

Atlanta Pharma Community Collaborates on Drug Development Education

Doctoral students from four Atlanta universities worked together recently to learn how to develop new pharmaceutical products during a two-week interdisciplinary short course at the Georgia Institute of Technology. The course's final presentations were held June 11.

Two dozen students from Georgia Tech, Mercer University, Georgia State University and Emory University heard lectures from Atlanta-based medical professionals, researchers, and pharmaceutical company leaders - and worked in teams to develop plans for how a drug company might convert a promising molecule into a real product. To demonstrate the interdisciplinary nature of the drug development process, each team included pharmacists, bio-scientists, chemists and engineers.

"Each team was given information from the scientific literature on a drug in early stage development by a pharmaceutical company, and was asked to put together and justify a detailed plan for bringing that molecule forward into a drug product useful in clinical medicine," said Mark Prausnitz, the course's leader and a Regents' professor in Georgia Tech's School of Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering.

Speakers from the Atlanta pharmaceutical community talked to the students on such topics as drug discovery and design, drug manufacturing, formulation, pre-clinical studies, design of clinical trials, marketing, project teamwork and R&D reports. In addition to Prausnitz, other instructors included:

- Ajay Banga, professor and chair of pharmaceutical sciences at Mercer University;
- Andy Bommarius, professor of chemical & biomolecular engineering at Georgia Tech;
- Bobby Khan, chief medical officer at Atlanta Clinical Research Centers;
- Joseph Patti, co-founder and senior vice president of R&D at Inhibitex;
- Harold Shlevin, director of bioscience commercialization at Georgia Tech and former CEO of Solvay Pharmaceuticals;
- James Sikorski, a consultant and former vice president of medicinal chemistry at AtheroGenics;
- Jaipal Singh, adjunct professor of biology at Georgia Tech and former chief scientific officer at Saint Joseph's Translational Research Institute;
- Charlie Thompson, a principal at Atria;
- Wes Wynans, director of leadership education and development at Georgia Tech.

Students were pleased with the opportunity to see the entire drug development

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process and to work closely with peers from other universities. "Working in an interdisciplinary team allowed us to connect the dots between all of the medical, scientific and business aspects of bringing a drug to the market," said Meera Gujjar, a graduate student in pharmaceutical sciences at Mercer University.

Chris Quinto, a Ph.D. student from Georgia Tech, found students from other backgrounds helpful in sharing their expertise in the complex drug development process.

"The Mercer students in my group were a great resource in helping explain and make sense of the data and terminology in the papers that we read," Quinto said. "What I found most interesting in this class was how the drug development research teams consist of many different specialties, each of which is vital to the final outcome of the drug development process."

The course is expected to be offered once every two years. "This shows how Atlanta universities are working together and with local pharmaceutical companies to build a stronger pharmaceutical research and education community here," Prausnitz added.

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