



## College of Pharmacy UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Report to the  
Texas Pharmacy Congress  
February 28, 2025

# UHCOP Reclaims Top NAPLEX Spot in Texas, Earns ACPE Reaccreditation into 2033

UHCOP reclaimed the first-place spot in Texas for Pharm.D. graduates taking the NAPLEX for the first time, with 88.9% pass rate on the 2024 exam.

In addition, among pharmacy institutions with at least 95 students taking the exam for the first time, UHCOP was ranked fifth in the nation.

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



Nationally, nearly 10,500 Pharm.D. graduates took the exam for the first time in 2024, yielding a 77.5% pass rate.

In addition, the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Board of Directors has designated the UHCOP Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) professional degree program as compliant across all ACPE standards, with accreditation extended through June 30, 2033.

UHCOP has maintained continuous accreditation since it was first awarded to the college in 1950, only days before the first class of students were to graduate and the first college at UH to earn national accreditation.

## Kumar Earns \$3.2M NIH Grant to Study TAK1 Inhibition in Rhabdomyosarcoma

Faculty researcher Ashok Kumar, Ph.D., has been awarded a five-year, \$3.2 million National Institutes of Health grant to identify key mechanisms and molecular targets to prevent tumor progression in Rhabdomyosarcoma (RMS).

Preliminary results demonstrate that the signaling protein transforming growth factor  $\beta$ -activated kinase 1 (TAK1) is highly activated in both embryonal RMS and alveolar RMS cells and human RMS samples, suggesting it plays a significant role in this cancer.

Kumar's lab will investigate the molecular mechanisms through which TAK1 induces tumorigenesis and inhibits myogenic differentiation in RMS. His team also will investigate the signaling mechanisms through which TAK1 causes cancer stem cell enrichment and inhibits differentiation of RMS and examine the therapeutic potential of inhibition of TAK1 on xenografts and patient-derived xenograft (PDX) models of RMS.

The Else & Philip Hargrove Endowed Professor of Drug Discover and Develop-



ment, Kumar also serves as director of the new Institute of Muscle Biology and Cachexia.

## Institute of Muscle Biology & Cachexia Forms, Sets Inaugural Conference for May 18-20

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

The institute members will focus on discovering the mechanisms of muscle biology and muscle wasting and developing therapeutic interventions to stop muscle loss or



alleviate the impact of muscle wasting. The IMBC also will facilitate experiential and mentoring opportunities for undergraduate,

graduate and professional students as well as postdoctoral fellows, early stage investigators and junior faculty.

The IMBC's inaugural Muscle Biology and Cachexia Conference will be May 18-20 at UH's Student Center. Abstracts are being accepted for presentation consideration through April 15. For more information about the conference, visit <https://tinyurl.com/>

## Interprofessional Student-run HOMES Clinic Celebrates 25 Years of Serving Unhoused

The student-run interprofessional H.O.M.E.S. Clinic recently marked its 25th year of providing essential medical care to Houston's unhoused population.

Since opening in January 2000 under the auspices of Healthcare for the Homeless-Houston, the H.O.M.E.S. Clinic has helped train thousands of student volunteers and served over 5,000 patients. Today, patient care is provided by pharmacy and medical students and preceptors from UHCOP, Baylor College of Medicine, the UH Tilman Fertitta Family College of Medicine, and UTHealth McGovern Medical School.

Students and preceptors – including



Clinical Associate Professor David Wallace, Pharm.D., who has been with the clinic since its start – work to provide for patients' immediate clinical needs through physical assessments, screenings, and short-term

medication supplies as appropriate. Patient cases often are more medically complex, with comorbidities including diabetes, high blood pressure, COPD or asthma, and skin infections as well as mental health concerns.

Students and preceptors also inquire into patients' housing, food, transportation and other challenges to share options for non-medical service providers and resources in the community.

In 2010, the H.O.M.E.S. Clinic was recognized with the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy's Student Community Engaged Service Award.

**Sherrie Myers**, RCPHT, Instructional Lab Manager, was named 2024 Outstanding Pharmacy Technician by Gulf Coast Society of Health-System Pharmacists.

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UHCOP recently welcomed **Anandi Law**, Ph.D., American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy and associate dean/professor at Western University of Health Sciences College of Pharmacy, for a series of presentations to graduate and professional students as well as college faculty members.



## Student News

Thirty-six Pharm.D. students across all four classes competed in the UHCOP Chapter of the American Pharmacists Association-Academy of Student Pharmacists' Dr. Lynn Simpson Patient Counseling Competition. After winning the local competition, Pharm.D. candidate **Hunter Adam** will represent the college at nationals.

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**Abigail Alley**, Pharm.D. candidate, was awarded the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy/National Association of Boards of Pharmacy District 6 Scholarship.

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**Megan Huang Frazier**, Pharm.D. student, was appointed to serve on the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists Pharmacy Student Forum Advisory Group on Student Society Development for the 2024-25 term.

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**Marriam Khan**, Pharm.D. student, was awarded a 2025 Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy Scholarship.



Continuing the tradition started in 1992, the first-year class of Pharm.D. students hosted the **2025 International Day** Jan. 29. The students organized booths to showcase their respective cultures, with a variety of food, fashion and activities such as henna tattoos, karaoke and jewelry-making.

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**Jacob McPherson**, Pharm.D. ('21), current Ph.D. candidate, was among the reviewers on the "Best Papers of AAC, 2024" episode of the *Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy* journal's "Editors in Conversation" podcast.



## College Bids Farewell to Prolific Researchers and Mentors Bond and Ruan

UHCOP recently farewell to two prolific and respected researchers, teachers and mentors: Richard A. Bond, Ph.D., and Ke-He Ruan, Ph.D., M.D.

A two-time alumnus of the college, Bond developed research collaborations with such Nobel Prize recipients as Robert J. Lefkowitz and the late Sir James Black; and late renowned pharmacologist Paul M. Vanhoutte, an author of over 1,100 publications, over his 31-year career.

Awarded three U.S. patents, Bond is among the top 2% most cited researchers in an analysis published in the journal *PLOS One* and was credited as a "major figure" in



pharmacology (alongside mentors Black and Lefkowitz) in a *Biochemical Pharmacology* retrospective article.

His scholarship included more than 100 papers in such publications as *Science*, *PNAS*, and the *British Journal of Pharmacology*, with over 10,000 citations. Bond is credited for the term "paradoxical pharmacology" to describe his results showing benefits of long-term beta-blocker use in asthma despite its initial negative impacts.

A UHCOP professor of medicinal chemistry for 18 years, Ruan also served as director of the Center for Experimental Therapeutics and Pharmacoinformatics. His team was the first to identify the detrimental effects of NSAIDs on heart repair.

Dr. Ruan's research also was instrumental in advancing the understanding of regulation of lipid metabolites, particularly through the cyclooxygenase pathway, and on prostacyclin (PGI<sub>2</sub>), prostaglandin E<sub>2</sub> (PGE<sub>2</sub>), and thromboxane A<sub>2</sub> (TXA<sub>2</sub>) illuminated their crucial roles in vascular and neuronal diseases.

Among his landmark achievements were engineering the Single-Chain Hybrid Enzyme Complex, also known as Enzyme-link technology, and developing active single-chain GPCR-G-protein complexes as versatile platforms for modulating GPCR signaling.



Diana S-L. Chow, Ph.D., FNAI, and Ming Hu, Ph.D., have been appointed John J. & Paula Lovoi Endowed Professor of Drug Discovery and Development and Diana S-L. Chow Endowed Professor of Drug Discovery and Development.

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Austin De La Cruz, Pharm.D., BCPP, clinical associate professor, presented "Collaborating with Mental Health Pharmacists to Optimize Multiple Medications" at the National Veterans Affairs Community Based Outpatient Clinic Mental Health Grand Rounds Jan. 5. De La Cruz also served as a reviewer for the Veterans Affairs/Department of Defense Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Chronic Insomnia Disorder and Obstructive Sleep Apnea.

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Taryn Eubank, Pharm.D., BCIDP, research assistant professor, has been awarded a one-year, \$40,000 Futures Grant Award from the American College of Clinical Pharmacy Foundation for her project, "Enterococcus colonization negatively impacts outcomes in patients with *Clostridioides difficile* infections: Implications for antimicrobial and diagnostic stewardship." Eubank also was awarded a one-year, \$40,000 Early Career Research Grant from the Society of Infectious Diseases Pharmacists for her project, "Enterococcus enhance *Clostridioides difficile* severity: implication for antimicrobial and diagnostic stewardship."

## \$390K NIH Grant Aids Darabi's Work on Stem Cell-based Therapeutics for Muscle Disorders

Backed by a two-year, \$390,000 NIH grant, Radbod Darabi, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor, is investigating stem cell "cross-talk" during muscle regeneration as well as how multicellular stem cell-based therapeutics can be designed for skeletal muscle disorders.

Dr. Darabi's efforts are focused on using human induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSC) to bolster the therapeutic efficiency of these cells and enhance muscle regeneration. The Darabi lab will utilize co-culture methods, thereby physically separating human iPSC-derived MPCs and ECs into two different populations and allowing communication via a process called paracrine signaling.

The lab also plans to develop, test and optimize therapeutic efficacy of the combinational MPC and EC based-cell therapies in animal models for muscle injury and dystrophy. The researchers will evaluate the survival and engraftment of the human iPSC-derived ECs and MPCs. The data will also help determine the efficiency and appropriate cell ratio of combined human iPSC-EC and MPC therapy in the models.



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