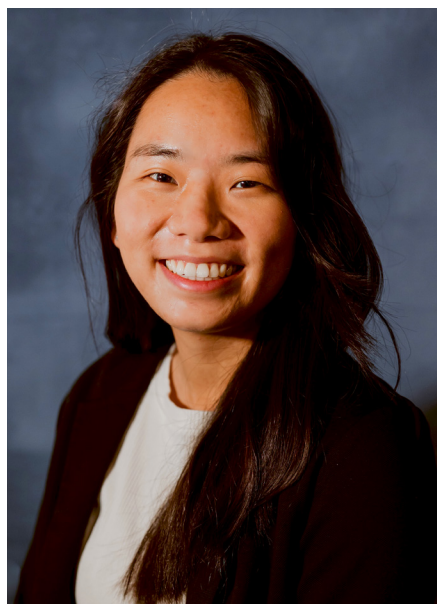


Anneliese Harp and Julie Lazzaris

encouraging students to engage with their state professional organization and understand the importance of advocacy in their careers.

Scholarship were also awarded to the following Pitt Pharmacy students:

- Anneliese Harp: Lindsey Heck Memorial Scholarship
- Charlotte Nazar and Akshaya Sudhakar: PA Educational Foundation Scholarships



Yin Zhu

Zhu Selected for Fellowship Award

Yin Zhu, PhD candidate in Dr. Christian Fernandez's lab, was selected as a recipient of the Clinical and Translational Science Pre-Doctoral Fellowship Award (TL1) through the NIH-funded Institute for Clinical Research Education!

The goals of this fellowship are to elucidate how the leukemia chemotherapy drug, PEGylated asparaginase, activates hepatic stellate cells causing fibrosis and to develop strategies to prevent liver damage in patients receiving this treatment.

Pitt Pharmacy Wins AAPS Award

The Pitt Pharmacy American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists (AAPS) student chapter received the AAPS Student Chapter Award! This recognition celebrates all of the hard work, dedication, and outstanding achievements of our students.

Sudhakar Awarded NCPA Presidential Scholarship

Akshaya Sudhakar was awarded a Presidential Scholarship at the 2024 National Community Pharmacists Association's Annual Convention. This award recognizes students demonstrating leader-



Akshaya Sudhakar

ship qualities, academic achievement, and an interest in independent community pharmacy. Akshaya is a member of the Community Leadership, Innovation and Practice Area of Concentration.

ALUMNI

Ginsburg Featured on Podcast

Diane Ginsburg (PHARM '84), one of our distinguished alumni, shared fond memories of her time at Pitt, and offered invaluable insights on servant leadership, mentoring, and lifelong learning, when she was featured on the MelisRx Scripts Podcast.

Gray Elected President of Missouri State Board of Pharmacy

Dr. James L. Gray, III (PHARM '75) was elected to serve as president of the Missouri State Board of Pharmacy for a fifth term. Dr. Gray previously served as the Executive Director of Pharmacy at Barnes-Jewish Hospital, a role he retired from in 2023 after serving the hospital in a number of capacities for more than 40 years. Dr. Gray is also a recipient of the prestigious Thomas J. Garrison Achievement Award from the Missouri Society of Health System Pharmacists Research and Education Foundation.



Diane Ginsburg



James Gray



Emily Kryger, PharmD

Emily Kryger Received ASCP Women's Spotlight Award

Emily Kryger (PHARM '14) received the 2024 American Society of Consultant Pharmacists (ASCP) Women's Spotlight Award at the ASCP annual meeting. This award recognizes a female pharmacist for outstanding contributions to senior care pharmacy.

Dr. Kryger is the owner of Pharm-Recs, LLC, an independent pharmacy consulting company partnering with pharmacies, nursing facilities, physician practices, and health care organizations. She is also a clinical pharmacist specializing in geriatrics in the medical education department at UPMC St. Margaret.

BY THE NUMBERS

#9

IN THE NATION

#1

IN PENNSYLVANIA

BEST PHARMACY SCHOOLS

U.S. NEWS & WORLD
REPORT RANKINGS

MORE THAN

6100

ALUMNI



Alumni Deans (left to right) - Dean Samuel Poloyac, Dean Amy Seybert, Dean Reginald Frye

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

**A Look at Our Alumni Who've Taken the Lead as Deans
Across at Schools of Pharmacy Nationwide**

Amy Seybert (PHARM '96), Dean, University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy

Samuel Poloyac (PHARM '93, '95, '99), Dean, University of Texas at Austin College of Pharmacy

Reginald Frye (PHARM '95), Dean, University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Pharmacy

Amy Schwartz (PHARM '88, '94), Former Dean, University of Texas at Tyler (Feb. 2023 – Sept. 2024)

Amy Pittenger (PHARM '93, '96), Interim Dean, University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy

Emily Dornblaser (PHARM '07), Interim Dean, University of New England (May 2022 – Sept 2023)

PITT LIFERS

These Pitt for Lifers Came as Students and Never Left

By Susan Jones

The ranks of employees who came to Pitt as students and never left range from deans and administrators to faculty and staff at every level.

We asked those who are “Pitt for Life” to send us their stories and the response was overwhelming, from retirees to recent grads who are looking ahead to a full career at the University. A few left Pitt for a couple years, but quickly came back, and some started as employees and then got their degrees.

Not surprisingly, those who wrote in are some of Pitt’s biggest cheerleaders, both as a place to work and as somewhere that’s making a difference in the world. While most credited their friends, colleagues and students as the best part about Pitt, several cited that ever-present problem of parking as the worst part of their time in Oakland.

So settle in for some stories from a few alumni who have the ultimate loyalty to Pitt.



Suzanne Mannino, her husband and daughters all attended Pitt.

Suzanne Lizik Mannino

'83, A&S, Pitt Marching band member

Professional student engagement coordinator, School of Pharmacy.

Worked in Office of Admissions and Financial Aid as a recruiter and Pitt Pathfinders supervisor, before taking a short break to have children.

EXTRA CREDIT

Husband, Joe, is a two-time Pitt graduate; youngest daughter, Isabella, graduated from the School of Engineering last April and was a Pitt Pathfinders for OAFA and daughter, Alexandra graduated from Pitt Pharmacy in spring of 2025.

“Even when I was away, Pitt always remained part of my life, whether it was staying connected with my ‘BFF’ from OAFA or attending football and basketball games; I always had a voice in the back of my mind telling me that I wanted to be a part of the University again. I missed my second home. It was time to think about going back to work for Pitt, and my desire to be a part of Pitt once more led me to my new journey with the School of Pharmacy.” —Suzanne Lizik Mannino



Brandon and
Sophia Herbert

Sophia Herbert

'17, B.S., pharmaceutical sciences; '19, Pharm.D.

Assistant professor, pharmacy and therapeutics,
School of Pharmacy.

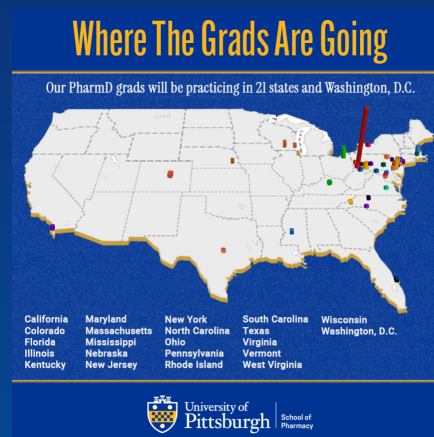
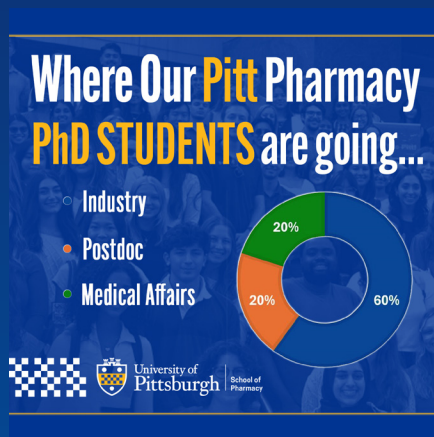
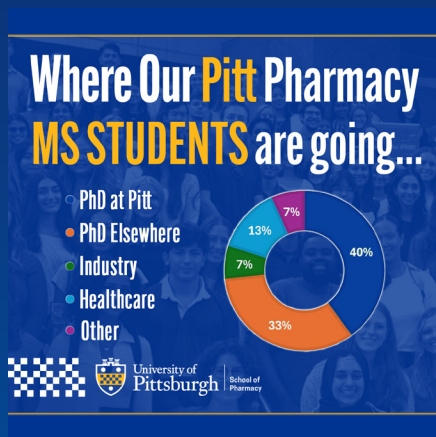
Did two year fellowship at Pitt before joining the
faculty in 2022.

EXTRACREDIT

Husband Brandon Herbert got his bachelor's from Pitt
in 2017, then got his master's of public health in 2019
and his Ph.D. in epidemiology in 2023. He now works
as a data scientist in the School of Public Health.

"We have Pitt to thank for our marriage, our education, and for our careers! We are proud to still call Pitt our home more than a decade since we first arrived." —Sophia Herbert

BY THE NUMBERS





2025 graduates celebrate in front of the Cathedral of Learning

Lauren Brock (PHARM '20)

Blends Science & Sweet Success



Lauren Brock, a 2020 graduate of Pitt Pharmacy, is serving up success with her innovative gelato shop, *Butterfat Gelato*, in Pittsburgh, PA. A full-time specialty pharmacist by day at PANTHERx Rare Pharmacy, Brock has dedicated her free time into crafting unique and delicious gelato recipes. Her entrepreneurial journey started during her first year at the school of pharmacy in 2017 when, along with three fellow students, she won the Randall Family Big Idea competition. Since graduation, *Butterfat Gelato* has grown from a local delight to nationally recognized brand.

In 2023, *Butterfat Gelato* was honored with the title of the most popular gelato flavor in the country at the Gelato Festival World Masters in Los Angeles—an achievement that Brock is incredibly proud of. Merging her love for science, community, and food, Brock sees this passion project as a true labor of love. In addition to opening their first brick and mortar on the Northside of Pittsburgh this year, they will be competing in the Gelato Festival World Masters North American Finals this Labor Day weekend – an exciting milestone and a sweet next chapter in her entrepreneurial story.

Say it in Six

Students Describe Their Experience at Pitt Pharmacy in Six Words or Less!

“From uncertainty to confidence, step by step.” —Yousuf Al-Abduladheem

“Growth, knowledge, friendships—unforgettable Pitt journey.” —Maddy Allen

“Cannot get this anywhere else!” —Kolbe Bien

“Supportive community, intellectual growth, lasting memories.” —Joy Cao

“Found my wife. Learned some stuff.” —Owen Hott

“Dreams tested, resilience built, purpose found.” —Rachel Kim

“Hard work and determination pays off!” —Alex Mannino

“Clinical competence meets trailblazing technology” —Jonathan Marks

“Bonded by caffeine and care plans.” —Daniella Perlov

“Gained lifelong knowledge, skills and memories.” —Kelsey Wagner

“Growth, challenges and impactful research.” —Madhulika Banerjee

“An era of growth and perseverance.” —Jacob Cuyler

BY THE NUMBERS

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

537

PharmD and graduate students in fall 2023

98%

target enrollment met for PharmD entering class (at a time of national declining enrollment in PharmD programs)

9.3%

identify as African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, or two or more races for fall 2023

PHARM D CLASS OF 2027 FALL 2023 ENROLLMENT

3.53

GPA mean

16

students with bachelor's or master's/PhD degree

81%

of our first-year students come from the Pittsburgh campus

GRADUATE PROGRAM FALL 2023 ENROLLMENT

14

new master's students enrolled in fall 2023

9

fellows

SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT

33%

of PharmD students are receiving scholarship support in 2024–25 academic year

\$914,000

in total scholarship support was awarded in FY24 for the 2024–25 academic year (up from \$809,900 last year)

RANKINGS

Pitt Pharmacy is one of the top-ranked pharmacy schools in the country.

#14

in funding from the National Institutes of Health (\$16.8 million, up from #19)

#1

in other federal funding (\$12.5 million)

#6

in total federal funding (\$29.3 million)

#11

in nonfederal funding (\$5.8 million)

#5

in all grants (\$35.1 million)

7TH

most engaged school in industry fellowships

17%

of Pitt Pharmacy faculty are recognized as elected fellows in one or more national scientific and professional organizations

GIVING

569

donors

\$2.25

million in new gift commitments in FY24

576

alumni and donor engagements in FY24

RESEARCH IMPACT

\$17.8

million in research expenditures in FY24

262

active research projects in FY24

RxPLORE Summer Camp

Helps Teens Learn About the Pharmacy Profession

By Megumi Barclay and Isabel Doshi



Mixing benzoyl peroxide and polyethylene glycol in a heated beaker might not sound like your typical high school summer camp activity. While it is a way of making lip balm, for Najih, a rising high school junior from Pittsburgh who attended Pitt's RxPLORE camp in July, this activity served a greater purpose.

Najih was one of a group of 74 high school students who came from New York, Dallas and Washington, D.C., to participate in RxPLORE 2024, a free three-day summer camp held July 25-27 at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Pharmacy. The camp is offered to ris-

ing high school juniors and seniors as an introduction to the pharmacy profession. Over three days, campers learned about specific pharmacy fields through lecture-style sessions and hands-on lab experiences taught by Pitt Pharmacy staff, alumni and students.

As members of the health care team, pharmacists are medication experts who provide critical services, such as counseling physicians and patients on the safest and most effective drugs to treat diseases. RxPLORE 2024 introduced campers to the basics of community pharmacy, hospital pharmacy, and the pharmaceutical industry to expand their under-

standing of the profession. Pitt Pharmacy, ranked ninth in the country in 2024 by U.S. News and World Report, offers various programs, such as the Doctor of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences graduate programs.

"I love that I'm going to be with so many other health sciences... so there's so much collaboration, well-developed clinical experiences for us, especially being attached to UPMC," Emma Reed, a fourth-year Pitt Pharmacy student working at RxPLORE, said in explaining why she chose Pitt Pharmacy. "We have access to all those rotations, which is great to have. People in the top of our field are teaching us in the classroom."

In addition to making lip balm, campers visited the Peter M. Winter Institute for Simulation, Education and Research (WISER) of Pitt/UPMC—a world-class multidisciplinary research facility—where they simulated pharmacists' roles in treating patients experiencing cardiac symptoms. Other camp activities included compounding IVs medication and administering naloxone, which can reverse an opioid overdose, on the SimMan, an advanced patient simulator, to learn how a patient would react, depending on the given dosage. Campers were also able to tour other pharmacy labs to further understand the research done within the school.

"I love helping people," Brianna, a rising junior from New York City, said about choosing pharmacy, "and I feel like the whole process of being a pharmacist is pretty cool."



Current Pitt Pharmacy faculty and alumni presented lecture-style sessions on community practice, independent pharmacy ownership, optimizing medications in palliative care, and careers in the pharmaceutical industry. In the closing session, campers participated in an escape room-type race where they used their new knowledge to solve puzzles and unlock boxes faster than their opponents. By forming relationships with current faculty and students, campers gained insights into the admissions process, experience, and career paths of Pitt Pharmacy.

Not only does RxPLORE provide an unforgettable experience for these aspiring pharmacists, but it also presents

a unique opportunity for Pitt Pharmacy students to develop, teach and direct the camp.

Students began planning for the camp in November, meeting weekly to design the program from the bottom up. RxPLORE 2024 directors were current students who had planned the camp previously and first-year students who hope to lead it in the future. They built the agenda and contacted faculty and alumni they thought would provide the best experience for camp participants.

“The student leaders worked so hard putting it together and they deserve tons of recognition,” said Kelli Whalen, RxPLORE staff and enrollment and recruitment specialist for Pitt Pharmacy.

“There are many areas [in the field] that people don’t know about until they get to pharmacy school. I think this [camp] can delve into exposing students who haven’t decided on what they’re going to do in college to more than just what they typically think of a pharmacist,” said Reed.

More information about the camp is available here: <https://www.rxplore.pharmacy.pitt.edu/>

A portrait of Dr. Lucas Berenbrot, a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a white lab coat over a light blue button-down shirt. He is standing in a laboratory or pharmacy setting with shelves and equipment in the background. The lab coat has a circular patch on the left chest that reads "UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH SCHOOL OF PHARMACY" and a name tag that reads "Berenbrot, Pharm.D Assistant Professor Pharmacy and Therapeutics".

Pioneering PHARMACY PROGRESS

**DR. LUCAS BERENBROT ON EXPANDING HEALTHCARE ACCESS
AND REDEFINING THE ROLE OF PHARMACISTS**

By Roberta Zeff
Photo by Aimee Obidzinski

Many Americans face hurdles in getting health care, but almost all Americans can easily get to a pharmacy. That's the central premise driving much of the work of Lucas Berenbrok (PHARM '13, MED '17), an associate professor of pharmacy and therapeutics in Pitt's School of Pharmacy. He's interested in the ways pharmacies can be entry points or delivery centers for certain aspects of health care.

During the COVID-19 shutdown in 2020, Berenbrok began a project to map the locations of the approximately 62,000 pharmacies in the country, to learn how pharmacies might be filling gaps in people's health care needs.

That work to visualize pharmacy access grew to be an especially valuable tool over the past year, as many independent pharmacies — as well as national chains like Rite Aid, CVS and Walgreens — shuttered locations, leading to worries over what are known as “pharmacy deserts.” The Associated Press even used the map this spring as part of a nationwide project on pharmacy closures.

Berenbrok also organized the inaugural Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid and Hearing Self-Care Symposium, held at Pitt on June 7. The event brought together thought leaders from pharmacy, audiology and public health to discuss how the newest class of hearing aids, which can be purchased over the counter (OTC), can increase patient access to hearing health care in the United States.

“What ties the two projects together is access,” Berenbrok says. “Pharmacies are in every neighborhood, and they're open on nights, weekends, holidays, when some other health care providers might not be open. And so, people really look to pharmacies as a place where they can get health care, and they can help with their overall health and wellness.”

We spoke with Berenbrok about his work. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Pitt Magazine: How did you get interested in being a pharmacist?

Lucas Berenbrok: I liked the chemistry piece of it, I liked the science behind it,

“Pharmacists play a vital role in improving health care.” —Lucas Berenbrok

and I liked this idea that I could help people in a very specific way. I grew up in Beaver County, and my first job was working at Giant Eagle stocking shelves, getting buggies, and my favorite part of the job was standing at the end of the conveyor belt and bagging groceries because I got to talk to people. It made me feel a part of the community, and so that's kind of how and why I gravitate toward community pharmacy, because I like being that staple and that face of a community.

When I was in pharmacy school at Pitt, I was doing research on how community pharmacists could do more than dispense medication; they could offer vaccinations and comprehensive medication reviews. In 2012, I went to the American Pharmacists Association's Annual Meeting to compete in the Patient Counseling Competition to represent Pitt on a national stage. At that meeting, I placed in the top 10. It gave me some confidence, like, “I'm pretty good at talking to patients and doing the things that the community pharmacists do best.”

How did your mapping project come about?

I wanted to prove this talking point — people often say that 90% of Americans live within five miles of pharmacy — but it's difficult to find how that stat came to be. Figuring there's a gap in the literature, I got together with some folks from the Department of Geology and Environmental Science here at Pitt — they're the mapping experts — and some of my colleagues at the School of Pharmacy. We assumed then that the COVID-19 vaccines would be given at community pharmacies, so we wrote a white paper

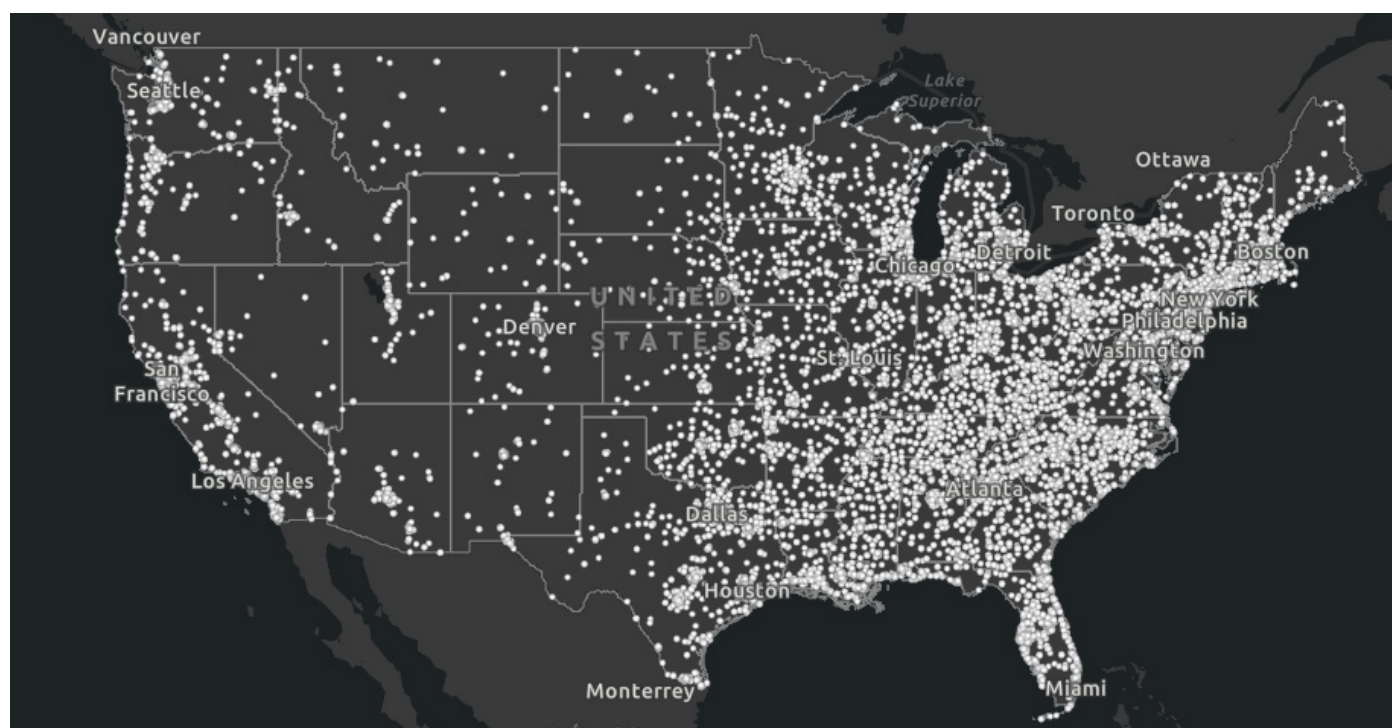
that talked about pharmacy locations, when vaccines would be available and predicted pharmacies would be a place where they would be distributed and administered. That paper came out two or three days before the emergency use authorization was granted for the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. It was a very exciting time to have that analysis come out, and then see people look to it for vaccine planning initiatives.

Since then, we've applied the mapping to lots of different things that you can do at the community pharmacy. I have some projects with students looking at OTC birth control that just went on the market in the first quarter of 2024, and we have another group looking at OTC hearing aids. We're able to apply where the maps are and to show that, when things are available at a community pharmacy, people can access them better.

How did you get involved with hearing aids?

In 2017, I was taking our first-year student pharmacists to senior community centers to do what we call a brown bag review. Seniors would bring their medications in a brown paper bag and then our students, with faculty, would review their medications and help with any questions or address safety and effectiveness.

I was thinking about other things that older adults need help with, and hearing came to mind. That's how I connected with the audiology folks at the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (SHRS). My long-term collaborator Elaine Morner (a Pitt professor of audiology and the vice chair for clinical



education communication science and disorders) had brought her students to do hearing screenings. Elaine looked at me and said, “Hey, you know a law was just signed that creates a new category of hearing aids that are going to be sold over the counter.”

No one in pharmacy was talking about this yet, but everyone in audiology was. And now we’ve developed a program to educate pharmacists about hearing health care and OTC hearing aids. We’re doing more research to find practice models and make sure that pharmacists are engaging with audiologists so it can be a team collaboration.

What about pharmacy closures? Are you seeing any patterns?

Over time, we’ll start doing analysis to look at trends in the rate of closures. I also want to match this to openings, because the closure is only one side of the coin. If pharmacies are opening where pharmacies are closing, is there really a problem? Some other people have suggested that pharmacies are closing in lower-socioeconomic areas and opening

in more affluent communities, but we haven’t done any of those analyses yet. That’s going to be later.

When you got into this field, did you imagine that map-making would be an important part of your work?

You know, one of the ways that Pitt’s School of Pharmacy has been talking about PharmD, especially to prospective students, is how versatile that degree can be. Not everyone who graduates from pharmacy school ends up being a clinician — some go into managed care, some into consulting, some into the pharmaceutical industry — and so we like that talking point because it opens up this bigger world of opportunities for our graduates. Whenever I have students who work with me on projects, we always love to kind of spin in the fact that by doing this research, we’re advocating for what pharmacists can do. And we’re advocating for patients by expanding access. And I think that’s a fun part of the research because we’re always looking for new ways in which the pharmacist can provide or bring value to the health system, to health care.

What do you wish more people knew about the role of pharmacists?

Pharmacy is an untapped resource and profession. We’re well trained. We’re the folks who get the most education on medications. And so part of our professional identity as pharmacists is as the medication experts, but we’re also health care providers and clinicians. When we think of pharmacists in this traditional dispensing role, that’s a very narrow view of what pharmacists are doing now.

Since COVID-19, there’s been a huge spotlight on our profession. We have an opportunity right now to capitalize on this limelight so that people can see us as clinicians and providers and people who can make a difference in public health. And I think our students are starting to see that, too. That’s part of the reason they’re attracted to pharmacy.



Signature Gala

Honors Pitt Pharmacy Leaders & Change-Makers

This past November, select students, graduates, friends and supporters of the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy gathered in the Cathedral of Learning Commons Room for its signature RxTravaganza gala.

Since 1962, Pitt Pharmacy leadership has regularly hosted this black-tie event to foster a sense of fellowship among current students and the alumni community, as well as to publicly honor alumni awardees and reunion classes. This year's event, RxTravaganza: Back for More in '24, recognized four alumni leaders for their impact on the fields of pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences, and acted as a class reunion for graduation years ending in 3, 4, 8 and 9.

"This year's honorees highlight how Pitt Pharmacy graduates are acting as leaders across all areas of the fields of pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences," said Dean Amy L. Seybert. "I couldn't be prouder to recognize these exceptional individuals."

Dean Seybert presented the 2024 Rising Star awards to Ukwen Akpoji (PHARM '13), Gretchen K. Garofoli (PHARM '09) and Douglas Gebhard (PHARM '09) and the 2024 Distinguished Alumni Award to Samuel M. Poloyac (PHARM '93, '95, '99). We caught up with the awardees ahead of the event to get to know them a little better—learn more about these incredible graduates on page 23.

First to be recognized was the most recent Pitt Pharmacy graduate in the group, Ukwen Akpoji, who currently serves as U.S. associate medical director, neurology, for Alexion, AstraZeneca Rare Disease. Akpoji is no stranger to the signature RxTravaganza event—not only did he perform at the 2013 event as part of a student group called the Funk Inducers, but he also attended the 2017 event with his now-wife, Aly.

"I hope there is one thing you can take from this speech—to embrace the unknown," said Akpoji. "It can change and improve your life forever."

The next Rising Star awardee to be recognized was Gretchen K. Garofoli, associate professor of clinical pharmacy at the West Virginia University School of Pharmacy. In addition to her academic roles, Garofoli also champions immunizations for populations, including the elderly residing in nursing homes and busy, working adults. In fact, she administered one of the first-ever COVID-19 vaccines in a West Virginia nursing home in late 2020 and continued to drive statewide efforts to ensure comprehensive community vaccination, which ultimately earned her an on-screen interview with BBC News.

"Over the past few years, the phrase, 'If not me, then who?' has become important to me," said Garofoli. "To the pharmacists here tonight, always remember why you chose this profession."

The final Rising Star awardee to speak was Douglas Gebhard, president of RareMed Solutions. Beyond his role at the helm of the nation's leader in complex patient services, Gebhard remains passionate about his Pitt experience and hopes to pay it forward to support the next generation of students by participating on the Pitt Pharmacy Alumni Society Board of Directors.

"When they recognized me as a Rising Star, I was extremely humbled," said Gebhard. "This is a chance to stop and reflect on what got us here ... and it's not an individual award. I want to be the person in 15 years supporting future Rising Stars."

The last awardee to speak, Samuel M. Poloyac, was honored with the 2024 Distinguished Alumni Award in recognition of his undeniable impact on pharmacy education and training at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin. Poloyac, who served as a faculty member at Pitt Pharmacy for 20 years before accepting the deanship of the UT Austin College of Pharmacy in 2020, credits his mentors from his time in Pittsburgh as key drivers of his professional success.

"When I look to the names on this list, so many people have impacted my career," said Poloyac. "To have my name on this list is truly humbling."

Signature Gala



IN GOOD COMPANY

Recognizing Alumni
Who Are Leading the
Way in Pharmacy,
Innovation and Care

By: Sierra Smith

For more than half a century, the Pitt Pharmacy community has come together biennially to celebrate the work and achievements of our incredible alumni. In recognition of their contributions to the fields of pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences and to their communities, leadership from the School of Pharmacy, in collaboration with the Pitt Pharmacy Alumni Society Board, honor one or more outstanding graduates with these prestigious alumni awards at our signature gala, RxTravaganza.

This year's awardees collectively exemplify this edition's theme of "leading the way": from advancing statewide vaccination efforts in West Virginia during the COVID-19 pandemic to forging key academic-clinical partnerships to improve pharmacy education in Texas, these graduates are affecting change on a national scale.

The Distinguished Alumni Award was first bestowed upon Pitt Pharmacy alumni in 1962, more than 60 years ago. Since then, more than 100 exceptional graduates have been named Distinguished Alumni. This year's Distinguished Alumni Award goes to Sam Poloyac (PHARM '93, '95, '99), dean and James T. Doluisio Regents Chair for the University of Texas at Austin College of Pharmacy.

Instituted in 2013, the Rising Star Awards recognize Pitt Pharmacy graduates who are making great strides early in their careers. This year's Rising Star awardees are Gretchen Kreckel Garofoli (PHARM '09), associate professor of clinical pharmacy for West Virginia University; Doug Gebhard (PHARM '09), president of RareMed Solutions; and Ukwem Akpoji (PHARM '13, '15), U.S. associate medical director for Alexion, AstraZeneca Rare Disease.

To learn more about the Pitt Pharmacy alumni awards and to view past Distinguished Alumni and Rising Star awardees, please visit pharmacy.pitt.edu/alumni/awards.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

SAM POLOYAC

PHARMD, PHD

“Anyone who knows Sam knows that he can barely say a word without smiling—a trait I first observed during his days as an undergraduate student. What a pleasure it was to work with him as faculty then as associate dean for graduate and postdoctoral programs! Sam consistently challenged the status quo, for which I was grateful. Knowing that someday he wanted to be dean, he also regularly sought feedback on ways to improve his leadership style and skills. Today, he carries forward the Pitt Pharmacy name as a great dean at a great university. We all at Pitt Pharmacy proudly claim him as ours even though he now says, ‘Hook ‘Em Horns!’”

—Dean Emeritus Patricia Kroboth

This year’s Distinguished Alumni Award is given to Samuel M. Poloyac (PHARM ’93, ’95, ’99), dean and James T. Doluisio Regents Chair for the University of Texas (UT) at Austin College of Pharmacy, to recognize how his bold leadership strategies are transforming the future of pharmaceutical science education.

A native of nearby Johnstown, Pennsylvania, the adolescent Poloyac applied to just one college—Pitt—saying that Pittsburgh was as far as he was “willing to wander away.” And although the Pitt-Johnstown satellite campus would have been closer to home, Poloyac had his sights set on joining Pitt Band, which required relocating to Oakland. He was admitted to the pharmacy program as a first-year student, which ultimately sparked his passion in organic chemistry and pharmaceutical sciences.

“This shows that I was going to be a faculty member someday—I used to make mock exams for my friends (and future wife), and I used to dream up exam questions for them to figure out. And every once in a while, I’d get one that was on the exam,” he said. “I found out I liked teaching and problem-solving.”

After graduating from Pitt Pharmacy with a bachelor’s degree, Poloyac earned a Doctor of Pharmacy in 1995 and a PhD in Pharmaceutical Sciences in 1999 from the University of Kentucky. He then promptly returned to the Steel City and joined the Pitt Pharmacy faculty later that fall.

“I had a chance to apply for a position at Pitt, and that was the pipe dream to come back to Pittsburgh,” said Poloyac. “We wanted to move back home ... and [Pitt Pharmacy] gave me an opportunity, which I will always appreciate.”

The motivation to move back home was both personal and professional. Professionally, Pitt was emerging as a leading college of pharmacy in the country with great research opportunities in Poloyac’s area of research interest: critical care pharmacy. It was also an opportunity for his wife, Kristine, whom he met during undergraduate studies at Pitt Pharmacy, to work as a pharmacist at UPMC. Personally, Poloyac, Kris and their 3-year-old son, Sam Jr., had a chance to move closer to family. Over the next two decades, Poloyac would work his way from assistant professor all the way to associate dean for graduate and postdoctoral programs, and the 3-year-old would become a 23-year-old.

In 2020, Poloyac accepted the deanship of the UT Austin College of Pharmacy, a fitting culmination to his academic leadership journey. Several of the key strategies he learned during his time at Pitt Pharmacy have been highly valuable in charting his future goals as dean.

“Pitt gave me the perspective and the opportunity to explore the way an institution and the program can build over time toward great goals,” said Poloyac. “To come to Texas Pharmacy and bring the things that I saw at Pitt was a great opportunity.”

Today, Poloyac remains committed to training the next generation of outstanding pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists to embrace bold problem-solving and open communication in order to revolutionize patient care and health outcomes in Texas and around the world.

GET TO KNOW SAM POLOYAC



What dorm(s) did you live in while in Pittsburgh?

I lived in Tower B in my freshman year at Pitt and then went to Forbes Hall (? I think that was the name of it) for my sophomore year. Then went off campus and lived on Bates and Oakland avenues.

Where was your favorite study spot on campus?

My favorite study spot was to find one of the secluded corners in the Cathedral of Learning. They were coveted spots, so didn't study there the most though. Probably studied the most in the back of the Falk Library in the back single desks between the archive journals.

What is a favorite memory from your time at Pitt?

Organic chemistry class in the two seat desks in class. I would sit next to this girl that I liked. I would spend more time talking to her than paying attention and occasionally got in trouble in front of 250 students, but it was worth it, since that girl was Kris, and we have been married for 31 years now.

What were your favorite Pitt sporting or signature events to attend as a student?

Pitt football as a Pitt band member 88-91. My favorite memory is from 1989, when Alex Van Pelt led us back from a 31-9 fourth-quarter deficit to end in a 31-31 tie in the game in Morgantown against Major Harris. That is the only time in my life when I ran onto a football field at the end of a game in spite of the fact that the band director was telling us we could not!! H2P!

What is the best "yinzer" delicacy? Think pierogi, Primanti Bros., Sarris chocolate, etc.

O-fries with double cheese ... without a doubt.

Who was your greatest professional influence/inspiration while training at Pitt Pharmacy?

There were many, but the two that come to the front of my mind are the two faculty who gave me an opportunity to do research with them. Dr. Venkat for hiring me as a P1 to work in his lab even though I had never worked in a lab before. And Dr. Gary Matzke, who taught me about passion for research, a tireless work ethic, and who has always served as a role model from both a research and spiritual perspective.

RISING STAR

UKWEN AKPOJI

PHARMD, BCPS, BCIDP

“[Ukwen] was a really hard worker, very driven to keep his eye on the goal. As a teacher, you are inspired by students like that. He was very passionate about it, and that raised my passion to help him get the work done.”

—Kim Coley, PharmD

Ukwen Akpoji (PHARM '13, '15) credits his interest in pharmacy and the pharmaceutical sciences to several mentors he encountered early in his academic journey, including Director of Student Services Marcia Borrelli, who encouraged Akpoji to pursue Pitt pre-pharmacy courses after high school; Professor Emeritus Randy Smith, who demonstrated the true range of the field while launching the Pitt Pharmacy Innovation Lab; and Professor Kim Coley, who explained the value of a graduate residency.

“When I finally got into the Pitt Pharmacy program, there was really a lot of support for where I wanted to go,” said Akpoji, who interned at Hieber’s Pharmacy and UPMC Falk Pharmacy/UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh Outpatient Pharmacy as a student. “From incoming pharmacy students to rising P3s ... the Pitt Pharmacy program is so nurturing to every student interested in any pathway they want to pursue.”

Akpoji recalls rotating with fellow Rising Star awardee Gretchen Kreckel Garofoli’s parents, Peter (PHARM '81) and Denise Kreckel (PHARM '81), while completing his final year of pharmacy school. During that time, he trained under Peter, who was the 2015 Pitt Phar-

macy Distinguished Alumni Award recipient, at an independent pharmacy, a physician assistant academic program and community clinic settings.

“[Kreckel’s] approach was just so unique,” said Akpoji. “He talked about patients, not customers, and the need for pharmacists to go ‘beyond the bench’ to meet patients where they are. He really broadened my understanding of what pharmacists could do.”

After earning bachelor’s and doctorate degrees at Pitt Pharmacy, Akpoji pursued PGY-1 pharmacy and PGY-2 infectious diseases residencies with the Veterans Health Administration (VA) systems in Atlanta and Cleveland, respectively. Upon completing his residency at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, he joined the VA Northeast Ohio Health Care System as the Antimicrobial Stewardship Program (ASP) manager in 2017. As ASP pharmacy lead, Akpoji led efforts to establish the multidisciplinary Cleveland ASP as an Infectious Diseases Society of America ASP Center of Excellence in 2019, the first VA hospital in the United States to earn such a designation.

The next step on his professional journey took him from the largest health care system in the country on to industry

giants: Pfizer and AstraZeneca. Today, Akpoji serves as U.S. associate medical director, neurology, for Alexion, AstraZeneca Rare Disease, a position that affects care at the national level for patients with rare diseases who are often under- or misrepresented.

“At the core, if you have a strong ‘why,’ that’s always going to be your compass for the work that you’re doing, no matter what it is,” said Akpoji. “I’m in a rare-disease company that’s intimately communicating with neurology patients who are often misrepresented, that’s the health equity piece, the complement cascade and immunology piece, as well as the advocacy piece, that I’ve tried to build throughout my career—it’s manifested in my current role.”

Akpoji attributes his early experiences at Pitt Pharmacy as transformative moments that ultimately set him on the path toward success.

“That’s the impression of the Pitt Pharmacy program,” said Akpoji. “It’s that ripple effect—if you embrace the unexpected and really see where it will take you, that can really change your life.”

GET TO KNOW UKWEN AKPOJI



What dorm(s) did you live in while in Pittsburgh?

Freshman: Forbes Hall
Sophomore: Forbes-Craig

Where was your favorite study spot on campus?

Any open Nationality Room in the Cathedral of Learning.

What is a favorite memory from your time at Pitt?

Singing on Pitt Men's Glee Club international tours to Italy/Croatia (2009) and Belgium/France/Netherlands (2013).

What were your favorite Pitt sporting or signature events to attend as a student?

Cramming the student buses for Pitt football games and tailgates outside Heinz Field (especially one opportunity to have a field access pass and watch from the press box after recording voiceovers for WPTS 92.1 Pitt football radio promos).

Oakland Zoo ... best game I went to was Pitt vs. WVU in February 2010 ... from the rafters of the Pete ... pure elation after seeing Gibbs hit the corner three-pointer to complete the comeback and send the game to OT ... watched Pitt pull off the WVU upset after third overtime!

What is the best "yinzer" delicacy? Think pierogi, Primanti Bros., Sarris chocolate, etc.

The O ... best bag of fries I've ever had.

Who was your greatest professional influence/inspiration while training at Pitt Pharmacy?

Dr. Kim Coley ... her candor, enthusiasm and encouragement for my personal and professional success were key to my fulfilling experience with the CLIP program. As my mentor, she helped me think more openly about obstacles and setbacks as learning experiences rather than failures. That realization increased my resilience to navigate the medical, operational, interpersonal aspects of pharmacy practice in clinical and corporate environments.

RISING STAR

GRETCHEN KRECKEL GAROFOLI

PHARMD, BCACP, CTTS, FAPHA

“Today, we honor an outstanding professor who many students will hold in the highest esteem for years to come. Gretchen has truly reached out beyond the brick-and-mortar structure that most associate with any school of pharmacy, highlighted by her roles managing CPESN WV, leading the charge of COVID-19 vaccinations in West Virginia’s nursing homes and showing compassion to her students. We are immensely proud of all of her accomplishments, and we are thrilled to see the wonderful professor, pharmacist, sister, daughter, wife and, most importantly, mother that she has become.”

—Peter (PHARM '81) and Denise Kreckel (PHARM '81)

For Gretchen Kreckel Garofoli (PHARM '09), blue and gold runs in the family—not only is Garofoli a second-generation Pitt Pharmacy graduate, but she also met her husband, Mark (PHARM '04), during her academic journey.

“It was wonderful to meet all of these folks that my parents had spoken so highly of and get to know them as well,” said Garofoli. “From the first day of pharmacy school ... it was a very welcoming, wonderful environment. I loved getting to know the faculty and really everything about being at Pitt Pharmacy.”

Garofoli began her pre-pharmacy studies at Pitt-Johnstown in 2003 before transferring to main campus in 2005, where she earned her PharmD alongside fellow Rising Star awardee Doug Gebhard (PHARM '09). After completing a community-based pharmacy residency at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, she then chose to pursue a career in academia. Today, she serves as an associate professor of clinical pharmacy at the West Virginia University School of Pharmacy.

“When I was a student at Pitt Pharmacy, I never thought that this is where I’d end up,” said Garofoli, sharing how

Dean Emeritus Patricia Kroboth encouraged her to pursue academia after graduation—and how she politely declined the suggestion at the time. “But as I was competing [my residency], I realized that I loved everything that was part of an academic career, whether it was taking care of patients, teaching students and also doing the research.”

In addition to her academic appointments, Garofoli also serves as the managing network facilitator for the Community Pharmacy Enhanced Services Network of West Virginia (CPESN WV), working with community pharmacists to help implement effective patient care services. She also works with an independent community pharmacy to administer essential vaccinations to those who need them most—especially working adults who can’t make time to visit their local pharmacy—by going to their workplaces or homes. Because her research passion lies with community-based topics and immunizations, she also emphasizes these tenets within the classroom.

“It always makes me extremely happy when I get to see my students vaccinate their first real-life patients, not just practicing in the classroom,” said Garofoli. “I love to see that aha moment.”

And speaking of first vaccines—Garofoli administered one of the first-ever COVID vaccines in a West Virginia nursing home in late 2020 and assisted with the statewide efforts to ensure comprehensive community vaccination throughout the following years. Because West Virginia led vaccination efforts during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Garofoli was even interviewed by BBC News on the state’s effort to achieve herd immunity.

It takes a village, and our Pitt “Pharmacy” of alumni continue to impact communities everywhere.

GET TO KNOW GRETCHEN GAROFOLI



What dorm(s) did you live in while in Pittsburgh?

I lived in Lothrop Hall during my first year of pharmacy school. Interestingly enough, this is the same dorm that my Dad lived in during most of his time at Pitt. I did my pre-pharmacy work at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown and lived in Laurel Hall and the Living and Learning Center while there.

Where was your favorite study spot on campus?

My favorite study spot was at Falk Library. I spent many hours there during my first year of pharmacy school. During my second and third year, I studied a lot in the study area in Posvar Hall.

What is a favorite memory from your time at Pitt?

My time at Pitt was filled with so many incredible memories that choosing just one is nearly impossible. However, the highlight of my experience was undoubtedly the lifelong friendships I formed through Pitt Pharmacy. Whether we were traveling to professional meetings to deepen our knowledge of the profession and network with student pharmacists and pharmacists, volunteering at health fairs where we applied our classroom learning to real-life patient care or simply enjoying social events, we created unforgettable moments together. Two standout memories that will always remain vivid are the two Super Bowl victories by the Steelers during my time at Pitt—seeing Oakland transform into an electric celebration was something I had never witnessed before!

What were your favorite Pitt sporting or signature events to attend as a student?

I had fun at football games, but the atmosphere of Pitt basketball games and being in the Oakland Zoo during the Jamie Dixon era and seeing Leverage Fields, Levon Kendall and the rest of the teams play was exhilarating!

What is the best “yinzer” delicacy? Think pierogi, Primanti Bros., Sarris chocolate, etc.

Nothing beats Pamela’s for breakfast, and on the weekends my friends and I would always enjoy a South Oakland “delicacy” of \$5 pizza from Antoon’s!

Who was your greatest professional influence/inspiration while training at Pitt Pharmacy?

Dr. Melissa McGivney was the most inspirational person at Pitt Pharmacy whom I worked with throughout my time as a student pharmacist. She was an excellent educator, both in the classroom and on clinical rotations. Dr. McGivney always encouraged and supported me during my time as a student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy and now in my career as an academician. Additionally, my parents are both pharmacists, and they encouraged and supported me in the pursuit of my dreams, starting back at the age of 4, when they let me use a counting tray for cheerios while donning my first lab coat.

RISING STAR

DOUG GEBHARD

PHARMD, MBA

“When my wife Beth and I presented Doug with his first white coat more than 20 years ago during the annual School of Pharmacy White Coat Ceremony, I couldn’t have predicted what an impact he would make on the rare medicine industry in Pittsburgh and across the country. As a mentor, it’s been rewarding to see Doug grow both academically and professionally into the national pharmacy leader he is today.”

—Gordon J. Vanscoy, PharmD, MBA, CACP

Doug Gebhard (PHARM ’09, KATZ ’10) realized early in his academic journey that the sense of community cultivated by the leadership, faculty members, alumni and fellow students of Pitt Pharmacy would continue to provide professional and personal support well beyond graduation. Like fellow awardee Sam Poloyac (PHARM ’93, ’95, ’99), Gebhard joined the Pitt Band drumline as an undergraduate and began forging lifelong relationships. Also like Poloyac, Gebhard met his wife, Jessica (A&S ’06, EDU ’07), at Pitt!

“[Pitt Pharmacy] had a small feel, even though it was a large school, which helped to foster those relationships,” said Gebhard. “We had a really good class of individuals that I still keep in touch with today.”

After graduating from Pitt Pharmacy in 2009—alongside fellow Rising Star awardee Gretchen Kreckel Garofoli (PHARM ’09)—Gebhard pursued a graduate degree from the Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business to learn the business side of pharmaceutical sciences. Now, thanks in part to trailblazing graduates like Gebhard, Pitt Pharmacy partners with a variety of schools under the Pitt umbrella to offer personalized

education pathways for the next generation of pharmacy professionals.

“Pitt is great at creating different pathways and connections. There are different tracks for students that can expand their horizons about what is possible with the support of the Pitt community,” said Gebhard, who cited an Executive Leadership Forum hosted by entrepreneur and faculty member Gordon Vanscoy (PHARM ’84, KATZ ’91) as an eye-opening experience from a business perspective. “To get that kind of exposure and learn that opportunities exist for pharmacists in leadership roles across pharmaceutical and other health care companies was really inspiring.”

Gebhard found a role with the CVS Pharmacy retail product development team, where he helped launch new products and services in the retail pharmacy space that would support adherence to health and wellness goals. In 2016, he was tapped by Vanscoy to join specialty pharmacy start-up, PANTHERx.

Today, Gebhard continues to collaborate with Vanscoy as president of RareMed Solutions, where he leads and provides oversight across all areas of the growing organization. Cofounded in 2018 with Vanscoy and other Pitt Pharmacy alumni, RareMed Solutions is the na-

tion’s leader in the complex patient services space. The firm collaborates with influential biopharmaceutical manufacturers to ensure patients have access to breakthrough medications and customized support to quickly start and remain on therapy to optimize care outcomes.

“The primary focus of our work is to get patients products that otherwise would be inaccessible for a variety of reasons,” said Gebhard. “Our teams work behind the scenes with physicians’ offices, with the patients, with the payers, to get those patients access to the rare and complex therapies they desperately need.”

In addition to his professional roles, Gebhard proudly participates on the Pitt Pharmacy Alumni Society Board of Directors, where he mentors current Pitt Pharmacy students as they walk the very same path he traveled years before.

“It’s all about surrounding yourself with the right people and mentors at the right time,” said Gebhard. “I’m very proud of the time and the people at the University, including all of the investments they’ve made to make it such a reputable institution to graduate from. It’s a top 10 school and a leader in the field of pharmacy.”

GET TO KNOW DOUG GEBHARD



What dorm(s) did you live in while in Pittsburgh?

My freshman year, I lived in Tower B Floor 4; I met some of my best friends that first year; four of us from that floor were accepted into the same class for pharmacy school.

I lived in Pennsylvania Hall the first year it opened. We had one of those corner suites with a living room that overlooked the Pete.

Where was your favorite study spot on campus?

I would study 'Club Hillman' if I wanted to hang out, but for serious studying, I would find a quiet place in Posvar Hall.

What is a favorite memory from your time at Pitt?

I met my wife, Jessica, at Pitt my freshman year. I played in the Pitt Drumline, and she was a Golden Girl. I don't have just one memory, but the overall experience and how it contributed to my personal journey is something I wouldn't trade for anything.

What were your favorite Pitt sporting or signature events to attend as a student?

Playing in the drumline, I was able to travel to away football games like Notre Dame and the various bowl games and watch the greats like Larry Fitzgerald, Shady McCoy, and Aaron Donald play. During basketball season, I was one of those crazy Oakland Zoo members watching the best basketball in the Big East.

What is the best "yinzer" delicacy? Think pierogi, Primanti Bros., Sarris chocolate, etc.

I could eat Primanti's every day; #2 Best Seller! Pamela's breakfast is always a good option too.

Who was your greatest professional influence/inspiration while training at Pitt Pharmacy?

My parents have always been my greatest influence and inspiration; they set the example for my work ethic and always prioritized a focus on education and continued learning.

Professionally, Dr. Gordon Vanscoy has always been a mentor providing honest feedback, guidance and creating unique experiences while at Pitt. Receiving my first white coat was an event that was extremely significant for myself and my family; I am now fortunate to have him as a business partner and close friend.

Legacy in Action

Shaping the Future of Pharmacy through Alumni Engagement

By: Justin D. Scholl, PharmD, MS, BCACP



Justin D. Scholl, PharmD, MS, BCACP

In nearly 20 years since I began my pharmacy journey, I am amazed by all that has changed. Predictably, the number of medications available has continued to increase, but the complexity of those medications and the wide range of both common and complex diseases which can now be managed is incredible. Moreover, pharmacy practice has evolved into widespread participation in the healthcare space across all practice settings. Pharmacists are active in immunizing, in helping to manage chronic illness inside and outside the hospital, in pushing the boundaries of drug discovery, in caring for marginalized populations all while still being the most accessible and trusted of healthcare professionals.

My own circuitous journey throughout the profession has led me to practice in a variety of settings from the community pharmacy to the clinic and into founding an interdisciplinary Lifestyle Medicine practice in Erie, PA. Along the way I have had to acquire new skills, face the challenges inherent in navigating the frustrations of our healthcare system, and have found the foundation built during my time at Pitt to have prepared me exceedingly well for all these endeavors.

Students who graduate in the next few years will face a healthcare landscape that continues to evolve, and they too will face many challenges. I am confident that they will succeed. As a member of the Alumni Association Board of Directors and its current President, I have had the privilege of meeting many of our student-pharmacists over the past several years and can honestly say that they continue to impress. Their dedication, vision, and surprisingly wide range of personal and professional interests is a testament to the School's ongoing success in attracting and training the best of the best.

A critical factor contributing to the success of future generations of Pitt Pharmacists is the wealth of experiences and support that are contained within our network of talented alumni. By giving of our time, our expertise, our talents or our treasure to support current and future students, we imprint our mark on the legacy of excellence at Pitt and continue to raise the bar for our profession.

Please join me in getting actively involved with the School of Pharmacy. Volunteer as a preceptor or mentor, participate in the Career Roundtables, visit with students, faculty and staff at Homecoming or other professional networking events. Volunteer your time to help in recruiting the next generation of students. You can even sponsor leisure activities during the PLS Auction or during the Pitt Pharmacy Joseph A. Gatto Golf Outing. The students are always grateful for your support.

Our profession continues to evolve, but the excellence that is Pitt Pharmacy will always depend on the dedication of those who have reaped the benefits of such excellent training and the ways they pay it forward.

Justin D. Scholl (PHARM '07)

PharmD, MS, BCACP

Clinical Pharmacist & Chief Operating Officer – Infinity Lifestyle Medicine

Clinical Coordinator & Project Manager – Gaughn's Drug Store

Partner – PEAK Pharmacy Solutions

The Greater Good

William W. Goode Sr. Scholarship Donor, Recipient Connect over Community Care

By: Caroline Sack

Thanks to the generosity of Sharon Ryan and family, the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy established the William W. Goode Sr. Scholarship in 1996 to provide financial support for pharmacy students of color in their fourth, fifth or sixth year of school. This year's recipient, fourth-year student Judith Okwamba, met with Ryan in a heartwarming moment of connection to share stories about their passion for advancing the field of pharmacy and to discuss the scholarship's enduring impact.

Endowed in honor of William Goode (PHARM '29), the William W. Goode Sr. Scholarship supports students of color at Pitt Pharmacy as they pursue academic and professional goals. Together with her mother and brother, William W. Goode Jr. (PHARM '63), Ryan established the scholarship to continue her father's legacy of fostering education and diversity in pharmacy.

The first Black pharmacist in Pittsburgh, Goode owned and operated Goode Pharmacy, a 24-hour pharmacy in the Hill District where he trained more than 200 students of color from Pitt, Duquesne University and Howard University who weren't permitted to train in predominantly white pharmacies. At the height of his career, Goode owned four pharmacies across the City of Pittsburgh.

"My father supported the community with his profession, and the community supported him back," said Ryan.

After Goode's passing in 1995, the family chose to endow a scholarship that would ensure students of color could pursue educational and professional opportunities without added financial stress.

"We were trying to find a way to keep students of color at the pharmacy school," said Ryan. "I hope [the scholarship] helps students finish pharmacy school and return that knowledge to their communities."

Her appreciation for the field of pharmacy stems from a childhood immersed in her father's work, witnessing the unique support pharmacists could offer community members. In fact, Ryan shared that she worked in Goode Pharmacy, which was one of the first Black-owned drug stores in the nation, from the time she was just 5 years old.

"A lot of gaps in care are filled by pharmacists," Ryan said, highlighting how local pharmacies help community members access cost-effective and convenient care. Pharmacists can play a role in providing vaccinations, health and wellness education and personalized medication guidance, she added. "It's very important, especially in communities of color, where folks can't get to a doctor readily."

This year's scholarship recipient, fourth-year student Okwamba, shares this passion for community-focused care. Balancing her coursework with shifts at Rite Aid Pharmacy, inpatient training at UPMC and volunteer work at the Birmingham Free Clinic, Okwamba shared how helpful she found the scholarship funds, which directly cover tuition and related costs.

But the scholarship also represents more than financial aid—it connects Okwamba to a legacy of service and mentorship.

"I'm so proud of my dad ... and proud to meet you," Ryan said, reflecting on how the scholarship empowers future pharmacists like Okwamba to make a difference.



Judith Okwamba,
Goode Sr. Scholarship Recipient

After graduation, Okwamba aspires to work in the pharmaceutical industry. With her current experience, Okwamba has gleaned insights on what patients need and what nurses are asking for, which will help in the creation of medication guides, package inserts and educational resources.

Ultimately, Ryan hopes the scholarship not only enables academic and professional success but also inspires generosity in scholarship recipients like Okwamba, encouraging them to pay it forward to future pharmacy students.

The William W. Goode Sr. Scholarship continues to stand as a testament to the power of education and mentorship, as well as the pivotal role pharmacists can play in building healthier communities.

To learn more about the William W. Goode Sr. Scholarship and other Pitt Pharmacy scholarships, please visit pharmacy.pitt.edu/student-life/student-resources/pitt-pharmacy-scholarships.

New Hires & Retirees

HIRES:

Sima Bajpayee: Research Staff – Associate Program Implementation Specialist
Maria Boki: Research Staff – Research & Evaluation Specialist III
Lucas Hill: Faculty – Visiting Associate Professor
Ming-Yi Hsieh: Research Staff – PEQI Manager
Muruges Kandasamy: Research Staff – Senior Research Scientist
InKwon Kim: Faculty – Associate Professor
Roxanne Kim: Research Staff – Clinical Research Technician
Yimin Nie: Research Staff – Software Engineer
Samantha Sacco: Administrative Staff – Program Administrator
Douglas Slain: Faculty – Professor and Chair, Department of Pharmacy & Therapeutics
Chloe Spencer: Administrative Staff – Residency Coordinator
Dilipkumar Uredi: Research Staff – Research Scientist
Sean Weiner: Research Staff – Laboratory Research Technician
Lisa Wells: Research Staff – Instructional Designer
Qihao Wu: Faculty – Assistant Professor

RETIRES:

Ralph E. Tarter, PhD: Professor
Sandra Ballantyne: Administrative Specialist

Remembering Dr. Herbert Barry III: Lifelong Scholar, Mentor, and Friend

Dr. Herbert Barry III (1930 – 2025), Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology, retired from the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy in 2001. He was both a brilliant scholar and a beloved member of our community. Known for his unwavering dedication to teaching, research, and mentorship, Dr. Barry left a lasting impression on generations of students and colleagues. He was a prolific researcher and author – publishing over 250 scholarly works, as well as a book in 2021 that analyzed every U.S. president through a professors' lens. His career spanned everything from psychopharmacology to anthropology, and even after retirement, he continued to pursue his lifelong passion for learning. Dr. Barry was an inspiration to many, and he will be profoundly missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him.

In Memoriam

The following individuals have passed away as of January 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025

Samuel Barfield (PHARM '50)
R. Paul Baumgartner (PHARM '56)
Robert A. Cohn (PHARM '65)
Patrick D. Dolan Sr. (PHARM '63)
Thomas J. Duda Jr. (PHARM '66)
Michael S. Heesters Jr. (PHARM '03)
Zola Phillip Horovitz (PHARM '55; PHARM '58; PHARM '60)
Stanton J. Jonas (PHARM '51, SPH '72)
Marvin H. Levick (PHARM '55, MED '60)
James Clair McMichael (PHARM '74)
Edward Donald Purich (PHARM '63; PHARM '68; PHARM '73)
William Joseph Rietscha (PHARM '78)

John P. Rosile (PHARM '57)
John R. Rupprecht (PHARM '57)
Marion E. Sauers (PHARM '74; PHARM '81)
Thomas Pearce Saxton (PHARM '66)
Anne E. Daniels Severs (PHARM '68)
Charles A. Sherer (PHARM '74)
Meyer Simon (PHARM '60)
Loretta Eileen Stana (PHARM '71)
Nancy Little Steele (PHARM '52)
Edward W. Sweeney (PHARM '74)
Loretta Eileen Stana (PHARM '71)
Nancy Little Steele (PHARM '52)
Edward W. Sweeney (PHARM '74)

Long Story Short

Our Grads Relive Their Favorite Pitt Pharmacy Memories

We asked the Class of 2025 to tell us some of their fondest memories from their time at Pitt Pharmacy. Here's what they had to say.

"One of my favorite Pitt memories is more of an experience and that is the friendships I've built. Pharmacy school introduced me to incredible people, and connecting them with my closest friends from undergrad created an amazing friend group. We've shared countless memories, and I know there are many more to come. The University of Pittsburgh and the School of Pharmacy gave me lifelong friends who have shaped my journey and will always be part of my life."

—Maddy Allen

"Early morning study dates at the Pete gym before midterms and finals. My friends and I would all pile into a car at 5AM, stop at Starbucks, then sit in the comfy chairs while watching the sun rise and asking each other exam questions." —Lana Callaghan

"Attending various professional conferences, including Midyear, APhA Annual, and PPA with Pitt Pharmacy!"

—Caitlin Esteves

"My time in school was full of moments that shaped me professionally. Whether it was navigating difficult coursework or connecting with patients during rotations, each experience has played a role in preparing me for what's next in my career."

—Tyler Jones

"Coming to school in the crack of dawn on exam days with my cold Dunkin ice coffee in my hand, ready to face my friend's chaotic, rapid-fire exam prep ritual."

—Rachel Kim

"Meeting my best friends, visiting Suzanne's office in Salk Hall, and organizing an end of year city celebration with our entire graduating class!" —Alex Mannino

"One of my favorite Pitt Pharmacy memories were the Cardiology Innovation Presentations, especially the Warfarin Dance Moms Pyramid." —Arvin Sequeira

"One of my favorite Pitt memories was serving as curriculum chair for the Student Industry Organization (SIO), where I helped build the PharmD curriculum by launching our school's first elective focused on careers in the pharmaceutical industry." —Kaylea Zhang

"My favorite memory was meeting my new cohort at the department. With the support we received from the faculty, we shared our goals to learn and grow together. Beyond campus, the warmth and support from my co-workers—and how kind people were—made Pittsburgh feel like home." —Mohammad Al Numan

"Feeling the seasons change — flowers blooming and falling — as I walked through Pitt's campus."

—Anzhuo Wang

"Collaborating with labmates, late-night problem-solving, and celebrating research milestones with classmates!" —Zoe Zhang

CLASS OF 2025





University of
Pittsburgh

School of
Pharmacy

University of Pittsburgh
School of Pharmacy
3501 Terrace St
Pittsburgh, PA 15261

The Pitt Pharmacy family wants to hear about your achievements and promotions.
We want to share with alumni, faculty, staff, and students.
Send us your news and keep in touch.



Drew, son of Pitt Pharmacy alum and Alumni Board of Directors member, Kristen (Topolosky) Petrilla and her husband Gregory Petrilla, Pitt Dental alumni.



Arianna, daughter of Pitt Pharmacy alum and faculty member Julie DiBridge Clarkson and her husband Ryan Clarkson.



Leo - Son of Pitt Pharmacy alumni Gretchen Garofoli and her husband, Mark.



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