

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

***New Leadership
for a New Era***

College of Pharmacy

ANNUAL
REPORT
2023–24

#1

Students win clinical skills
national championship

#1

Public university in
New England

#1

Top research funding among
pharmacy colleges in New England

URI College of Pharmacy

This annual report includes the latest news and feature stories about our programs, faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

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WHO WE ARE

Mission

We are a welcoming and inclusive student-centered research community. We pursue lives of service and intellectual exploration to solve scientific challenges and prepare students to deliver interdisciplinary health care with compassion and intention.

Vision

To advance health and transform communities

Cover: Kerry LaPlante, an internationally recognized expert in antimicrobial resistance and infectious diseases, was named the eighth dean of the URI College of Pharmacy in December 2023. Learn more about LaPlante on page 12.

MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

“To advance health and transform communities.”

A short sentence, yet one with a profound impact. This vision perfectly encapsulates the purpose that unites every professor, student, staff member, and alumnus of the URI College of Pharmacy. It is a dedication to excellence, compassion, and advancing health—a culture that transcends the boundaries of our classrooms and laboratories to positively impact communities near and far.

In my first year as dean, I have been truly inspired by the extraordinary commitment, dedication, and achievements of our college’s faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Rhody pride runs deep, and it shows!

Within these pages, you will find highlights of the outstanding accomplishments that have propelled our college forward, including our significant rise in national rankings—placing our Doctor of pharmacy program at No.31 in the country!

Our research partnerships continue to drive innovation and discovery in critical areas such as neuroscience, liver disease, cancer, infectious diseases, and opioid use disorder. Our researchers are tackling urgent challenges like microplastics’ impact on health and the environment, pioneering novel therapies through technologies like nanoparticle delivery and virtual reality, and establishing collaborative research networks regionally and nationally. This extraordinary work has been supported by more than \$21 million in grants over the past year, placing URI among the top 10 percent in the nation for research funding.

Our educational programs are also breaking barriers, offering students interdisciplinary opportunities to collaborate with peers in nursing, medicine, physical therapy, and more, both within URI and beyond. These experiences prepare our pharmacy students to be full-spectrum health-care providers, equipping them to assess not just medications, but overall patient health, ensuring they are ready to make a real difference in patients’ lives.

And our commitment doesn’t stop there. Our faculty and alumni are living examples of service in action. Many are on the front-lines of health-care, providing direct patient care in hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies nationwide. Others are advocating for change, whether it’s in statehouses, on Capitol Hill, or through global platforms online. Together, they continue to make a profound impact on the health of communities locally and globally.

These achievements are remarkable, and they represent just the beginning. As you review this year’s annual report, I hope you are as inspired as I am by the transformative work happening at the URI College of Pharmacy.

The future is bright, and I look forward to the incredible accomplishments still to come.

Go Rhody!

Kerry LaPlante
Dean, College of Pharmacy



“The future of the College of Pharmacy lies in our collaborative spirit and deep commitment to community and each other. Together, we will drive innovation, advance healthcare, and create a lasting impact on the world around us.”

—Dean Kerry LaPlante

BY THE NUMBERS



Pharm.D.

Student applications
392

Admitted students
91

Incoming student average
GPA – 4.07

B.S.P.S.

Student applications
88

Admitted students
23

Incoming student average
GPA – 3.36



Year one residency
match



Year two residency
match



2023 students employed
upon graduation



Students who would
choose URI again



Federal research
funding
\$21M



National research
funding rank
Top 10%



Research funding
in 2022–23
#1 in
New England



Student-to-faculty ratio
7.8-to-1



A Place of Healing and Wellness

The Heber W. Youngken Jr. Medicinal Garden, named after the College of Pharmacy's founding dean, a pioneer in the study of medicinal plants, focuses on the growing role of nature in healing and wellness, and features more than 200 plants that contain medicinal properties to help treat everything from dry skin to cancer. Located outside Paramaz Avedisian '54 Hall, the garden offers students an intimate interaction with the environment of healing. Pharmacy students studying natural ingredients in medications and self-care products can examine, in their natural state, plants commonly used in supplements and

ointments, including aloe, elderberries, saw palmetto, black cohosh, green coffee beans, and many more.

The garden is also a peaceful gathering spot for the campus community, featuring 500 ornamental plants, nine birch trees, sodded areas, walkways, benches shaped in the form of birch leaves, and a translucent sculptural frieze featuring panels that depict plant life in laboratory slides. A stunning example of a public space that draws on nature, science and art, the garden is a place for research and respite from the demands of 21st century life.

RESEARCH



Top in the Nation

College Among Country's Best in Research Funding

The URI College of Pharmacy is now ranked among the top 10 percent in the nation in total research grant funding after securing more than \$21 million in fiscal 2023.

The total research funding beats the college's three-year average of \$19.1 million and places URI atop the list of all pharmacy schools in the Northeast, according to the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, which compiles the list. The college has consistently ranked among the best pharmacy schools in research funding, reaching as high as No. 8 in the nation in 2020.

The funding fuels innovative research in such areas as drug development, cancer treatment and prevention, health outcomes, neurological health, and the use of natural ingredients like maple in maintaining health. The college's dynamic researchers will work to improve the influenza vaccine, find new treatments for cerebral palsy, investigate the damaging effects of microplastics on the body, and reduce incidence of HIV, among many other impactful projects.

Visit uri.edu/pharmacy/news for a more comprehensive look.



Nanoparticle Research

Professor Working To Treat, Prevent Liver Cancer



Associate Professor Jyothi Menon works in her lab in Avedisian Hall on the Kingston Campus.

Despite the prevalence of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), the fastest-growing cause of cancer-related death in the world, treatments against alcohol liver disease and associated fibrosis have proven largely unsuccessful due to the poor pharmacokinetics, toxicity, and the difficulty of targeting therapies to specific liver cells.

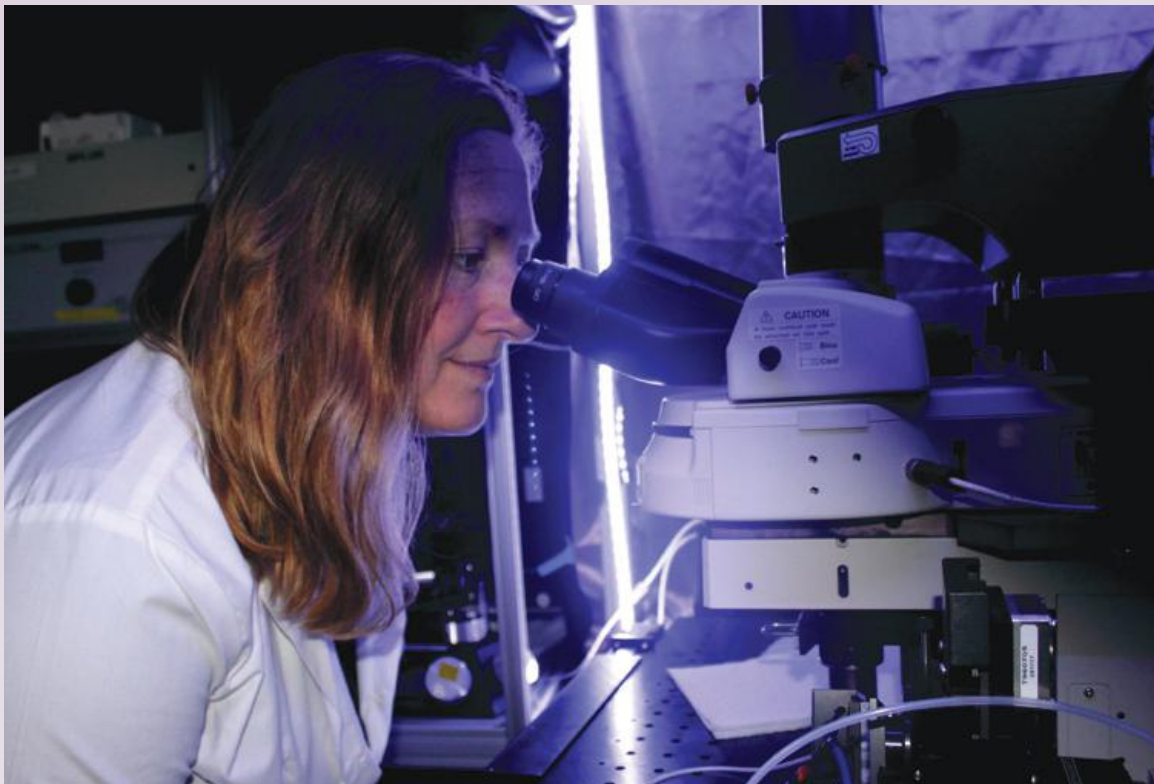
Associate professor Jyothi Menon is working to overcome those barriers using nanoparticles to specifically target liver cells responsible for hepatic fibrosis, enhance the penetration of drugs into the fibrotic liver tissue, deliver needed medications, and facilitate the timed release of therapeutics. Her efforts are supported by a grant from the National Institutes of

National Institutes of Health National Cancer Institute and the Biden Cancer Moonshot, a program launched by the White House last year "to support early-career researchers and help build a cancer research workforce that better represents the diversity of America."

Using nanoparticles created from polymers and lipids in her lab, Menon is specifically targeting liver macrophages that play a major role in the liver's response to stressors, including alcohol, to suppress cell signaling responsible for HCC development. The nanoparticles—roughly 1,000 times smaller than the diameter of a human hair, small enough to navigate through biological barriers and protect their cargo from degradation—are designed to specifically target and activate a protein expressed by the liver's Kupffer cells, leading to suppression of signaling responsible for liver inflammation and fibrosis.

In addition to activating cell surface proteins, nanoparticles can be used as a carrier system to deliver anti-fibrotic and anti-cancer therapies to the liver. The nanoparticles can be designed to release the drug in a sustained manner over time. Visit uri.edu/pharmacy/news for more details.





Assistant Professor Katharina Quinlan

Unlocking Cerebral Palsy

Millions in NIH Grants Support Research into Disorder's Causes, Treatments

Two new grants from the National Institutes of Health could shed light on why cerebral palsy develops and repurpose existing therapeutics to help treat the disorder.

Professor Katharina Quinlan is principal investigator on both grants, totaling \$5.8 million, to investigate key questions in cerebral palsy.

She is examining primary afferent depolarization (PAD), a mechanism that causes reflex responses to vary depending on sensory input. Quinlan is investigating PAD in cerebral palsy, along with an innovative idea: the potential to use transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) to help modulate hyperactive reflexes that can cause spasms through the PAD mechanism. Quinlan is investigating whether using TENS to tweak sensory input could be an affordable and accessible way to reduce spasms.

Quinlan, who also holds an appointment with URI's George & Anne Ryan Institute for Neuroscience, is also

working with fellow Professor Marin Manuel on whether a serotonin antagonist could be used as a potential treatment for hypertonia, in which too much muscle tone causes joint stiffness and difficulty with movement. In recent work, Quinlan saw that motor neurons become excessively active in response to serotonin following an

injury such as prenatal hypoxia, or lack of oxygen, which is a cause of cerebral palsy.

The project includes the key step of identifying which serotonin receptors in the spinal cord are the ones that contribute to spasticity and

“The idea is to look at a very targeted treatment that could be delivered specifically to the spinal cord.”

—Professor Katharina Quinlan

hypertonia. “Serotonin plays so many roles, we don’t want to block all of it,” said Quinlan. “The idea is to look at a very targeted treatment that could be delivered specifically to the spinal cord.”

Visit uri.edu/pharmacy/news for more details on these innovative projects.

Microplastics Research

Study: Microplastics Infiltrate All Body Systems, Cause Behavioral Changes

While the prevalence of microplastics in the environment is well-known, few studies examined the potential health impacts on mammals before Professor Jaime Ross's new research.

Ross and her team focused on neuro-behavioral effects and inflammatory response to exposure to microplastics, as well as the accumulation of microplastics in tissues, including the brain. They exposed young and old mice to varying levels of microplastics in drinking water over the course of three weeks, finding widespread infiltration of the microplastics into every organ in the body. They found that microplastic exposure induces both behavioral changes and alterations in

immune markers in liver and brain tissues. The study mice began to move and behave peculiarly, exhibiting behaviors akin to dementia in humans. The results were even more profound in older animals.

"To us, this was striking. These were not high doses of microplastics, but in only a short period of time, we saw these changes," Ross said. "We want to understand how plastics may change the ability for the brain to maintain its homeostasis or how exposure may lead to neurological disorders and diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease."

For more details on Ross' study, visit uri.edu/pharmacy/news.



Assistant Professor Jaime Ross





RI-INBRE Program Renewal

\$21M Grant Supports Biomedical Research, Training

The Rhode Island IDEa Network of Biomedical Research Excellence (RI-INBRE) program secured a new five-year, \$21 million grant from the National Institutes of Health, raising its investment in biomedical research and training in the state to more than \$100 million since the program's inception in 2001.

Based at URI, RI-INBRE promotes biomedical research at nine academic institutions across Rhode Island, providing faculty research and development support through research grants and student training awards for investigators.

Originally created to support biological, chemical, and pharmaceutical sciences, the program has expanded to include neuroscience, engineering, biotechnology, nursing, and other health and environmental sciences, according to pharmacy Professor Bongsup Cho, director of RI-INBRE.

"RI-INBRE provides the environment that enables unique opportunities for networking, faculty development, student training, and resource-sharing in Rhode Island. This has nurtured a vibrant community of researchers dedicated to advancing

biomedical science," Cho said. "This is a highly productive collaboration between federal and state entities, academia, and industry. It's been a wonderful partnership that continues to increase biomedical research funding and capacity in Rhode Island.

In its 23 years, the program has supported 802 research projects involving 218 faculty members, who have trained 2,210 undergraduate students, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows.

"This is a highly productive collaboration between federal and state entities, academia, and industry. It's been a wonderful partnership that continues to increase biomedical research funding and capacity in Rhode Island."

—Bongsup Cho, RI-INBRE director



Program Prepares Next Generation of Biotech Experts

RI-INBRE will continue preparing students to be the next leaders in the state's biotechnology industries after receiving renewed funding from the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training.

The organization's workforce development program provides hands-on biomedical training for students on URI's Kingston Campus. The program's

mission is to provide trainees with valuable biotech skills and to make those trainees preferred new hires for Rhode Island biotechnology industries once they graduate. The program is supported with \$223,875 in funding for the 2024–25 academic year, part of the Real Jobs Rhode Island program, raising its total funding to more than \$600,000.

Expert faculty and staff at URI design and conduct 14 intensive 2.5-day training modules for small groups of trainees, allowing instructors to provide individual attention for each participant. Students in chemical, biological, bioengineering, and other health sciences are encouraged to apply.



RI-INBRE Hosts Summer Undergraduate Research Symposium

RI-INBRE hosted its annual Summer Undergraduate Research Symposium in July, showcasing research findings from undergraduate students throughout the state. More than 140 research posters covering multiple topics were presented by students from nine colleges and universities in Rhode Island.





Partnership Expands URI Research Hub in Providence

College, Veterans Administration Medical Center Team Up

The URI College of Pharmacy has established a research hub in Providence that will help expand its already robust research program at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in the capital city.

A memorandum of understanding is spurring collaborative research among URI, the VA, and Ocean State Research Institute Inc. The five-year agreement establishes a formal relationship among researchers at the college and the VA,

allowing them to collaborate on research grants, combine resources, confirm and expand on each other's work, and share data to bolster research projects.

"We have so many outstanding researchers in the college, and the VA's research program—which is already fantastic—will be augmented by this research partnership," said Dean Kerry LaPlante. "This will give URI researchers direct access to patients and patient samples. We depend

on our medical school partnerships and our hospital partnerships because researchers need clinical samples for their studies. Now they can get them through this established relationship."

URI researchers can request access to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs database, encompassing data from up to 8 million veterans and real-world test results. Additionally, they may now be eligible for a VA research appointment.



Award-Winning Research

Annual Showcase Highlights Pharmacy Student Projects

With subjects as varied as arthritis, cancer, vitamin D deficiency, diabetes, and influenza, along with many more, dozens of URI College of Pharmacy students shared their research projects during the annual Student Research Showcase in the lobby of Paramaz Avedisian '54 Hall on April 26.

Faculty members reviewed the research and issued awards for the top projects in each department. Award winners include:

Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.):



First place: Meryl Coriell, Aminah Islam, Annabel La, Christine Mason, and Alexandria O'Brien

Bachelor of Science in Pharmaceutical Science



First place: Danielle Burge

Graduate Program in Pharmaceutical Science



First place: Colleen Hayes



Second place: Suburna Das

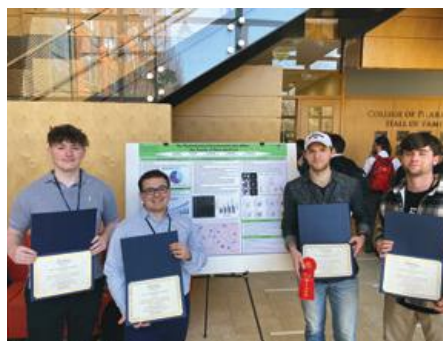


Third place: Sydney Bartman

Postdoctoral Fellows



Second place: MacKenzie Dolan, Maxwell McGuire, Samantha Meyer, Scott Mitchell, and Katie Scroggs



Second place: Elliya Delaire (not pictured), Evan Keough, Gavin Borges, Jake deBouver, and Liam Kennings



First place: Katherine Houlihan



Second place: Janitha Unagolla



Third place: Nicole Arnold, Katelyn Blake, Madi Hartling, Mahnoor Awa Shahzad, and Emma Van Reysen



Third place: Liam Patel and Jeily S. Mendez Alvarado (not pictured)



Third place: Elvia Mena Avila



College Names Kerry LaPlante Eighth Dean

LaPlante Brings Expertise in Infectious Diseases

Kerry LaPlante, an internationally recognized expert in antimicrobial resistance and infectious diseases, was named the dean of the College of Pharmacy after a comprehensive nationwide search.

A licensed clinical pharmacist, LaPlante is a tireless researcher and writer. She has published more than 140 peer-reviewed research articles, and she has received uninterrupted funding from more than 30 successfully awarded research grants, totaling more than \$21 million. Her foremost research expertise is in infectious diseases, specifically in the treatment

and prevention of multiple drug-resistant bacteria. The overall goal of her research and clinical work is to improve the health of the community, with the focus always on the patient, she said.

"Pharmacists, as the medication and safety experts in health care, play a critical role in a patient's health and well-being," LaPlante said. "The future of pharmacy practice and pharmaceutical sciences represents endless opportunities where innovation, compassion, and expertise should come together to redefine health care. I intend to carry on the

tradition of excellence in education and research that has long been established in our college, making groundbreaking discoveries and preparing the next generation of healthcare leaders."

LaPlante joined URI in 2004 as associate professor of pharmacy, rising to full tenured professor in 2015. She was named pharmacy practice chair in 2020 and has played a prominent role in expanding and enhancing the college's research program, which is ranked among the top 10 percent in funding among pharmacy colleges in the nation and at the top in New England.

Dean LaPlante Wins Leaders' Award

Dean Kerry LaPlante received the 2024 Leaders and Achievers award by Providence Business News, the publication announced. The annual program recognizes honorees with long-standing commitment to the Rhode Island business community and a sustained demonstration of leading others, community service, and mentoring.

"Dean LaPlante's long-standing commitment to the pharmacy community, exem-

plary leadership, and unwavering dedication to mentoring and community service have truly set her apart," the award reads. "Her passion for the future of pharmacy and her relentless support for student success continue to inspire and shape the next generation of leaders in the field. We are incredibly proud to celebrate her remarkable achievements and continued impact."

"Dean LaPlante's long-standing commitment to the pharmacy community, exemplary leadership, and unwavering dedication to mentoring and community service have truly set her apart."

'Exceptional Achievements'

Lacroix Named Fellow by Pharmacists Association

Matthew Lacroix, Pharm.D. '05, coordinator of accreditation and assessment for the college, has been honored as a fellow by the American Pharmacists Association (APhA), recognized for his "exceptional professional achievements in pharmacy practice and his outstanding service to APhA and various other organizations."

Lacroix leads assessment efforts in the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in pharmaceutical science and

"He has been a leader in moving forward policy for our profession, and we are excited to see what he will do next."

—Kerry LaPlante



the professional Doctor of Pharmacy program. He led the college's efforts to renew its national accreditation.

Throughout his 20-year career, Lacroix has held roles as a pharmacist, professor, and advisor. Through his contributions to the Rhode Island Pharmacists Association, the Maine Pharmacy Association, and Kappa Psi Pharmaceutical

Fraternity, Lacroix has broadened his professional network and left a lasting impact on the community both locally and nationally.

"We are very excited for Matt and his accomplishments," said pharmacy Dean Kerry LaPlante. "He has been a leader in moving forward policy for our profession, and we are excited to see what he will do next."



'It's More Than Giving a Pill'

Clinical Professor Virginia Lemay Focuses on Prevention, Wellness, Holistic Health

Pharmacists in today's health-care environment need to do more than provide pills, patches, or creams for customers in the pharmacy. They need to be full-service health-care providers, examining a patient from a whole perspective and helping them understand not just their medications but their overall health.

"It's more than just giving them a pill to fix X, Y or Z," said Virginia Lemay, clinical professor in the URI College of Pharmacy. "It's, 'what can I do to make them feel better in their body, their mind, and their spirit?' So just thinking of the whole person. I think our health-care system is lacking that, so I felt like pharmacy students should be a part of knowing not just to look for what drug to give, then think their job is done. It's, 'what else can I do to address this patient?'"

It's a perspective Lemay has held since her early career as a community pharmacist, one she continues in her community practice at Walgreens and the Visiting Nurses Association and has brought into the classrooms in Avedisian Hall. She integrates standard, Western health care with more holistic wellness methods, including yoga, meditation, massage therapy, acupuncture, and more. Such whole health methods are the focus of a new course she created in Integrative Health, which teaches pharmacy students to think about different ways to care for patients.

"It's a unique class that teaches students how to take care of a patient other than just giving them a patch or a pill," Lemay said. "A patient may be prescribed medicine for their blood sugar, for example,

but they don't like the way it made them feel, and there's depression and anxiety. You think of someone going through chemo. It is curing them of cancer, hopefully, but then you think of all the other things they're dealing with in their body that we don't always properly address. I started thinking what else do I have to offer them? We're teaching students how to take care of other people, but it's also a reminder to take care of themselves."

Lemay is helping faculty, staff and students do just that with weekly wellness programs in and around Avedisian Hall. In addition to organizing immunization clinics in the college and around the Kingston Campus, she leads yoga classes in the Heber W. Youngken Jr. Medicinal Garden. She also works with the students to organize meditation sessions, therapeutic



“We understand it is a very demanding curriculum and a very demanding profession. A lot of our faculty members have practices, so we know that the demands and their stress levels are high. And we also know that if faculty are in a good place, that will translate into students being in a good place.”

—Professor Virginia Lemay

painting classes, and pet therapy sessions, among other programs.

“I think everyone in this college knows that is part of our culture,” Lemay said. “We understand it is a very demanding curriculum and a very demanding profession. A lot of our faculty members have practices, so we know that the demands and their stress levels are high. And we also know that if faculty are in a good place, that will translate into students being in a good place.”

Lemay’s efforts have drawn substantial recognition in the college and the community. The former president of the Rhode Island Pharmacists Association and “true advocate for health” was named a Health-care Hero by the *Providence Business News*, which noted “her research on stress reduction to her

holistic approach to patient care.” And last year, graduating students voted for Lemay as the College of Pharmacy Faculty Member of the Year.

“I was surprised by the faculty of the year; I never thought I would achieve that,” said Lemay, who also serves as a mentor for students on clinical rotations and postgrads in residency programs. “It really meant a lot that the students saw me that way, because again, I started as a pharmacist and I wanted to share the joy I have of pharmacy and caring for people with the students, and inspire them to want to be that way, too. So it kind of made me feel good that that’s working.”

Lemay continues to teach integrative health, cardiovascular health, and self-care, in addition to guest lecturing

throughout the college on wellness, mindfulness, and holistic care. She continues to organize immunization clinics, recently vaccinating students, faculty, and staff against the flu, COVID, RSV, pneumococcal illness, Shingles, Tdap, Mpox, meningitis B, and HPV illness.

“I am definitely an advocate for vaccination. I see it as preventative health-care, similar to the wellness initiatives,” Lemay said. “We need to invest in taking care of patients before things are broken, really have a more proactive approach instead of fixing things when people already feel hurt or sad or defeated. I’m trying to prevent that by educating people and showing them other ways of doing things for themselves and for their patients.”

STUDENTS



URI College of Pharmacy Celebrates Spring Commencement

Dean Kerry LaPlante, joined by URI President Marc Parlange, Provost Barbara Wolfe, and the faculty and staff of the College of Pharmacy, conferred degrees upon the Class of 2024 graduates on May 17. Dean LaPlante and the entire College of Pharmacy community extend their heartfelt congratulations to the Class of 2024.



Personal Inspiration

Passion for Science, Helping Others Leads Grad to Career in Infectious Disease

Like many health professionals who choose to dedicate their lives to helping others, Rebecca O'Toole's career path was directed by a harrowing personal experience, which, while stressful and frightening, ultimately proved inspiring, thanks to the compassion of the health-care workers on the case.

O'Toole was already a student in the college but had yet to decide on a specialty when her mom was hospitalized with a serious infection that landed her in the intensive care unit. The Fort Washington, Pa., native rushed home to be with her family while her mother was placed on a ventilator, where she would remain for more than a month before making a full recovery.

"She's totally fine now, but going through that experience really drove my interest in infectious disease and critical care," O'Toole said. "She was there for an infection, and they didn't know what was going on. We had to just sit and watch. The doctors were really amazing and saved her life, and I knew the pharmacists were part of that team behind the scenes. I thought, I could be that person for someone else;



Rebecca O'Toole

that's what I want to do. And I get to go do that now."

The ability to earn a Doctor of Pharmacy degree in just six years through the college's zero-6 Pharm.D. program was a huge draw to URI for O'Toole. So was the flexibility the college allows students to pursue interests outside the notoriously demanding major, a luxury not all pharmacy schools offer. She embraced the wealth of experiential opportunities the college offers, including at the Providence VA Medical Center, the Cleveland Clinic, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

O'Toole is now working at the University of Colorado Hospital in Aurora, Colo., where she continues her research into infectious disease and critical care. In the future, she sees

herself working on a critical care team in a hospital and ultimately hopes to one day coordinate her own antimicrobial stewardship program. Teaching could also be in her future. For a complete look at her story, visit uri.edu/pharmacy/news.

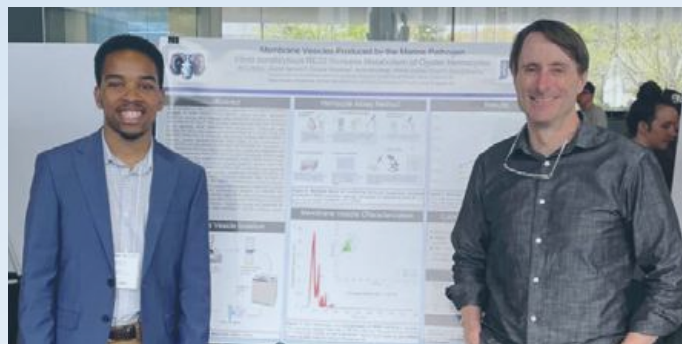
Research Sparks Innovation

Student Earns Funding for Startup Drug Delivery System Company

Pharm.D. student Willy Njeru's innovative drug delivery system startup company, which uses bacterial molecules to carry antibiotics, earned funding at i(x)Studio Pitch Night.

401 Tech Bridge, a business unit of the URI Research Foundation, hosted pitch presentations by 13 aspiring entrepreneurs from across the University. The budding entrepreneurs, all students, worked with Resilient, Innovative, Sustainable Economies via University Partnerships' (RISE-UP) i(X)Studio, an industry-based program that supports students, faculty, and the Rhode Island community in commercializing entrepreneurial ideas.

Njeru came to URI hoping to explore the intersection of health care and business strategy. I(X)Studio offered him a place to do that, as well as funding for Nanovyx, the startup concept he conceived after researching how bacteria exchange molecules with one another in Professor David Rowley's lab. The project sparked conversations about how to use the mechanism to carry drugs such as antibiotics and led to the idea of creating a



Pharm.D. student Willy Njeru and Professor David Rowley present Njeru's research on an innovative drug delivery system.

technology platform that would design antibiotic-carrying molecules to help treat disease and save lives.

"The special thing about this concept is that it uses natural mechanisms to improve drug delivery and overcome antimicrobial resistance," Njeru said. "Antimicrobial resistance occurs when bacteria are able to withstand the very drugs that are supposed to eliminate them. It is one of the most significant public health issues we are facing today, and it's only getting worse. Nanovyx seeks to step up and combat this problem head-on."

National Champions

URI Students Earn First Place at Clinical Skills Competition

Two University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy students won a national clinical skills competition at the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists' (ASHP) midyear Conference in New Orleans in December, after three rounds of competition against more than 130 college of pharmacy teams from across the country.

Gabriella Mignosa and Emma Van Reysen, both P4 students, emerged as the winners of the highly competitive event in which participants prepared written and oral presentations on a specific patient scenario. Given just two hours to prepare, teams had to present a comprehensive written treatment plan identifying and addressing all conditions affecting an imaginary patient before making an oral presentation and then facing an interrogation from a panel of judges who peppered them with pointed questions about their care plan on the particularly complicated case.

The students were faced with a patient diagnosed with diffuse large B-cell lymphoma, a type of cancer that attacks white blood cells, along with a host of complications like neutropenia, a condition in which the body lacks sufficient white blood cells to fight infection. The patient also suffered from chemo-induced vomiting and diarrhea, as well as preexisting conditions, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.

"You have to answer as many problems as you can in terms of what you would do with this patient," Mignosa said. "We had to create very detailed plans for every problem, so it's very lifelike."

The two students are scheduled to graduate in May, and both plan to pursue residencies—Mignosa in solid organ transplant and Van Reysen in either cardiology or critical care. Both students credit the college's emphasis on experiential learning with preparing them not just for the



ASHP competition, but for the actual patient care they will encounter throughout their careers.

"When you're on rotations, it's a different level of learning, because it is very hands-on," Van Reysen said. "I think that really helped a lot for both of us to be able to tackle this case and handle all the patient encounters we deal with every day."

Pharm.D. Graduate Awards

Academic, Professional, Service Accolades Presented

As the 2023–24 academic year came to an end, the college issued a series of academic, professional, and service awards to graduating seniors.

Recipients include:

Viatrix Excellence in Pharmacy Award:

Jessica Samuel

Rho Chi Award: Gillian Dilorio

Rho Chi Service Award: Thomas Bokinz

Merck Award: Lillian Luong, Alexandra DeSantis, Jenna D'Alesio

Wolters Kluwer/Facts and Comparison Award: Elisa Quinones

Natural Medicines Recognition Award: Caroline Joncas

DEI Award: Ji Woo Lee, Edith Martinez

University Excellence Award: Hannah Iarussi

College of Pharmacy Academic

Excellence Awards: Thu Le, Russell Scarpa, Emma Daly, Lauren Fortier, Elena Tormo, Rebecca O'Toole, Emily Lancor, Jason Cambra, Cassidy Lawrence, Matthew Armanus, Jia Ying Lin, Bret Abreu



Outstanding Achievement in Teaching:

Henry Karshis, Alex Linn

Outstanding Achievement in Research:

Michael Akon

Outstanding Achievement in Pharmacy Practice: Madison Savidge, Olivia Arukwe

Outstanding Achievement in Self-Care:

Lucas Nicolau

Outstanding Achievement Global Health Advocate of the Year: Sydney Story

APhA-ASP Award: Madison McGuire

Phi Lambda Sigma Award: Emma Daly

PPA Award: Evan Goncalves

ASHP Award: Russell Scarpa

SNPhA Award: Christine Wu

ASCP Award: Alexandra DeSantis

Student Leadership Award: Celia Parisi

NCODA Leadership Award: Jessica Samuel

Kappa Psi: Liam Furlong

Lambda Kappa Sigma: Hannah Iarussi

AMCP Award: Madison Savidge

IPhO Award: Amanda Lin

SCCP Award: Morgan Fenderson

AAPP Award: Jason Baldinger

College of Pharmacy Service Award:

Russell Scarpa, Madison Savidge, Celia Parisi

Rite of Passage

Class of 2027 Welcomed During White Coat Ceremony

More than 100 new URI College of Pharmacy students officially entered into the field of pharmacy as they donned their white coats for the first time.

Pharmacy Dean Kerry LaPlante welcomed the students and their families in a packed Edwards Auditorium, welcoming them into their first professional year of pharmacy education. She was joined by URI Provost Barbara Wolfe, former

dean of the URI College of Nursing, and URI President Marc Parlange, who greeted the students after receiving a white coat of his own.

URI alumna Stacey Ranucci, who serves on the Rhode Island Board of Pharmacy and the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, led the students in their first recitation of the Oath of a Pharmacist, which reads:



Oath of a Pharmacist

"I promise to devote myself to a lifetime of service to others through the profession of pharmacy. In fulfilling this vow:

"I will consider the welfare of humanity and relief of suffering my primary concerns.

"I will promote inclusion, embrace diversity, and advocate for justice to advance health equity.

"I will apply my knowledge, experience and skills to the best of my ability to assure optimal outcomes for all patients.

"I will respect and protect all personal and health information entrusted to me.

"I will accept the responsibility to improve my professional knowledge, expertise and self-awareness.

"I will hold myself and my colleagues to the highest principles of our profession's moral, ethical and legal conduct.

"I will embrace and advocate changes that improve patient care.

"I will utilize my knowledge, skills, experiences and values to prepare the next generation of pharmacists.

"I take these vows voluntarily with the full realization of the responsibility with which I am entrusted by the public."





Alex Vose on Capitol Hill



From Student-Pharmacist to Activist

Pharm.D. Student Lobbies Congress for Lower Drug Costs, Patient Access

Third-year Pharm.D. student Alexander Vose recently experienced firsthand how Congress works, learned how to discuss pharmaceutical issues with government representatives, and helped lobby Congress for lower drug costs and greater access for patients.

Vose attended congressional sessions and met with representatives and senators as part of the recent RxIMPACT Day on Capitol Hill, organized by the National Association of Chain Drug Stores. The event trains student-pharmacists to be advocates during a day of training on how to discuss key pharmacy issues to influence policy outcomes. Students then joined CEOs, practicing pharmacists, state association leaders, and other pro-patient, pro-pharmacy advocates to lobby on Capitol Hill.

Vose led a discussion about pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs)—intermediar-

ies between insurance providers and pharmacies. He said the for-profit companies drive up copays for patients, leading to nonadherence to their medications, making it harder to manage their care. The group recommended that Congress provide regulation over PBMs and ban spread pricing, a practice whereby PBMs charge significantly more to payers like Medicare than they give to pharmacies.

The group also addressed the bipartisan Equitable Community Access to Pharmacist Services Act, a COVID-era ruling that allowed pharmacists to test for common illnesses, such as COVID and influenza, and to provide treatment and vaccines. However, pharmacies are currently unable to bill Medicare Part B to provide these services to seniors, a barrier that Vose's team asked Congress members to change.

‘Faces of Honors’

Pharmacy Student’s Artwork Displayed in Lippitt Hall

Lippitt Hall, one of URI’s oldest granite buildings, got a facelift last year when students in the URI Honors Program installed new works of art as part of the “Faces of Honors” art project.

Among the talented artists displaying their work was pharmaceutical sciences major Thelma Iheanacho ’28, who painted a self-portrait featuring her journal, a tool that is an important part of her URI experience and approach to life.

“It’s my safe place, my way of releasing things I feel I cannot handle or control,” Iheanacho said. “I hope other students can find something that makes them feel safe, too, and I hope future URI students see these portraits and understand that every student has their own individual way of coping with life experiences.”



ACADEMICS



Igniting Interest in STEM

College Creates Virtual Reality Lab for High Schools

Through the use of a virtual reality laboratory and in-person lab experiences, scientists with the college are working with high school students around the state, teaching them about natural therapeutic plants and herbal medicines, while helping stimulate an interest in STEM disciplines.

URI students and faculty members in pharmacy and computer science are working with their counterparts at the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, Woonsocket, and South Kingstown high schools on Hands-on Education and Research for Biomedical and Analytical Learning (HERBAL). The curriculum includes a virtual lab designed by URI students. Funded by a five-year, \$1.35 million award from the National Institutes of Health, the college is designing scientific experiments and virtual reality lab simulations to familiarize students with research and modern lab settings.

The program allows high school students to conduct virtual experiments in their classrooms and science labs, investigating plants that have medicinal properties. Students can take the first steps in being able to extract molecules and test them for biological activities that may have human health benefits.

That will be followed by real-life experience in an actual lab in Avedisian Hall. Students visit the Kingston Campus to conduct research using the same instrumentation they have been learning to work with in the VR environment. Among the experiments is high-performance liquid chromatography, during which a scientist

purifies a particular molecule from a complex mixture so it can be tested for drug-like qualities. Students would go into the virtual lab, set up the necessary instruments and solvents, perform the experiment, then evaluate the outcome, and interpret what the results mean.

“Once we get the HERBAL program established, we would like to expand our

reach,” said Professor David Rowley. “We are trying to design transportable experiments that can be conducted in basic laboratories or science rooms at high schools. Also, we want to make the

“Once we get the HERBAL program established, we would like to expand our reach.”

— Professor David Rowley

VR experience open access so people can download and use it wherever they are located.”



Tops in Country

College Ranked Among Leading U.S. Pharmacy Schools

URI College of Pharmacy programs are again ranked among the top in the country, with the Doctor of Pharmacy program making an impressive rise over the four years since the last survey, according to the latest *U.S. News & World Report* rankings.

The college's Pharm.D. program is now ranked No. 31 among more than 140 pharmacy colleges in the United States, the college's highest rank to date. The

program has been rising steadily through the ranks in recent years, improving from No. 40 in the last survey in 2020, and No. 46 in 2016.

"We are thrilled to share that the URI College of Pharmacy has ascended to the 31st spot," said Dean Kerry LaPlante. "This achievement is due to the unwavering dedication of our alumni, faculty, staff, and students. This ranking reflects our commitment to educational excellence,

impactful research, and service to community health."

In addition to the zero–6 Pharm.D. program, allowing students to complete the degree just six years after graduating high school, the URI College of Pharmacy also offers master's and Ph.D. programs, as well as a Bachelor of Science in Pharmaceutical Sciences. Visit uri.edu/pharmacy for more information and to apply.



The college's Pharm.D. program is now ranked No. 31 among more than 140 pharmacy colleges in the United States.

Full Accreditation Extended

Pharmacy Education Council Notes Strengths in Program

After a comprehensive review process, the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) has extended the full accreditation of the University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy through 2032.

After months of review through remote meetings and in-person visits, the ACPE board determined the URI College of Pharmacy complies with all standards for pharmacy education, extending its accreditation of the college for the maximum eight years.

The ACPE site team identified several notable strengths within the program,



including the effectiveness of the college's strategic planning process and monitoring, the personalized attention given to each student in experiential placement, and the diverse array of experiences

curated by the Office of Experiential Education. The team also commended the college on its integration of graduate student teaching assistants in operational aspects such as exam assessment.

Joining Forces

Students Treat Simulated Patients During Collaborative Event at Brown University



URI students from the College of Pharmacy joined those from nursing, physical therapy, and social work in multidisciplinary teams, working together on a variety of patient-focused health-care simulations during an interprofessional education collaboration at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University on Jan. 31.

More than 500 students—140 from URI—worked in teams to assess the



condition of hypothetical patients played by local actors. Each team—consisting of a student pharmacist, physician, nurse, physical therapist, and social worker from URI, Rhode Island College, and Brown—met with the patient for a physical exam and consultation. The team then worked together to develop a comprehensive treatment plan covering all disciplines that they then presented to the “patient,” according to College of Nursing Clinical

Assistant Professor Kerry Ellis along with pharmacy professors Joe Nardolillo and Tracey Taveira, who led the URI contingent.

“Interprofessional education fosters collaboration among diverse health-care disciplines, preparing our future professionals to seamlessly integrate their expertise,” Ellis said. “Together, the students assessed, planned, and delivered patient care, exemplifying the power of teamwork in shaping comprehensive and patient-centered health care. This exceptional interprofessional initiative reflects our commitment to cultivating well-rounded health-care practitioners equipped for the complexities of modern health-care delivery.”

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND



BROWN



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

'Biotech Boot Camp'

Event Prepares High-Tech Workers in Life Sciences Industry



The college's Pharmaceutical Development Institute (PDI) hosted several Rhode Island residents interested in careers in the biotech industry for a two-week intensive program to provide the in-depth, hands-on training biotechnology and biopharmaceutical firms are looking for in potential employees.

The PDI's "Biotech Boot Camp," a partnership with RI Bio, Skills for Rhode Island's Future, and the state Department of Labor and Training, welcomed 20 students to the institute's labs in Avedisian Hall on the Kingston Campus. Trainees are taught aseptic techniques, clean-room gowning, document control, biopharmaceutical manufacturing concepts, quality control systems, and measurement and data collection, among other skills.

"The students have a chance to learn in an on-site, face-to-face environment from

highly experienced experts in the biotech industry," director Jennifer Lewis said. "In PDI's state-of-the-art manufacturing and laboratory facility, they participate in hands-on workshops throughout the camp. The PDI is committed to enhancing and expanding the workforce development of pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms by training them in our world-class facility."

The boot camp is part of the PDI's mission to increase innovation opportunities for related firms in Rhode Island. Recently, the PDI received a \$1.2 million federal grant to strengthen teaching and training programs in its facilities, which include a 7,000-square-foot clean-room facility for pharmaceutical manufacturing, a 1,500-square-foot Analytical and Stability Testing Laboratory, and a 1,500-square-foot training laboratory.



"The students have a chance to learn in an on-site, face-to-face environment from highly experienced experts in the biotech industry."

—Jennifer Lewis



Exploration Day

High Schoolers Get Taste of College Experience

High school students interested in careers in pharmacy and their families and teachers toured Avedisian Hall, interacted with faculty members and URI students, and learned about the college and the pharmacy profession, in general, during an exploration day at the Kingston Campus.

Students from the region visited to learn more about the school, careers in pharmacy, and information on applying to URI. Students broke into groups to tour the building and watch demonstrations by faculty members and students. Elizabeth Leibovitz, coordinator of the Heber W. Youngken Jr. Medicinal Garden, gave a presentation on the use of plants and herbs in medicine; simulation lab codirector Amanda Chichester demonstrated the use of lifelike mannequins in the Patient Simulation Laboratory; URI students taught their high school counterparts how to make capsules in the compounding lab; and Pharmaceutical Development Institute engineer Sara Hanson demonstrated equipment used in the institute's analytical lab.

The goal of Exploration Day is to give students the opportunity to:

- Learn the role of pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists.
- Explore research opportunities.
- Participate in health and wellness activities.
- Tour the pharmacy building and medicinal garden.
- Experience the college's simulation lab.



GLOBAL IMPACT



Clinical Professor Anita Jacobson and former student Emily Lancor, Pharm.D. '24, staff a table at a community event.

Opioid Use Disorder

College Helps Improve Access to Medications

The college is furthering the fight against the ongoing opioid epidemic, thanks to a \$455,000 grant from the Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts to train pharmacists to prescribe and dispense medications for opioid use disorder.

Led by clinical professor Jeffrey Bratberg, the college is initiating two novel approaches to providing medications for opioid use disorder through community pharmacies, particularly in areas where physician prescribers are limited.

First, a collaborative practice agreement developed in Rhode Island, in which a pharmacist is allowed to prescribe and treat a specific condition under the supervision and authority of a licensed physician, will be adapted and implemented in Connecticut. It will enable pharmacists in that state to be trained to initiate buprenorphine and provide maintenance care to people with opioid use disorder.

Second, a protocol for informing patients, starting treatment, and providing ongoing care will be implemented in community pharmacies in Ohio, where U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration-licensed pharmacists can prescribe controlled substances. The Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association, through this funding to URI, will also conduct a state-by-state review of pharmacy regulations and develop tool kits for pharmacies in other states with the goal of expanding these new approaches to community pharmacies across the United States.

“As key access points for harm-reduction services like naloxone, sterile syringes, and medication for opioid use disorder, pharmacists play an essential role in addressing the overdose crisis,” Bratberg said.



Jeffrey Bratberg

“As key access points for harm-reduction services like naloxone, sterile syringes, and medication for opioid use disorder, pharmacists play an essential role in addressing the overdose crisis.”

—Jeffrey Bratberg

College Hosts Flu, COVID Immunization Clinic

The college hosted another successful immunization clinic in October, helping protect the campus community by vaccinating hundreds of students, faculty, and staff members against the flu and COVID-19. More than 100 pharmacy students, faculty, and staff members volunteered to administer more than 300 immunizations at the annual clinic.



Good Deed

College Donates High-Tech Simulator to School in Ghana

Pharmacy students at a university in Ghana now have access to a high-tech, lifelike baby simulator to practice patient care, thanks to a donation by the URI College of Pharmacy.

The college's Patient Simulation Lab is home to seven of the lifelike, animated mannequins that stand in as real patients. Ranging in "age" from infants to full-grown men and women, the mannequins give students the opportunity to practice on patients at different stages in the lifespan.

After recently upgrading the baby simulator, lab directors Clinton Chichester and Amanda Chichester offered the still-functional older model to the University of Cape Coast School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in Ghana, with which they had established a relationship when professors and students visited URI the previous semester.



"Getting a simulator like this is hard; they're not available there," Clinton Chichester said. "We just decided it would be nice to donate the old simulator to a school in need of this technology."

The simulators, which cost about \$60,000, depending on the model, give students practice in direct patient care. Connected to a computer, as well as all

the monitors and equipment typically found in a hospital room, the mannequins mimic actual patients, with the ability to breathe, speak, cry, sweat, and even bleed. Monitors transmit vital signs, and the computer can simulate medical conditions such as an opioid overdose that students must respond to in real time.

Seminar by the Sea

College Hosts 39th Annual Continuing Education Event

Pharmacists from around the region earned continuing education credits while discussing some of the most pressing pharmacy and health-care issues during the 39th annual Seminar by the Sea conference presented by the Office of Healthcare Workforce Development.



The college's flagship continuing education event of the year attracted more than 300 pharmacists and other health-care providers to the hybrid in-person and online conference, "Mental Health Triad: Caring for Our Patients, Ourselves, and Each Other." Presentations included such topics as schizophrenia, drug use and overdose, Parkinson's disease, clinical depression, insomnia, and diet culture. Experts also delivered updates on immunization policies and pharmacy law.

The event includes up to 15 contact hours of continuing education credit for pharmacists, as well as opportunities for professional networking with colleagues and health-care industry representatives in meeting rooms and in the virtual exhibit hall.

To learn more about the 2025 conference, visit uri.edu/pharmce.



College, RIPA Advocate for Pharmacy Initiatives

URI College of Pharmacy faculty members and students joined alumnus Chris Federico '10 and the Rhode Island Pharmacists Association at the Rhode Island Statehouse on

May 14 for Pharmacy Advocacy Day, where they met with General Assembly members to advocate for important pharmaceutical initiatives.



Zen in the Garden

This year, students got the opportunity to join a healing, safe space on campus while experiencing the therapeutic benefits of growing ornamental plants, flowers, and herbs, thanks to a collaboration between the College of Pharmacy and the URI Counseling Center.

The URI Horticulture Therapy Group invites participants to explore the healing power of nature through mindfulness activities, gardening, and the design of a therapeutic garden over five weeks during the fall semester.



URI Pharmacy Alum, TikTok Star Educates Patients, Advocates for Profession

Ethan Melillo has amassed nearly 500,000 followers of his educational, entertaining videos.



The public's perception of a pharmacist used to be a reclusive scientist in a white lab coat dumping pills in a bottle and slapping on a label for a cashier to hand to a customer. That perception has drastically changed, as patients increasingly turn to their pharmacist for advice not just on a specific drug, but on a whole host of health issues, even those unrelated to prescription medication.

Pharmacists are now known as the most accessible of health-care professionals, and one University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy alumnus is highlighting that fact, shining a spotlight on the myriad health-care services your local pharmacist provides, while helping inspire the next generation of pharmaceutical scientists.

Ethan Melillo, Pharm.D. '17, is senior manager of integrated health for cosmetic brand L'Oreal, working to increase patient access to skin care products and teach pharmacists to counsel patients on their skin care. He is also a certified clinical diabetes pharmacist, a clinical program pharmacist, community specialty pharmacist, and, in perhaps his most prominent role, social media influencer helping educate and entertain nearly 500,000 followers.

"I had seen other medical professionals online, but I hadn't really seen any pharmacists on there," the East Greenwich resident said. "And whenever I saw any pharmacy videos, it was always something negative about our profession. I saw this as an opportunity to talk about the positive things about why I love being

a pharmacist and really educate the public about what we know and what we do. I want to advocate for my profession and showcase the knowledge pharmacists have. We're really the medication experts."



"I wanted to pull the curtain away and show pharmacy students that there are so many opportunities available to them."

—Ethan Melillo

Melillo began posting videos on TikTok in March 2021 under the handle "millennialrx," beginning with a musical video about medications to avoid taking with alcohol, which quickly went viral and has been viewed more than a million times. He followed that up with posts about vaccines, diabetes, pharmacy law, birth control, and many more. He offers important advice to followers about medications and their side effects, debunks less qualified influencers who share dubious information, offers glimpses behind the scenes of a pharmacy, and shows students the broad range of opportunities a pharmacy degree allows.

"I think as a student, I saw community pharmacy, I saw hospital pharmacy, and I saw teaching, but I didn't really know what other avenues there were in pharmacy," Melillo said. "So I wanted to pull the curtain away and show pharmacy students that there are so many opportunities available for them. By showing them the different careers pharmacists can have, I think it's been really eye-opening to students and helped them be excited about becoming a pharmacist."

His videos—primarily on TikTok, but also on Instagram and YouTube—are also eye-opening to the general public and have garnered such a following that he has secured paid partnerships with such prominent brands as Relistor, Salix Pharmaceuticals, Dulcolax, and CeraVe. Melillo now has a talent agency booking more partnerships as he posts as many as five videos a day—essentially creating a second full-time job—all while he continues to work for L'Oreal;

partner with *Pharmacy Times* to create continuing education programs for pharmacists on various skin conditions; contribute to “The Pharmacy Corner,” a website for pharmacists, technicians, and students to learn about skin care; and guest lecture at pharmacy schools across the country.

Educating the public on health care has been part of Melillo’s mission since he began as a community pharmacy technician, at age 17, then as a pharmacist and teacher at the University of Houston, and now as a social media celebrity.

“I hope I’m helping open up the communication between patients and their pharmacist and really showcasing our profession on a larger scale.”

—Ethan Melillo

“A lot of times people can’t afford to see a doctor, so they’re getting advice online or from social media, which is a little scary,” Melillo said. “They really trust these people who have no medical degree and no medical background, and they’re buying these products they don’t need. When I see something that’s really trying to mislead the general public, I have no problem trying to debunk it, and I’m very blunt about it, which is probably why I have such a big following. I really want people to be aware that there are so many scams online.”

While Melillo’s videos are informative and educational, as well as entertaining, he points out that one of the best teachers any patient can have is at the local pharmacy. People should feel comfortable talking to their pharmacist even after seeing their doctor, he said, as pharmacists have specialized knowledge about medications that physicians may not consider.

“There are a slew of antidepressants, for example, and some people think because that’s the one their doctor prescribed,



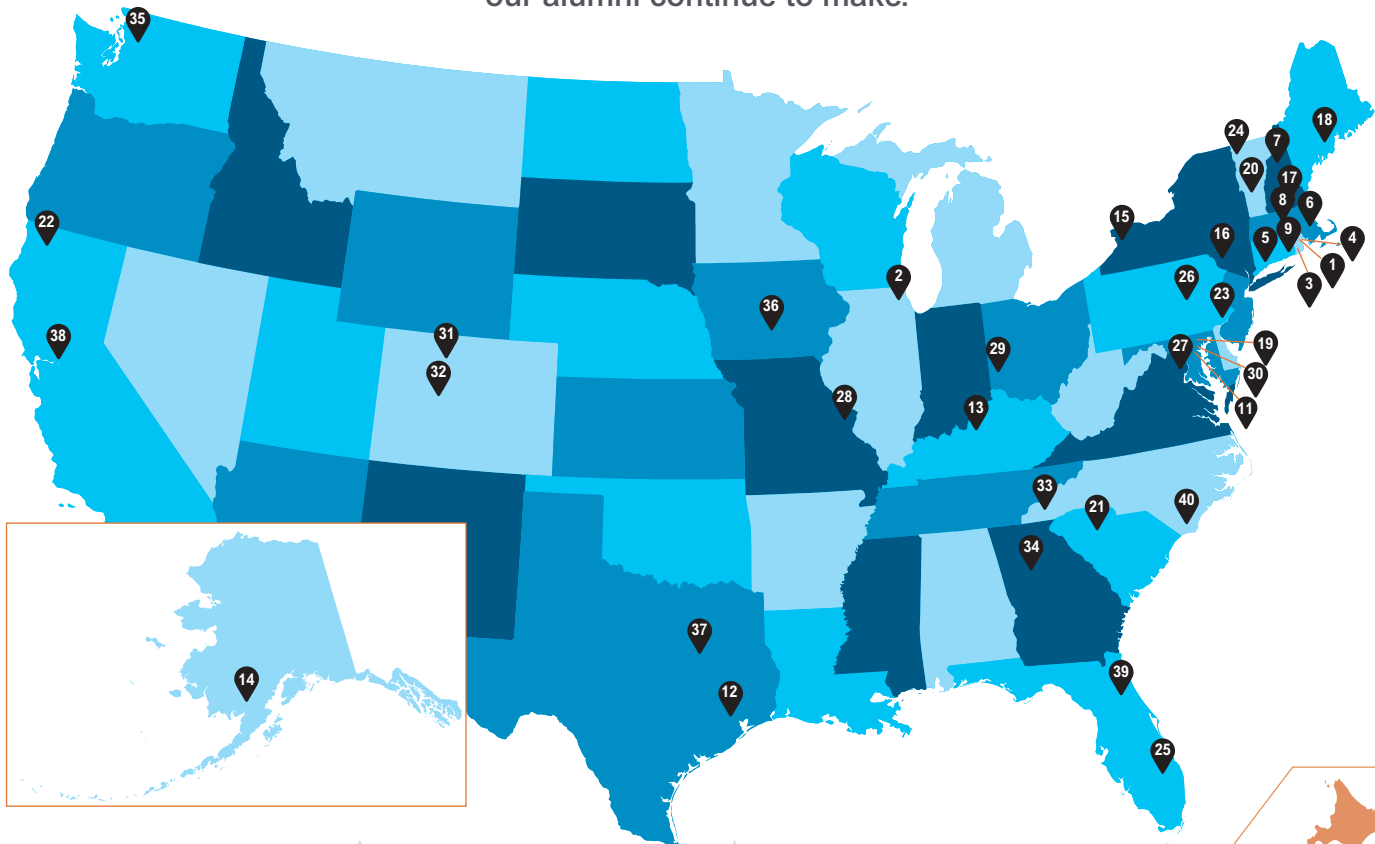
URI College of Pharmacy graduate and TikTok creator Ethan Melillo is senior manager of integrated health for cosmetic brand L’Oreal’s CeraVe and La Roche-Posay products, working to increase patient access to skin care products and teach pharmacists to counsel patients on their skin care.

they should take it even though it may have side effects or doesn’t make them feel good,” Melillo said. “They might not feel comfortable talking to their doctor. So having that open communication with their pharmacist, the pharmacist can say you can try another one. By showing the knowledge pharmacists have, I hope I’m helping open up the communication between patients and their pharmacist and really showcasing our profession on a larger scale.”



Clinical Partnerships

URI College of Pharmacy alumni are making significant impacts on health care throughout the country, and even the world. Here is a look at just a few of the college's clinical and research partnerships, which barely scratches the surface of the impact our alumni continue to make.



- 1 CVS Health - RI
- 2 Walgreens - Deerfield, IL
- 3 Lifespan - RI
- 4 Care New England - RI
- 5 Yale New Haven Health - CT
- 6 Boston Medical Center - MA
- 7 Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center - NH
- 8 UMass Memorial Medical Center - MA
- 9 Hartford HealthCare - CT
- 10 Takeda - Tokyo, Japan
- 11 American Pharmacists Association - D.C.
- 12 Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center - TX
- 13 PharMerica Corp. - KT
- 14 Providence Health and Services (Providence Alaska) -AK

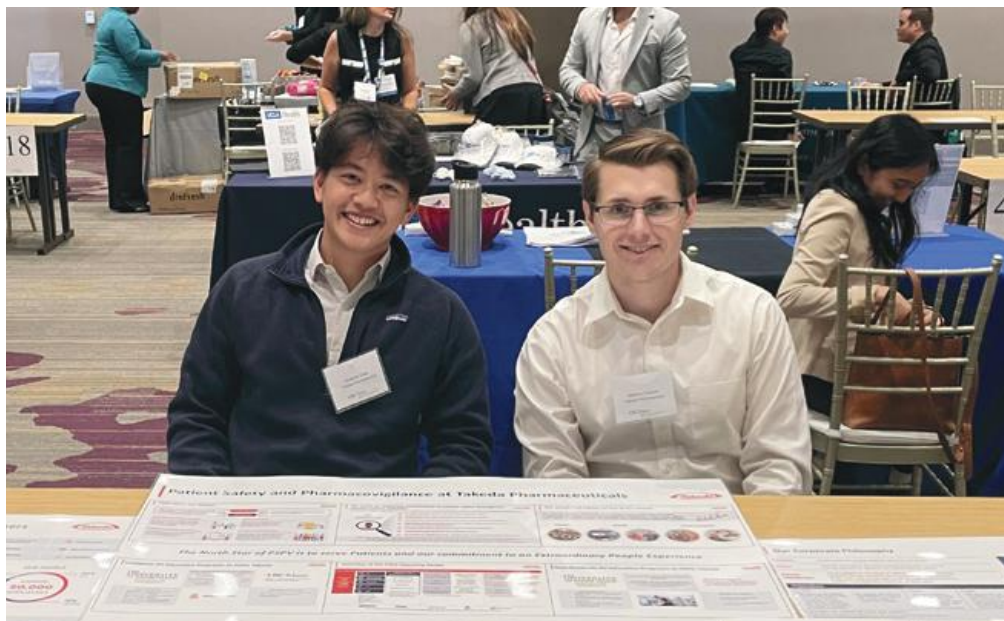
- 15 Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center- NY
- 16 Federal Correctional Institution - Otisville, NY
- 17 Southern New Hampshire Medical Center - NH
- 18 Togus VA Medical Center- ME
- 19 University of Maryland Medical System - MD
- 20 Rutland Regional Medical Center - VT
- 21 Xcenda - SC
- 22 Store to Door of Oregon - OR
- 23 Shore Medical Center - NJ
- 24 Northwestern Medical Center - VT
- 25 Palm Beach Compounding Pharmacy - FL
- 26 Newhard Pharmacy and Long Term Care - PA

- 27 National Association of Chain Drug Stores - VA
- 28 Magellan Rx - MO
- 29 Hock's Pharmacy - OH
- 30 U.S. Food and Drug Administration - MD
- 31 Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital CO
- 32 Array BioPharma - CO
- 33 Cherokee Indian Hospital - NC
- 34 Barnes Healthcare Services - GA
- 35 Genoa Healthcare - WA
- 36 Albertsons Companies Inc. - ID
- 37 Medical Pharmace - TX
- 38 Vegan Med - CA
- 39 Florida Poison Info.Center - FL
- 40 Lehigh Valley Vender Services - NC



URI Partners with International Pharmaceutical Firm on Fellowship Program

Takeda Pharmaceuticals Offers Fellows Experience in Patient Safety, Pharmacovigilance



College of Pharmacy alumnus Matthew Campion '23, senior manager of global educational programs at Takeda Pharmaceutical, worked with the college to help establish a fellowship for URI doctor of pharmacy graduates.

With a mission centered on ensuring patient safety, Takeda Pharmaceutical Co., a Japanese multinational pharmaceutical company, in partnership with the URI College of Pharmacy, is sponsoring a two-year fellowship in patient safety and pharmacovigilance, offering Doctor of Pharmacy graduates from URI comprehensive training in safety risk assessment, characterization, and minimization/mitigation.

The Takeda fellowship provides practical training in the academic and industry setting, overseeing all pharmacovigilance activities, which includes the detection, assessment, management, monitoring, and prevention of adverse events, as well as the continuous evaluation of the benefit-risk profile for all Takeda products.

Achieving excellence in patient safety demands expertise in medical and scientific disciplines, along with operational excellence in compliance, training, which the fellowship offers.

Throughout the fellowship, fellows collaborate closely with experts in pharmacovigilance, including pharmacovigilance scientists, risk management scientists, and benefit risk scientists. Fellows are dedicated to pharmacovigilance activities for both investigational and marketed products and will rotate across various functional areas in patient safety and pharmacovigilance.

At URI, the fellow will focus on coursework, completing an M.S. in Health Outcomes and Data Analytics, participate in

academic activities and professional development, be paired with faculty members conducting clinical research, and focus on a project with a safety element.

At Takeda, during the first year, the fellow will be exposed to various therapeutic areas of medical safety, with a primary focus on a pharmacist's roles within the department.

During the first half of the second year, the fellow will gain exposure to signal management and innovation, medical device safety, benefit-risk assessment, and risk management and organ toxicity. This will allow the fellow to identify a focus area for the final six months of the fellowship.



ALUMNI



Matthew Olivier, Pharm.D. '06, stands in Matt's Local Pharmacy, which he opened in 2018.

Community Pharmacies: Health-Care 'Service as It's Supposed To Be'

Despite financial challenges in drug reimbursement, URI alumnus seeks to expand services of Matt's Local Pharmacy.

Pharmacists are known as the most accessible of health-care providers, willing to meet with patients without an appointment to discuss health conditions, medications and their side effects, or possible alternative treatments to help keep fellow members of their community happy and healthy.

Despite financial challenges and ever-increasing costs—especially as third-party middlemen known as pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs, maintain

control over insurance reimbursement—a handful of independent pharmacies in Rhode Island are determined to keep the “community” in community pharmacies. Matthew Olivier, a 2006 graduate of the URI College of Pharmacy who began his career with a big chain pharmacy, loved working with patients but disliked the limits corporate red tape placed on the services he and his fellow pharmacists could provide. So he put together a business plan, sold his house, worked to secure

additional financing, and in 2018, opened Matt's Local Pharmacy on East Main Road in Middletown, R.I.

“I think one of the main things when you come in my pharmacy, you feel the difference. It's got a community vibe, a welcoming staff you can come in and talk to,” Olivier said. “Community pharmacy has always been an amazing part of the community. We are providing what I envision pharmacy should be. We are providing a service as it's supposed to be.”

“I think one of the main things when you come in my pharmacy, you feel the difference. It’s got a community vibe, a welcoming staff you can come in and talk to.”

—Matthew Olivier

Olivier and his staff—which often includes URI interns he oversees—make it a point to be available to consult patients, address their concerns, and generally create the conditions they need to lead healthy lives.

“We can provide such a premium service compared to our competitors. People come to us because they want to talk about their medications; they want to be healthy. That’s amazing, and that’s why I’m doing it,” Olivier said.

Matt’s Local Pharmacy is planning to further expand those premium services. Olivier envisions a more service-based pharmacy, a one-stop shop where patients can receive more medical-based services like counseling on chronic disease states, health screenings and testing, in addition to vaccination and medication services pharmacies already provide.

“We could see you, find out what the problem is, and you could leave here with a medication without having to go see your doctor or a walk-in,” Olivier said, noting the severe shortage of primary care practitioners in the state. “We could fill in a lot of gaps, but those services won’t grow if we can’t be paid for it.”

That requires legislative support in Rhode Island, which does not officially recognize pharmacists as health-care providers, prohibiting them from billing for those services, Olivier said.

The biggest problem, however, remains the level of reimbursement pharmacies get from insurance companies. Olivier said they frequently fail to pay what it costs pharmacies to acquire a drug, forcing them all to take a loss to fill prescriptions they can’t refuse.



“You’re seeing a lot of independents closing out, because we can’t dispense medication without losing money. We can’t get medications for what they’re willing to reimburse,” Olivier said. “We actually have more business than we can handle, and we group up with other independents so we have huge buying power, and we’re all stuck in this position. They’re really pretty much forcing you out of business.”

Industry groups have been lobbying the state General Assembly to allow pharmacists to serve as health-care providers and to rein in the PBMs that drive up costs. In the meantime, Olivier continues to seek alternate sources of revenue, renting space to a chiropractor in an adjacent building where he hopes to one

day also offer pharmacist-based health services; planning to build a compounding lab; and offering therapies like hormone and veterinary compounds that don’t involve insurance companies. His efforts have resulted in a business that is growing every year, despite the challenges in profit.

“We run a lean machine; I’m doing everything I can to make this thing run as well as possible for the least expense,” Olivier said. “I can really see things growing in the right direction. There’s a huge opportunity here for outreach to our community. That’s what gets me excited, to start offering things that no one else is. It’s been amazing the amount of impact we can have on the community.”

Alum Honored

Captain in U.S. Public Health Service Corps Wins Campbell Award



Norman A. Campbell and Capt. Bill Lehault, Pharm.D. '09

The college presented Capt. Bill Lehault, Pharm.D. '09, an officer of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, with the Dr. Norman A. Campbell Award for Ethics and Excellence in Healthcare, honoring his contributions to pharmacy and health care in the region and across the country.

Lehault has dedicated his career to providing and advancing the care of some of the most underserved patients in the country: people who are incarcerated, those suffering from mental illness and substance use disorders, and those who identify as transgender and nonbinary. He serves as the chief pharmacist and an advanced practice clinical pharmacist for the Federal Correctional Institution in Otisville, N.Y., a medium-security prison operated by the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

"Bill's professional career is marked by performance above and beyond expectations," said Professor Emeritus Campbell, who presented the award. "This is especially noteworthy in his attention to the mental health needs of a marginalized population he serves."

Lehault, who earned his Doctor of Pharmacy degree from URI and serves as an adjunct clinical associate professor, developed the pharmacy review protocol for the Federal Bureau of Prisons' secure mental health units and transitional care units. He drafted the board's clinical guidance documents for bipolar disorder and gender-affirming clinical care and served as an author or reviewer for five additional mental health guidance documents. He is a member of the board's Transgender Clinical Care Team and Transgender Utilization

Review Advisory Board and, consults on psychiatric and gender-affirming medications.



Alumni Spotlights



◀ Anthony Aiudi

URI degree: PharmD '14, MBA '14

Current position: Investor at Morningside Ventures

Responsibilities: I provide operational and managerial oversight to early-stage biotechnology companies. I lead investments in and serve on the boards of numerous biotech firms across a broad spectrum of therapeutic areas. Additionally, I have facilitated company creation, completed multiple financings for private companies, and incubated portfolio companies.

URI Impact: "URI had a profound impact on my career, providing the foundational scientific knowledge and skills that propelled me into the biotech/pharma industries and now into venture capital. The PharmD program equipped me with hands-on and in-depth knowledge that prepared me for leading clinical development programs for innovative new drugs. Earning my MBA allowed me to merge that scientific expertise with business acumen. Together, these degrees have empowered me to bridge the gap between science and business."

▶ Geri Kuklinski

URI degree: Pharm.D. '16

Current position: Chief Business Officer, URI College of Pharmacy

Responsibilities: I am a strategic leader and chief business officer, combining clinical expertise with strategic insight to drive growth and innovation. My work focuses on analyzing data, creating business cases, and developing actionable strategies to improve enrollment, operational efficiency, and financial performance. I aim to identify opportunities, align resources, and craft compelling narratives to secure funding and build partnerships that advance organizational goals.

URI impact: "URI had a profound impact on my career and personal journey. It provided me with the foundational clinical knowledge that has been instrumental in assessing strategic growth opportunities across the healthcare industry, where I've spent the entirety of my career. Beyond academics, the mentorships I established with influential professors greatly shaped my personal and professional development, leaving a lasting impression on how I approach leadership and problem-solving. On a personal note, URI holds a special place in my heart, as it's where I met my husband, and together, we now have two beautiful children. It was truly a formative experience that shaped the person I am today, and I am so grateful to have the opportunity to give back to the University in my current role."



◀ Rhonda Pacheco

URI degree: Pharm.D. '03

Current position: Group vice president, U.S. Cardiometabolic Health, Eli Lilly and Co.

Responsibilities: "As group vice president of U.S. Cardiometabolic Health, I provide commercial leadership for some of Lilly's most notable innovative medicines."

URI impact: "The URI College of Pharmacy provided a strong foundation for my career. Through being a student-athlete at URI, I learned the importance of determination and setting goals. I also learned the importance of strong leadership, and as an executive ... I rely on those lessons every day."



IN MEMORIAM

Community Mourns Professor's Passing Pharmacy Professor Kalista Remembered for Love of Teaching, Dedication to Students

The college community mourns the loss of clinical assistant professor of pharmacy Thomas Kalista, who passed away unexpectedly on May 7.

Kalista is remembered not only for his love of teaching and dedication to his students at URI, but also for his sense of humor, his bright smile, his passion for music, and his love of football. He was known as a friend and a mentor to students and colleagues alike. He had a unique ability to relate to his students and instill in them his passion and dedication for the pharmacy profession.

Kalista was born in New Britain, Conn., son of William and Kathy (Morrison) Kalista. He is survived by his wife, Hannah; his parents; brothers, Nathan Kalista and Ryan Kalista; sister, Hailey Champagne; niece, Chloe; nephew, Luke; and many aunts, uncles, cousins, and second cousins, as well as his beloved fur baby, Soto.

After graduating from URI with his Doctor of Pharmacy degree in 2013, Kalista worked in community and ambulatory care pharmacy practice, with a focus on diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, asthma, cigarette smoking cessation, and heart failure pharmacotherapy management. As a professor, he encouraged his students and peers to ensure patients received the best care possible. Among his many words of wisdom is a mantra many students remember: "What is our job? Five words: Take care of the patient."



Students share their memories of Dr. Kalista:

"Thank you for everything you taught me about pharmacy and life. You are a part of URI that I will never forget. My favorite line of yours is "what is our job? Five words—take care of the patient." It was an honor to be taught by such a dedicated pharmacist whose dream was to give back to the future of the profession. Your legacy will live on forever! Rock on."

"His smile and laugh were totally infectious, and I don't know if I've met another person as effortlessly kind and funny. What a remarkable person, friend, and teacher. The world is better for having had Tom here."

"Dr. Kalista was so much more than a professor, he was a support system, friend and mentor to students. One thing I admired about Dr. Kalista was his ability to instill not only the knowledge we "needed to know" in us but more importantly being able to instill a passion and love for the profession, which is the hardest thing a professor can do."

"Dr. Kalista always encouraged his students and peers to ensure patients received the best care possible. He was always available for students who needed him and was such a support system for all those around him. To lose him is a loss that will be felt in each and every one of our lives. His presence, joy, care, and drive is something that will be felt in the community forever."

"Thank you for always bringing a smile even in the middle of difficult times. It felt as though you were always available with an open office door when needed. Thank you for your patience, joy, and that stubborn willingness to help!"



A scholarship fund has been established in Tom Kalista's name. Scan the QR code to donate.

Ernest Mario

URI was saddened to announce the passing of alumnus Ernest Mario, who was a leader in the pharmaceutical industry throughout his illustrious career. He died Oct. 20 after a battle with pancreatic cancer.

Mario earned his M.S. and then his Ph.D. in physical science at URI after graduating from Rutgers University College of Pharmacy, which in 2001 was renamed the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy in his honor. He began his career as a pharmacist and researcher, working his way up through quality control and manufacturing at Strassenburgh Labs, SmithKline, and Squibb, to eventually become the CEO of Glaxo Inc. (USA) and then Glaxo Holdings (Worldwide) from 1986 to 1993, where he played a pivotal role in the company's growth.

He served as chairman and CEO of Alza Corp., CEO of Reliant Pharmaceuticals, and CEO and chairman of Soleno Therapeutics, remaining chairman until retiring in August 2024. Throughout his career, he served on numerous corporate boards including Boston Scientific Corp., Celgene Inc., and Kindred Biosciences, and was actively involved in health-care education, notably as honorary chairman of the APhA, and as chairman of the American Foundation for Pharmaceutical Education Board for 15 years. In 2007, he received the Remington Honor Medal from the American Pharmacists Association, the profession's highest honor.



Ernest Mario's philanthropic impact on the College of Pharmacy was extraordinary. His funding of the Ernest Mario 3-D Visualization Auditorium, the Ernest Mario Distinguished Chair in Pharmaceutics, and the Mario Family Foundation Impact Fund provide resources that elevated our College of Pharmacy's standing and quality.

THE
UNIVERSITY
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COLLEGE OF
PHARMACY

College of Pharmacy
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Blast from the past...



Graduates pose with faculty members of the R.I. College of Pharmacy & Allied Sciences, precursor to the URI College of Pharmacy, in June 1933.