



College of Pharmacy UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

**Report to the
Texas Pharmacy Congress
August 6-7, 2026**

UHCOP Students Win Self-Care Championship, 5 Scholarships at TPA

UHCOP students secured the trophy in the Texas Student Pharmacist Self-Care Competition and five scholarships at the Texas Pharmacy Association 2026 Conference & Expo July 24-26 in The Woodlands.

The team of Gabriela Gaytán, Christine Nguyen, Emily Nguyen and Andrea Pabón secured a nail-biting win in the Jeopardy/quiz bowl-style competition hosted by the Texas Pharmacy Foundation. With a narrow lead of \$200 going into the final question, the UHCOP team claimed the



Gabriela Gaytán, Andrea Pabón, Christine Nguyen, and Emily Nguyen celebrate a hard-fought win in the Texas Student Pharmacist Self-Care Competition.

trophy after betting its entire bank and correctly identified the recommended dose for a smoking cessation product based on a patient's typical nicotine use.

Five UHCOP Pharm.D. students also were presented with TPF scholarships at the meeting. The recipients and their scholarships were: Jose Ayala and Kaitlin Ridgell — Professional Recovery Network Scholarship; Gabriela Gaytán — Abeldt Family Scholarship; Michael Crichlow — Larry "Neal" McClaugherty Scholarship; and Qamar Dhafer — TPF General Scholarship.

5 Colleges Unite Under 'UH Health' Banner to Expand Patient Care and Discovery

UH Health is the University of Houston's cross-disciplinary academic health enterprise, created to unite education, research and clinical partnerships to improve health outcomes and increase access to care across Texas.

The initiative brings together medicine, nursing, pharmacy, optometry, psychology, social work, population health, research, the Humana Integrated Health Systems Science Institute and many other disciplines under a shared interprofessional vision. This collaborative, team-based approach represents a fundamental shift in how healthcare is delivered.

UH Health demonstrates the University's commitment to addressing complex health challenges by connecting expertise from across UH and creating new opportunities to advance research and innovation, education and community impact.

To strengthen these efforts, UH is investing \$77 million in a new 55,000-square-foot medical research building that will expand interdisciplinary research and accelerate scientific discovery in addition to the previously announced \$15 million medical research and education center in Edinburg as part of an expansion of the university's commitment to the region.



PREMIER Center Launches Community Pharmacy Research Network

UHCOP's PREMIER Center is developing a Texas-based community pharmacy research network to identify barriers and opportunities to improve pharmaceutical care statewide.

The PREMIER Center Community Pharmacy Research Network (PC-CPRN) is recruiting urban, rural and semi-rural pharmacies to help shape research questions, test patient-care interventions and translate findings into practical tools. The first PC-CPRN partner is Lufkin-based Brookshire Brothers Pharmacy, which operates 71 sites across Texas and Louisiana.



The network's rural and semi-rural component serves as the Texas Hub of the Rural Research Alliance of Community Pharmacies (RURAL-CP), a multistate practice-based research network. The network will provide lasting research infrastructure guided by the needs of participating pharmacies and communities, including settings often underrepresented in traditional clinical research.



Students, Preceptors Engage in 2,151 Encounters at Houston Mayor's Back 2 School Fest

At the annual Houston Mayor's Back 2 School Fest Aug. 1, 69 Pharm.D. students provided 2,151 service encounters — comprising 246 patient screenings and 1,905 educational encounters — to area schoolchildren and their parents or guardians. Under the supervision of 12 preceptors, student-provided screenings included blood pressure and blood glucose screenings and immunization record reviews as well as education on such topics as medication safety, nutrition, chronic kidney disease, stroke and cancer.

200+ High School, College Students Gain Education and Career Insights

More than 200 students recently stepped into the world of pharmacy through immersive programs at UHCOP. The three sessions of the Pharmacy Summer Institute drew more than 60 high school and college students for hands-on activities and insights on pharmacy education and careers. UHCOP also welcomed 160 high school students from the National Youth Leadership Forum on Medicine, allowing them to explore the diverse roles of pharmacists in patient care and research.



Blackwell Earns Houston Program's Roger Anderson Leadership Award

The Houston Program honored alumnus **Joshua Blackwell**, Pharm.D., M.S. ('17), MBA, FASHP, FTSHP, BCSCP, R.Ph., clinical pharmacy manager of ambulatory services, and residency program director at UT Southwestern Medical Center, with the 2026 Roger W. Anderson (RWA) Leadership Award June 18.

Blackwell has held several leadership positions at both the Texas and American

societies of health-system pharmacy, as well as co-founding the mentorship/scholarship organization Pharmacist Initiative Leaders (PILs), Inc.

Pictured at right are UHCOP's Divya Varkey, Pharm.D., M.S., R.Ph.; University of Texas at Austin College of Pharmacy's Diane Ginsburg, Ph.D., M.S. ('90), R.Ph., FASHP; Blackwell; and Thomas Roduta, Pharm.D., M.S. ('18), R.Ph.



Student News

Emily Nguyen, Pharm.D. student, attended the American Pharmacists Association-Academy of Student Pharmacists (APhA-ASP) Summer Leadership Institute as APhA-ASP national president-elect July 17-19 in Washington, D.C.

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Four Pharmaceutical Health Outcomes and Policy Concentration Ph.D. students were accepted into summer internship programs: **Paroma Arefin** – AMCP Foundation/OptumRx; **Sammitha Cheruvu** – Pharmaceutical Quality Alliance; **Zhengxuan Li** – Regeneron Pharmaceuticals; and **Chijioke Okeke** – Johnson & Johnson.

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Matthew Kim, Pharm.D. student, was selected for the Food and Drug Administration's Oncology Center of Excellence Scholars Program, which provides opportunities for participants to contribute to scientifically grounded projects in project management, document standardization, inter-center coordination, and oncology-focused educational initiatives developed in partnership with professional societies.

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Six Pharm.D. students attended the APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorders May 26-30 in Salt Lake City, thanks to TPF PRN Scholarships, The PREMIER Center travel awards and APhA-ASP national executive committee sponsorship.



UHCOP APhA SUD Institute participants included Aya Al Obaidi, Crystal Nguyen, Menatalla Amer and Kaitlin Ridgell.

Bernadette Asias-Dinh, Pharm.D. ('11), BCPS, BCACP, CDCES, R.Ph., clinical associate professor, was awarded a scholarship to complete the Certification-Advanced Diabetes Management Board Exam of the Certification Board for Diabetes Care and Education.

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Elizabeth Coyle, Pharm.D., FCCM, BCPS, associate dean for academic affairs and clinical professor, has been appointed as the 2026-27 vice chair of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy's Academic Affairs Committee.

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Radbod Darabi, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor, served as a grant reviewer and Special Emphasis Panel member for the Musculoskeletal, Skin and Oral Sciences Review Branch within the Center for Scientific Review's Division of Physiological and Pathological Sciences; a panel member and grant reviewer for the NIH Musculoskeletal Tissue Engineering Study Section; and a grant reviewer for KU Leuven in Leuven, Belgium.

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Shanter Rayford Davis, Pharm.D. ('06), BCPS, R.Ph., clinical assistant professor, and **Joshua Wollen**, Pharm.D., R.Ph., clinical associate professor, were recognized as Top Reviewers for the American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education.

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E. James Essien, M.D., DrPH, professor, has been appointed to the editorial board of Spring Nature's Scientific Reports.

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Tetiana Kolodiazhna, Ph.D. student, earned third place in the Graduate Research category for her poster, "Targeting CDK5 with the novel inhibitor TK22 suppresses endothelial-to-mesenchymal transition in idiopathic pulmonary arterial hypertension," at the DDI/CNRC 2026 Annual Symposium hosted by the UH Drug Discovery Institute and Center of Nuclear Receptor and Cell Signaling April 29.

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Xi Lu, Ph.D., assistant professor, and **Jieni Li**, Ph.D. ('24), MPH, research assistant professor, were appointed to the working group of the International Society for Pharmacoeconomics' response to the FDA draft guidance on the "Use of Bayesian Methodology in Clinical Trials of Drug and Biological Products," with Lu as lead.

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Bradley McConnell, Ph.D., FAHA, FCVS, professor, has been appointed to the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET) Organizing Committee.

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Fanfei Meng, Ph.D., assistant professor, received a two-year, \$446,144 National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases grant for "Blocking Multiple Pathological Factors for Sepsis Treatment."

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Kimberly Nguyen, Pharm.D. ('02), R.Ph., assistant dean of student and professional affairs and clinical associate professor, has been appointed as an inaugural American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Membership Ambassador.

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Onye Ononogbu, Pharm.D., MPH, BCOP, research assistant

Aspiring Cardiovascular Researchers Earn AHA Meeting Awards, Travel Support

Several aspiring undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral cardiovascular researchers earned presentation awards and travel support — including an American Heart Association (AHA) Institutional Award for Undergraduate Student Training — to present at the Basic Cardiovascular Sciences (BCVS) Scientific Sessions July 13-16 in Boston.

Cardiovascular Undergraduate Research Experience (UH-CURE) participants **Ethan Liu** (Case Western University) and **John Nguyen** (Texas A&M University) earned first and fourth place awards for their posters, "Comparative Characterization of Human Induced Pluripotent Stem Cell Derived Endothelial Cells with Human Umbilical Vein Endothelial Cells," and "Aptamer Conjugated Polymers for Targeting Cardiovascular Disease," respectively.

UHCOP's **Ying Xu**, Ph.D. student, and **Luqi Zhao**, Ph.D., postdoctoral fellow, received BCVS New Investigator Travel Awards to present posters at the meeting. Xu's project was on "Compartmentalized cAMP Dysregulation by the AKAP12-PDE8A Axis Drives Electrical Remodeling and Heart Failure" and Zhao's project was on "Pathogenesis of acquired left ventricle non-compaction."

professor, has been appointed to the Texas Health and Human Services Sickle Cell Task Force. She also received a two-year, \$445,168 National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities grant for "Tailoring Depression Screening for Sickle Cell Disease: A Novel Approach to Mental Health Care." Project contributors include co-principal investigators **Modupe Idowu**, M.D., of UTHealth Houston and **Tyler Varisco**, Ph.D. ('21), Pharm.D., of The University of Texas at Austin College of Pharmacy and co-investigator **Austin De La Cruz**, Pharm.D., BCPP, UHCOP clinical associate professor.

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MariVi Tejada-Simón, Ph.D., M.Ed. ('07), associate professor, was inducted into Sigma Xi, The Scientific Research Honor Society.

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Tiansheng Wang, Ph.D., Pharm.D., assistant professor, received a two-year, \$148,445 Alzheimer's Association grant for "Using neuroimaging data to identify drug repurposing candidates for ADRD."

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Joshua Wollen, Pharm.D., clinical associate professor, has been appointed to the steering committee of Houston Medical Forum.

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Guizhen Zhao, Ph.D., assistant professor, was appointed to the Early Career Editorial Board of the Journal of the American Heart Association (JAHA) and the Academy of Cardiovascular Research Excellence Science and Program Committee. Additionally, she received a one-year, \$77,000 American Heart Association Career Development Award.

HEART, CURE Summer Programs Wrap Up With AHA, UH Presentations

Thanks to American Heart Association (AHA) and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute grants, 15 undergraduates from universities across the U.S. received paid hands-on research experiences and mentorship in UH labs over the summer as part of the Houston Experience for Advancing Research and Training (UH-HEART) and UH-Cardiovascular Undergraduate Research Experience (UH-CURE) programs led by Professor **Bradley McConnell**, Ph.D., FAHA, FCVS.

As their respective programs drew to a close, the participants had the opportunity to present their research work at the AHA Basic Cardiovascular Sciences (BCVS) Scientific Sessions July 13-16 in Boston and at UHCOP July 31.

The UH-HEART projects and presenters were:

- "Determining the Molecular Changes in Mice Hearts After a Single Bout of Treadmill Running" by Adam Alubaidi of the University of Houston
- "Developing Optimized Bioprinting Techniques for Cardiac Tissue Chip Applications" by Allison Ding of Rice University
- "Development and Characterization of a Tantalum-Loaded Self-Assembling Peptide Hydrogel for Endovascular Embolization" by Elaine Liu of The University of Texas at Dallas



- "HSL Inhibition Affects Oleic Acid-induced Lipid Droplet Accumulation in Mouse Cardiac Endothelial Cells" by Nishi Modi of the University of Texas at Arlington
- "Investigating BAF60a's Role in Endothelial Cell Dysfunction" by Anna Toombs of Tougaloo College

The UH-CURE program projects and presenters were:

- "Membrane-Associated Transcription Factor MYRF Regulates Epicardial Cell Migration to Drive Cardiac Dysfunction and Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome" by Katarina Dobrosky of Wake Forest University
- "Talin: Integrin Activation and Disruption" by Oscar Garza of The University of Texas at Austin
- "TAK1 Regulates Multiple Oncogenic Signaling Pathways and Mitochondrial Stress Responses in

Rhabdomyosarcoma" by Erin He of Rice University

- "STEMIN-and YAP5SA-Induced Exosomes as a Therapeutic Strategy to Block Cell Death in Failing Hearts" by Ali Irhabi of the University of Houston
- "Comparative Characterization of Human Induced Pluripotent Stem Cell Derived Endothelial Cells (hiPSC-ECs) with Human Umbilical Vein Endothelial Cells (HUVECs)" by Ethan Liu of Case Western Reserve University
- "Investigating the Effect of AKAP12 Upregulation on AKAP5 in Cardiac β -Adrenergic Signaling" by Jenevieve Lopez of Occidental College
- "Cardiovascular Drug Repurposing to Prevent BTK Inhibitor-Induced Endothelial Dysfunction" by Camila Leonor Madera Ruiz of the University of Puerto Rico at Ponce
- "Aptamer Conjugated Polymers for Targeting Cardiovascular Disease" by John Nguyen of Texas A&M University
- "Impact of Antipsychotics on Cardiovascular Outcomes Among Older Adults with Dementia" by Bailey Perry of Howard University
- "Effects of Prior LPS Exposure on Adipose Macrophage Inflammation and Diabetes Risk" by Esther Umezurike-Chukwu of Case Western Reserve University

Bradley McConnell, Ph.D., FAHA, FCVS, professor, presented "Innovative Signaling Concepts in Cardiac, Metabolic and Lymphangiogenic Processes," and "Precision Regulation of Cardiac Stress Responses by AKAPs" at the American Society of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics Annual Meeting May 17-20 in Minneapolis.

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MariVi Tejada-Simón, Ph.D., M.Ed. ('07), associate professor, presented "Assessment that teaches: Two-stage exams in Health Professions" during the eLearning Consortium of Colorado April 8-10 at the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs and "Creating equitable education through AI tutors and faculty tools that support learning and reflection" at the Teaching and Learning with AI Conference June 11-13 at the University of Central Florida.

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Several faculty and staff members served as presenters during the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Annual Meeting July 18-21 in Grapevine:

- **Elizabeth Coyle**, Pharm.D., BCPS, FCCM, R.Ph., served as

a panelist for "Same Goal, Different Game: Advising versus Coaching"

- **Morgan Ely**, B.S., served as a panelist for "Enhancing Your Efficiency with WebAdMIT, Analytics, and More"
- **Nancy Ordóñez**, Pharm.D. ('98), R.Ph., **Shane Tolleson**, Pharm.D. ('14), R.Ph., **Mabel Truong**, Pharm.D. ('11), BCPS, R.Ph., **Cindy Chavez-Wiechec**, MBA, and **Sarah Garcia**, B.S. ('24), co-presented "Assessing P4 Student Responses on the Utility of Professional Development Activities"
- **Aayna Shamsi**, Pharm.D. ('17), R.Ph., presented "Leveling up the learner: Strengthening Self-Directed Learning through Emotional Intelligence, Self-Efficacy and Coping" and served as a panelist for "Counter to Classroom: How Rxacy Technicians Can Power Pharmacy Education," which was moderated by **Leslie Joseph**, B.S., R.Ph.T., and **Sherrie Myers**, RPhT
- **Doug Thornton**, Pharm.D., Ph.D., BCPS, R.Ph., and **Matthew Wanat**, Pharm.D., BCPS, BCCCP, FCCM, R.Ph., co-presented "Building Research Capacity: A Pilot Mentoring Program for Clinical and Research Faculty"

Recent Publications

Persistent Median Artery Prevalence: A Cadaveric Study. Tran P, Bennett D, Eversole EA, Al-Sharfeen A, **Nguyen V**, Frison AC, Arguedas C, Sadacharan C, Pinkas A. *Cureus*. 2026 Jan 14;18(1):e101539. doi: 10.7759/cureus.101539. eCollection 2026 Jan.

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Phosphodiesterase 8 regulation of excitation-contraction coupling as a target for cardiovascular disease: is it my turn now? **Xu Y, McConnell BK**. *Am J Physiol Heart Circ Physiol*. 2026 Apr 1;330(4):H1102-H1116. doi: 10.1152/ajpheart.00743.2025. Epub 2026 Feb 18.

Textbook reading habits and perceptions among PharmD students in an integrated curriculum: A mixed-methods analysis. **Das J, Safarudin R, Thornton JD, Williams L**. *Curr Pharm Teach Learn*. 2026 Feb;18(2):102489. doi: 10.1016/j.cptl.2025.102489. Epub 2025 Oct 28.

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K2P Channels as Key Regulators of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Vascular Function. **Abdelnasser HY**, Pi X, Pandit LM, **McConnell BK**. *Pharmaceuticals (Basel)*. 2026 Mar 25;19(4):533. doi: 10.3390/ph19040533.

Using Machine Learning to Design Effective Antimicrobial Dosing Regimens. Galgat H, **Pouya N, Tam VH**, Nikolaou M. *Comput Chem Eng*. 2026 Jul;210:109645. doi: 10.1016/j.compchemeng.2026.109645. Epub 2026 Apr 3.

Mitragynine and Morphine Stabilize Different Conformations of the μ Opioid Receptor as Revealed by Molecular Dynamics Simulation Studies. **Neupane NP**, Mathews JT, Lingaraju S, **You Y, Mathukumalli K, Das J**. *ACS Omega*. 2026 Apr 9;11(15):22929-22944. doi: 10.1021/acsomega.5c12348. eCollection 2026 Apr 21.

Acquired resistance to the PRMT5 inhibitor confers collateral sensitivity to MEK inhibition in MTAP-null non-small cell lung cancer. Fu R, Wang Y, Rehman I, Bedford E, **Sharif S**, Nguyen ND, Powell RT, Adams A, Liu W, Wang S, He W, Lu Y, Liu B, Shah PA, Ahnert JR, Chen T, Peng W, Stephan CC, **Liu X**, Bedford MT, Xu H. *bioRxiv [Preprint]*. 2026 Apr 21:2026.04.16.719008. doi: 10.64898/2026.04.16.719008.

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2025-2026 Academic Affairs Committee Report: Advancing Competency-Based Pharmacy Education and Academic Coaching. Chen AMH, Rhoney DH, Thornby KA, Chung EP, Churchwell MD, **Coyle EA**, Daugherty KK, Elmes-Patel A, Kleppinger EL, Maldonado Davila WT, Minze M, Nelson NR, Rapier M, Shehata M, Sibicky SL, Traynor A, Ragucci KR, Stowe CD. *Am J Pharm Educ*. 2026 Jul;90(7):102009. doi: 10.1016/j.ajpe.2026.102009. Epub 2026 Jun 2.

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