

# RESEARCH NEWS



## NOTES FROM THE ADRGS

Dear colleagues, students and staff,

### What Drives Us?

In Research and Graduate Studies, our motivation comes from many sources: exciting ideas, innovative concepts, new collaborations, state-of-the-art equipment and spaces, and students who are eager to learn. Our curriculum inspires both faculty and students to reflect on what came before and imagine what comes next. These elements fuel the energy and passion behind our work.

At our August retreat, we “celebrated research” — and I was especially moved by the recognition of our Heim Award recipients, the creativity shown in posters and pitches, and the student-selected Faculty Teaching and Mentoring awardees. These honors are a powerful reminder of the drive and excitement that research and graduate education bring to our daily efforts.

Shortly after, we welcomed a new class of Master's and Doctoral students. The start of the academic year always brings fresh energy and new possibilities. What drives me — and the incredible team that supports these areas in our school — is you. Your curiosity, commitment, and collaboration make this work meaningful.

As the holidays approach, we hope you find time to recharge and refresh. We're looking forward to more exciting ideas and welcoming our new Dean in the coming year!

Manisha Patel, PhD

Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies



Karen Kimes, MBA,  
Director of Research  
Administration



Isabella Jaramillo,  
Graduate Program  
Administrator



Cora Allen,  
Graduate Program  
Coordinator

## THANK YOU DEAN ALTIERE

Dr. Ralph Altieri was appointed Dean of the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in December 2003. Over the past two decades, he has elevated SSPPS to new heights, strengthening its national and global reputation while fostering a collaborative community of faculty, students, and staff committed to innovation and shared success. We deeply appreciate his steadfast leadership and dedication.

As one of the school's longest-serving Deans, Dr. Altieri has overseen a period of remarkable growth and achievement. Under his guidance, CU Pharmacy has risen to the top tier of pharmacy schools nationwide, currently ranked among the top 10% of institutions and the top 15% for NIH funding. His commitment to mentorship and professional development has empowered countless students to excel in their careers.

Dr. Altieri has also been a strong advocate for advancing graduate programs and research. Through his leadership, the school increased PhD student stipends for three consecutive years, secured teaching assistant funding for first-year PhD students, and introduced Gap Funding awards to support faculty during periods of grant uncertainty.

We are profoundly grateful for his contributions and wish him continued success in the next chapter of his career.



# Annual SSPPS Research Retreat 2025

The Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences Research Retreat returned for its 28th year. A program agenda developed by the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies (ADRGs), Manisha Patel, PhD, and the 2025 ADRGS retreat advisory committee composed of students, staff and faculty welcomed several distinguished keynote speakers.

Dean Ralph Altieri, PhD, opened the day by highlighting CU Pharmacy's research successes for the year which consisted of receiving over \$18 million for funded research, ranking #12 in NIH funding, establishing the first endowed chair in Translational Pharmaceutical Sciences, and having the most competitive Skaggs Scholars Award since its inception in 2011.

The full-day event was held in the CU Anschutz Health Sciences Center and brought together faculty from across the School of Pharmacy as well as students from the Pharmacy Graduate Programs. Guest keynote speakers included Jennifer Richer, PhD, from the CU Anschutz Graduate School and Elizabeth Fowler, PhD, from Johns Hopkins University. Faculty presented on their current research in progress. The faculty breakout was led by panelists David Schwartz, MD, Leslie Berg, PhD, and Jacci Bainbridge, PharmD. Students participated in career panels hosted by alumni from both industry and academia.

The retreat ended on a high note as multiple awardees were recognized for outstanding research and mentorship.



Faculty, Staff and Students



Utibeabasi Ettah, Michael Armstrong



Students engaged in the career panels



Natalie Carter, Meg Little, David Angarita

# Skaggs Research Retreat Awards

## Poster Presentation Winners

- Best Research Poster or Presentation by a Graduate Student, Pharmaceutical Sciences- **Kyle Ross**
- Best Research Poster or Presentation by a Graduate Student, Toxicology- **Stephanie Bersie**
- Best Research Poster or Presentation by a Graduate Student, Pharmaceutical Outcomes Research- **Harry Gyimah Gyamfi**
- Best Research Poster or Presentation by Other Professional Participants (PRAs, masters and undergraduate students, postdocs)- **Natalie Carter**
- Best Research Poster Pitch by Any Eligible Poster Presenter- **Ariana Crary**

## Harold C. Heim Award Winners

- Pharmaceutical Sciences PhD Graduate Program- **Yue Li**
- Toxicology PhD Graduate Program- **Lauren Rutt**
- Pharmaceutical Outcomes Research PhD Graduate Program- **Nicholas Mendola**



Lauren Rutt, Dr. Ralph Altieri

## Teaching and Mentoring Award Winners

The Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences recognizes the following teaching awards:

- Excellence in Pharmaceutical Sciences Doctoral Teaching Award - **Laura Saba, PhD**
- Excellence in Toxicology Doctoral Teaching Award - **Kristofer Fritz, PhD**
- Excellence in Pharmaceutical Outcomes Research Doctoral Teaching Award - **Brett McQueen, PhD**
- Excellence in Pharmaceutical Sciences Master's Teaching Award - **David Kroll, PhD**

The Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies recognizes the following teaching award:

- Excellence in Graduate Mentoring Award - **Kristina Brooks, PharmD**



Dr. David Kroll, Sierra Coonts



Nicholas Mendola, PhD, Dr. Ralph Altieri



Ariana Crary, Dr. Laura Saba



# Graduate Program New Student Orientation Fall 2025

We welcomed our new graduate student class on August 14th, 2025 at the Graduate Programs New Student Orientation! 10 PhD students and 18 MS students gathered to start their Graduate School journey, and learn more about the next few years. With a series of engaging presentations, students were introduced to the diverse curriculum, research opportunities, and vibrant campus life that awaited them. Please join us in welcoming our new Fall 2025 students!

## Research In Progress

We were thrilled to introduce a new Research in Progress seminar series format this Fall! On Thursdays from 11:00 am–12:00 pm, we gathered for an exciting lineup of presentations. PhD students, second year and up, have the chance to present their research with peers and faculty in a supportive environment. Each session features multiple student presentations, creating a space for learning, feedback, and collaboration. Each student is assigned a presentation date, with senior students leading the way early in the year, while newer students will present later in the school year. Thank you to everyone who participated in the Fall semester, and made this new series a success!



Utibeabasi Ettah

## Fall Fun

The students of the Graduate Programs have been working diligently in the labs during the fall 2025 semester. So much so that some would say they are taking after program leadership.

Halloween 2025 was one to remember when students cloned the Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, Dr. Manisha Patel and the Chair of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Dr. Blake Hill. To Dr. Patel and Dr. Hill's surprise students mirrored them down to the very last detail. It was a playful costume, done with great reverence and admiration, that left the faculty and students with a smile on their faces.



Cameron Lowry, Kelly Douglas, Emily Giedraitis, Dr. Blake Hill, Jeffrey Kearns, Sarah Jacques, Ashlynn Barnes



Ariana Crary, Kristin Weninger, Chanapa Mann, Dr. Manisha Patel, Paola Garcia Gonzales, Anna Figueroa

# Graduate Student Night Out

The Associate Dean of Graduate Studies hosted the first Graduate Student Night Out on Friday, November 21, 2025. Graduate students from the Pharmaceutical Sciences, Toxicology and Pharmaceutical Outcomes Research PhD Programs and Pharmaceutical Sciences Master's Programs, all came together at the Local Drive at the Stanley Marketplace for a fun night of simulated golf competition and delicious New York style pizza from Famous J's.

The event was a much-needed break from the rigors of academic life, providing students with an opportunity to relax and build camaraderie outside of the classroom. Laughter and friendly banter filled the air as students took turns at the golf simulators, attempting to outdo one another with their swings. Some discussed their research projects, sharing insights and advice, while others simply enjoyed the chance to unwind and connect on a personal level.



Natalie Carter, Sierra Coonts,  
David Angarita, Megan Little,  
Jeffrey Kearns



Lev Titov



Hannah Webb, Yuxin Huang, Harman  
Kaur Chaggar, Sara Cantrell, Cassidy  
Poynter



Colby Riexinger



Chanapa Mann, Kristin  
Wenninger, Gabriela Rizzo  
Kodama, Sophia Rankin,  
Sebastian Santos De Leon,  
Laura Calvimontes Barrientos



Sierra Coonts



# GRADUATE PROGRAMS

## Updates

### Leadership Transition in the Toxicology PhD Program

Dr. Jared Brown stepped down from his role as Program Director of the Toxicology PhD Program.

Over the past decade, Dr. Brown has been instrumental in advancing the program's growth and development. His unwavering commitment to academic excellence and student advocacy has left a lasting impact on our community.

Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Brown led the program to secure its first T32 training grant, a milestone achievement that was recently renewed for an additional five-year term. We are pleased to share that he will continue to serve as Principal Investigator of the Toxicology T32 training grant, ensuring continuity and continued excellence in this critical area.

On November 19, 2015 an informal celebration was held in Dr. Brown's honor. Faculty, staff and students came together to enjoy pizza, cake and diet Dr. Pepper. A slide show was presented along with a kudo board. Past students of the Toxicology program, fellow Toxicology faculty and staff posted warm words of thanks and gratitude.

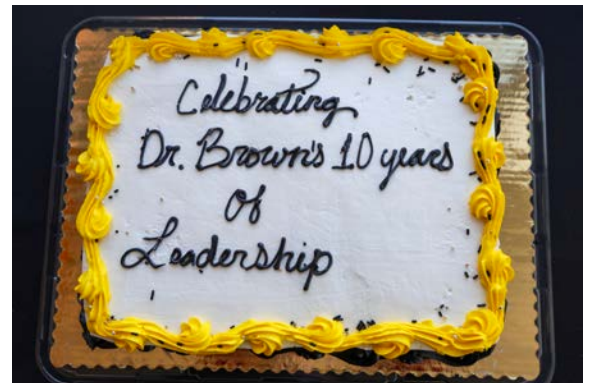
We extend our deepest gratitude to Dr. Brown for his exceptional leadership and dedication.

We are pleased to announce that the role of Program Director will be filled by Dr. Becky McCullough, who has served as Associate Program Director of the Toxicology Program since June 2023. Her experience and commitment to the program make her well-positioned to lead the next phase of its development.

Please join us in thanking Dr. Brown for his continued commitment and in welcoming Dr. McCullough to her new role.



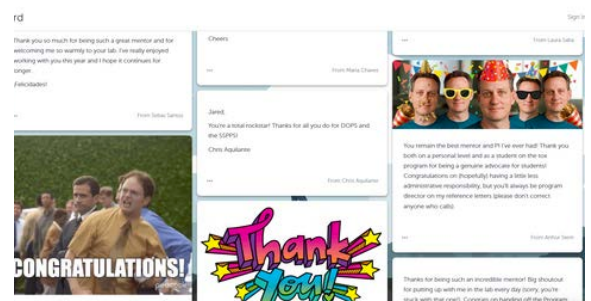
Dr. Jared Brown, Dr. Manisha Patel  
and Dr. Rebecca McCullough



Dr. Brown's celebratory cake



Dr. Rebecca McCullough



Dr. Brown's Kudo Board

# GRADUATE PROGRAMS

*Updates*

## Notable Leadership Changes

The Pharmaceutical Outcomes Research PhD Program received a new Program Director over the summer. Dr. Robert “Brett” McQueen took over the program. His previous years with the program and work in health economics and outcomes research has equipped him with the knowledge and skills necessary to advance the program's mission of improving healthcare delivery and patient outcomes. With a wealth of experience and a fresh perspective, Dr. McQueen is eager to lead the program into its next chapter of innovation and excellence.

We are thrilled to have Dr. McQueen lead the program and look forward to his future successes.



Brett R. McQueen, PhD

## ALUMNI CORNER

Greetings, Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Alumni! My name is Madison Crepeau, I am the new Program Manager for Alumni Relations for the School of Pharmacy. I recently joined the team in July – I’ve enjoyed meeting so many of you and look forward to continuing to engage with our alumni community.

The Alumni Association for the University of Colorado Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences sends its congratulations to the Class of 2025 on reaching this incredible milestone! The Alumni Association is here to support you every step of the way. Whether you're seeking career advice, networking opportunities, or ways to give back to the community, we offer a wealth of resources and connections to help you succeed. Stay engaged, stay connected, and continue to make us proud.

Whether you’re a recent graduate or experienced alum, I’d love to connect. Your stories, memories, and ideas are what make this role so special. Please don’t hesitate to reach out and connect with us!

*Sincerely,*

Madison Crepeau, MA  
Program Manager, Alumni Relations  
[madison.crepeau@cuanschutz.edu](mailto:madison.crepeau@cuanschutz.edu)



# GRADUATE PROGRAMS

## *Student Successes*

### Comprehensive Exam Fall 2025

The comprehensive exam is designed to challenge students to step back from the specific deliverables expected in courses and reflect critically on their discipline through synthesis and integration of their knowledge, skills and experiences across significant topics in their academic discipline.

Passing a comprehensive exam indicates that a student is prepared to move into the dissertation phase of the degree.

Congratulations to the following students for passing the comprehensive exam fall semester 2025!

*Toxicology*

Utibeabasi Ettah  
Emily Mitchem

*Pharmaceutical Outcomes Research*

Mouna Dardouri

### Congratulations to Summer and Fall 2025 Graduates

Manisha Patel, PhD, Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies; along with Program Directors, Laura Saba, PhD, Rebecca McCullough, PhD, David Kroll, PhD, Program Coordinator, Cora Allen, Program Administrator, Isabella Jaramillo, and Karen Kimes, Director of Research Administration, offer their sincere congratulations to the summer and fall 2025 class of graduates.

#### Pharmaceutical Sciences PhD Program

Jason Groegler, PhD

#### Toxicology PhD Program

Sophia Clune, PhD  
Daniel Foster, PhD  
Rama Kant, PhD  
Lauren Rutt, PhD

#### Pharmaceutical Sciences Masters Program

Praveen Ramaswamy, MS  
Emma Myers, MS





# GRADUATE PROGRAMS

## Student Successes

### Mountain West Society of Toxicology 2025

In August, a team of Graduate Students, Postdocs, and Faculty attended the 43rd Annual Mountain West Society of Toxicology Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The event highlighted the strength and impact of our research community. Dr. Jared Brown delivered the keynote address, setting the tone for an engaging and insightful meeting. This team demonstrated outstanding success, with numerous Graduate Students and Postdocs recognized for their exceptional research!



Dr. Jared Brown, Matthew Gibb, Angela Reinert, Finnegan Friday, Carly Chesterman, Sebastian Santos, Zaria Jackson, Robert Canfield, Laura Calvimontes, Emily Mitchem, Kristin Weninger, Michaela Hvizdak, Dr. Kris Fritz, Dr. Jed Lampe

### Awards

- 1st Place, Best Platform Presentation by a Graduate Student-**Michaela Hvizdak**
- 2nd Place, Best Platform Presentation by a Graduate Student-**Emily Mitchem**
- 1st Place, Best Platform Presentation by a Postdoctoral Fellow-**Matthew Gibb**
- Travel Award Recipients:
  - **Kristin Weninger**
  - **Finnegan Friday**
  - **Carly Chesterman**
  - **Sebastian Santos**
  - **Angela Reinert**

### Toxicology PhD Successes

- **Zaria Jackson** presented a poster at the Fusion Redox Biology Conference in Tulum, Mexico; Mentor: James Roede, PhD
- **Chanapa Mann** presented a poster at the American Epilepsy Society Meeting in Atlanta, GA; Mentor: Manisha Patel, PhD
- **Shannon Twardy** presented a poster at The Liver Meeting in Washington DC; Mentor: Rebecca McCullough, PhD
- **Emily Mitchem** presented a poster at the Society for Redox Biology and Medicine's 32nd Annual Conference in Washington DC; Mentor: Kris Fritz, PhD
- **Gabriela Rizzo Kodama** presented a poster and received a travel award for the Radiation Research Society Annual Meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico; Mentor: Gina Bouchard, PhD
- **Victoria Wei** presented at the American Conference on Pharmacometrics in Aurora, CO; Mentor: Kristina Brooks, PharmD
- **Utibeabasi Ettah** participated in the Three Minute Thesis Graduate School Event on December 8th, 2025. She was in the top 5 of all presenters! Mentor: Shaodong Dai, PhD

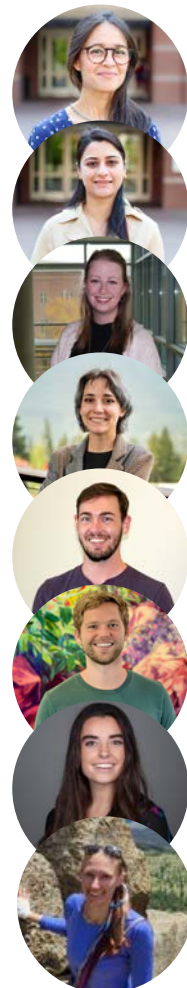


# GRADUATE PROGRAMS

## *Student Successes*

### Pharmaceutical Sciences PhD Successes

- **Anna Figueroa** received the Deitrich Endowed Graduate Support Scholarship, which provides scholarships, travel awards, and research project funding for graduate students at SSPPS; Mentor: Manisha Patel, PhD
- **Harman Chaggar** presented at the Assembloids and Complex Cell-Cell Interactions across Tissues & Organs 2025 Conference in Cold Spring Harbor, NY. After only one semester of research, Harman is showing remarkable success! Mentor: Julio Aguado, PhD
- **Emily Gracey** presented at the International Society for the Study of Xenobiotics Conference in Cambridge, MA; Mentor: Jed Lampe, PhD
- **Brianna Hunt** presented at the Metabolomics Association of North America 2025 Conference in Alberta, Canada; Mentor: Nichole Reisdorph, PhD
- **David Nerguizian** presented at the International Workshop on Clinical Pharmacology of HIV, Hepatitis, and Other Antiviral Drugs in Amsterdam, Netherlands; Mentor: Peter Anderson, PharmD
- **Jason Groegler** presented at the European Association for the Study of Diabetes Conference in Vienna, Austria; Mentor: Thomas Delong, PhD
- **Sarah Asby** presented at the American Society of Nephrology Conference in Houston, TX; Mentor: Melanie Joy, PharmD, PhD
- **Alexandra Dunbar** was randomly selected to compete in a STEP Communication Challenge at the ACoP Meeting, and she won an award her abstract drawing! Mentor: Kristina Brooks, PharmD



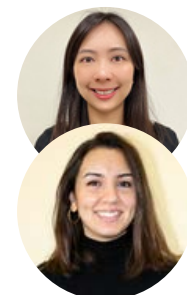
### Pharmaceutical Sciences MS Successes

- **Cassidy Poynter** presented at the Assembloids and Complex Cell-Cell Interactions across Tissues & Organs 2025 Conference in Cold Spring Harbor, NY. Cassidy is a first-year student, but is already paving the road to a successful research career! Mentor: Julio Aguado, PhD
- **David Angarita** presented at the Nanomedicine and Drug Delivery Symposium in Houston, TX; Mentor: Dmitri Simberg, PhD
- **Thanh Ngyuen** presented at the American Conference on Pharmacometrics in Aurora, CO; Mentor: Peter Anderson, PharmD



### Pharmaceutical Outcomes Research Successes

- **Sammi Chen** presented at the The Professional Society for Health Economics and Outcomes Research Conference in Glasgow, UK; Mentor: Brett McQueen, PhD
- **Mouna Dardouri** presented at the Health Technology Assessment International Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina; Mentor: Michael DiStefano, PhD, MBE



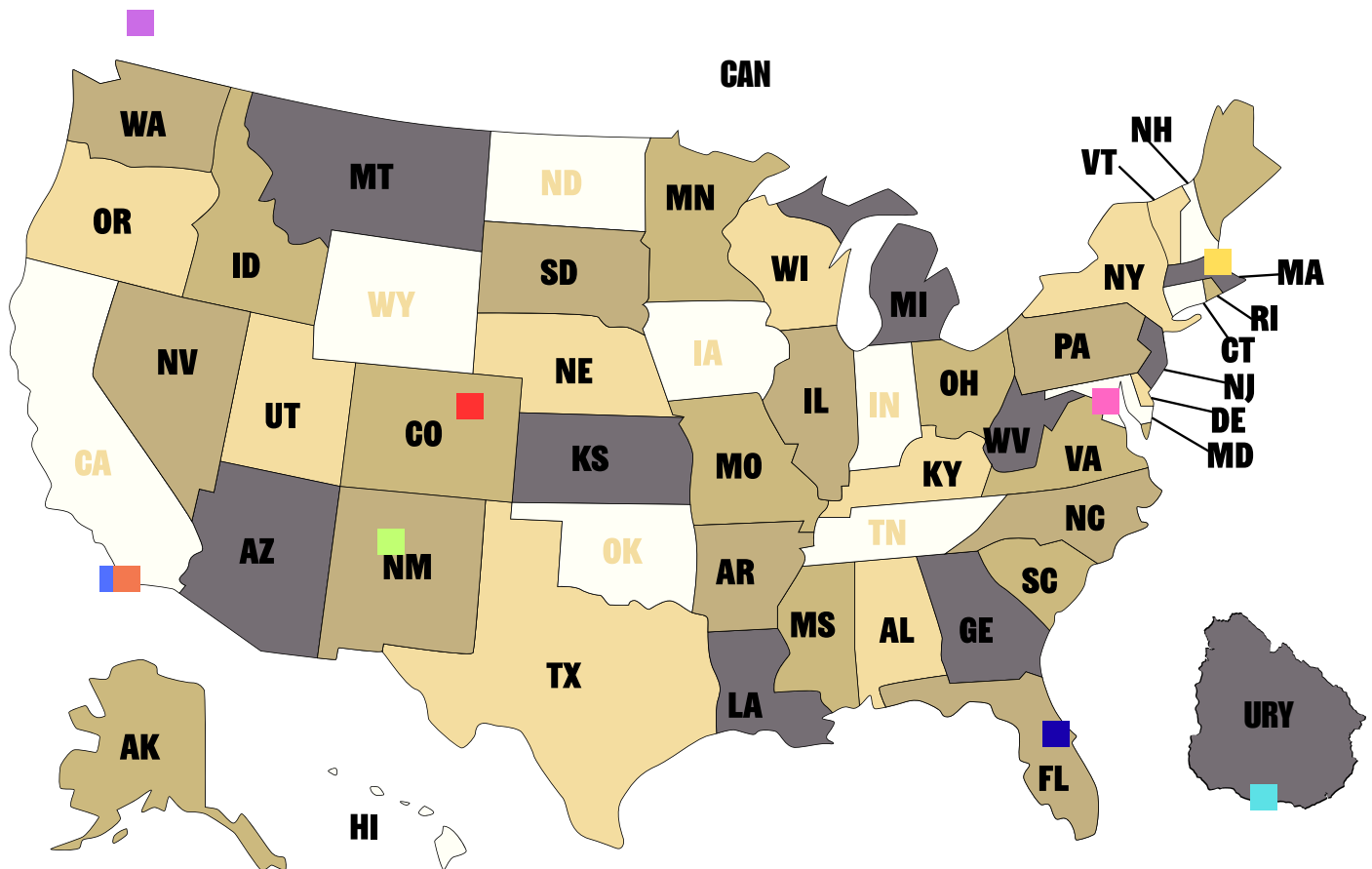


# GRADUATE PROGRAMS

## *Student Successes*

### Helen Gretchen Tilden Travel Award

The Helen Gretchen Tilden Travel Award was established with a generous donation made Helen Gretchen Tilden to the Toxicology PhD Program in 2019. The funding was designated for travel awards for PhD students in 2020, but it was not able to be used because of the pandemic. All of the programs at the university reduced travel for student health and safety reasons the following 2 years, and many had not been fully re-instated yet. Then came 2023, the first year the funds were awarded to a Toxicology PhD student. Between the years of 2023 and 2025 9 students were awarded travel funds to attend various conferences all over the country and abroad!



<u>Student Name</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Conference Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
Scott Tilden	2023	Gordon Research Conference	<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Boston, MA
Paige Anton	2023	Keystone Symposium on Innate Immunity & Aging	<span style="color: purple;">■</span> Whistler, Canada
Courtney McGinnis	2023	Society for Redox Biology and Medicine Conference	<span style="color: cyan;">■</span> Punta Del Este, Uruguay
Lauren Rutt	2024	Liver Meeting	<span style="color: blue;">■</span> San Diego, CA
Shannon Twardy	2025	Liver Meeting	<span style="color: orange;">■</span> San Diego, CA
Courtney McGinnis	2025	Society of Toxicology	<span style="color: darkblue;">■</span> Orlando, FL
Angela Reinert	2025	Mountain West Society of Toxicology	<span style="color: lightgreen;">■</span> Albuquerque, NM
Victoria Wei	2025	American Conference on Pharmacometrics	<span style="color: red;">■</span> Aurora, CO
Emily Mitchem	2025	Society for Redox Biology and Medicine Conference	<span style="color: pink;">■</span> Washington, DC

# ADRGs ADVISORY COMMITTEE: UPDATE

The ADRGS Advisory Committee met on December 10, 2025 to confirm funding for the Seed grants and a new funding opportunity called MicroAccelerator Grants. The MicroAccelerator grants were to support projects that require a small sum (\$5-10K) to generate pilot data to become competitive for larger-scale external funding. Seed grants are awarded in the amount of \$75,000 and promote new research growth through individual faculty initiatives or new collaborations. Led by Manisha Patel, PhD, Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, the committee consists of members from both SSPPS departments and includes Jacci Bainbridge, Jared Brown, Jed Lampe, Heather Anderson, Kristofer Fritz, Isabella Jaramillo, and Karen Kimes. The group approved funding for 8 of the MicroAccelerator awards and 3 Seed grants.

## ADRGs SEED GRANT AWARDS

Congratulations to the following Faculty for their successful **Seed Grant** applications:

- **Gina Bouchard, PhD:** *Spatiotemporal Profiling of Radiotherapy Response in Cervical Cancer Using Highly Multiplexed Imaging of Cellular and Metabolic Features*
- **Raj Agarwal, PhD, Julio Aguado, PhD and Laura Saba, PhD:** *Determining the differential neurotoxicity of organophosphates in different brain organoids*
- **Dmitri Simberg, PhD and Krishna Mallela, PhD:** *Bio-orthogonal complement inhibitors (BCIs) for nanomedicine*



## ADRGs MICRO GRANT AWARDS

### MICROACCELERATOR Grants

- **Agarwal/Saba-** Mechanistic models and treatments for corneal injury caused by arsenical vesicants.
- **Kandel-** How 25-hydroxycholesterol 3-sulfate affects pyocin gene activity in *P. aeruginosa*.
- **Bouchard-** Finding drugs that target Tumor-Adjacent Fibroblasts at the tumor edge.
- **Aguado-** RNA-sequencing study comparing how different neurotropic viruses change activity in human brain organoids.
- **Hill/Fritz-** How acetylation of FIS1 controls mitochondrial fission.
- **Saba/Hopfer/Schacht-** Short-term effects of cannabis exposure on gene activity in immune cells.
- **McCullough/Sandoval-** How GLP-1R activation influences brain inflammation caused by alcohol.
- **DiStefano/Pete Anderson-** Creating methods to measure safety and effectiveness of compounded GLP-1 products.





## COMING SOON

### Research Rotation Talks

The Toxicology Research Rotation Talks will take place on January 14, 2026 from 10:00-11:00AM. Please join us in room V20-1000 to support our first year Toxicology students!

### Spring Fling

Kindly mark your calendars for the annual Spring Fling event (formerly known as Fall Ball), hosted by Student Council on Saturday, March 7, 2026! The event is for all students of the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. We'll share additional details as the event date approaches—stay tuned!

### New Graduate Programs Merch!

On behalf of Dr. Manisha Patel, Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, I am excited to announce the launch of Graduate Programs/Postdoctoral Fellows Merchandise! Working closely with the Student Representatives from each program, we collaborated to select the merchandise items and design. We are thrilled to offer this free item as a way to foster a sense of belonging and pride among our students and fellows. We look forward to seeing everyone sporting their new gear spring semester.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### New Keurig Coffee Station

The Graduate Student Lounge on the third floor has a new Keurig coffee station. The coffee station will remain stocked in the lounge for use all year round. We recognize all the hard work both in the lab and in the classroom. We hope this will help you to take a moment for yourself to recenter and recharge. Thank you to the Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, Manisha Patel for the machine!

## UPCOMING EVENTS

January 7-8, 2026: **Faculty and Staff Retreat**

January 14, 2026: **Toxicology Research Rotation Talks**

February 6, 2026: **PhD Programs Recruitment**

