

RUTGERS

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

School of Health Professions

Into the
future

RUTGERS SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

1,436

students

(an increase of 2% from Fall 2019)

graduates

504



alumni

13,210

58.6%

of students identify as underrepresented minorities

Our students come from 41 states and six countries beyond the U.S.



3 campuses
Newark,
Piscataway, Blackwood
and a global classroom



full-time faculty

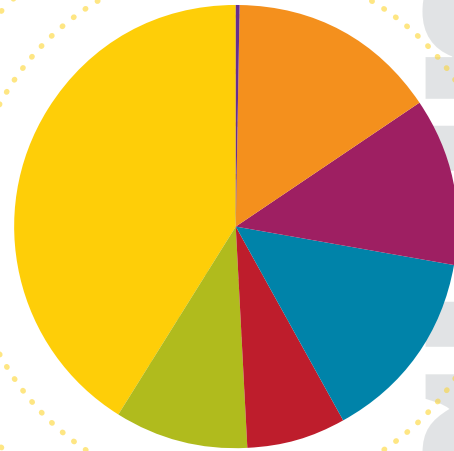
136

part-time faculty

245

staff

93



student demographics

74% graduate students

26% undergraduate students

- 5 American Indian
- 220 Asian
- 173 Black
- 201 Hispanic
- 106 Not known
- 136 Two or more races
- 585 White

39

programs in 2020-21

9 undergraduate degrees

18 graduate degrees

12 professional certificates

GWENDOLYN M. MAHON, MS.C., PH.D.
DEAN, RUTGERS SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Each year as I reflect back on accomplishments, major milestones, and challenges, my pride in the Rutgers School of Health Professions grows exponentially. This past year has once again proven that we are on the forefront of health professions education, research, and service.

Our focus on world-class education has remained steadfast, progressive, and strong. We have remained adaptable to the evolving needs of the health care workforce on the front lines and behind the scenes. We have launched and reimaged programs this year that will offer new opportunities within health care, setting standards high for our incoming students who are forging lightly walked paths.

Our faculty have secured more than \$10.5 million in grant funding this past year, increasing research dollars by more than 100% from previous years. Research conducted at SHP provides direct and measurable patient outcomes, especially in the areas of physical and psychiatric rehabilitation and health informatics. The incredible scholarly work of our faculty, and support from the Methodology and Statistics Support Team, has led to the highest number of publications by our faculty to date: 244 peer-reviewed publications, a 54% increase from 2019–20 and a 480% increase from 2015–16 (42 publications).

While the COVID-19 pandemic shifted our operations and challenged us to think bigger, it has allowed us to be more agile and adaptive in providing education and conducting research. We know, regardless of the challenges that we face as a school, we can overcome them together.

I once again look forward to the coming year with optimism, fortitude, and pride in our school.



BRIAN L. STROM, M.D., M.P.H.
CHANCELLOR, RUTGERS BIOMEDICAL
AND HEALTH SCIENCES



Founded forty-five years ago as the College of Medicine and Dentistry–School of Allied Health Professions, the Rutgers School of Health Professions (SHP) has since grown into the largest health professions school in the country, and one of its very best. The 2020–21 academic year continued this forward momentum as SHP advanced health professions education and research, as summarized in Dean Mahon’s message, and bolstered the mission of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences with resilience and distinct compassion.

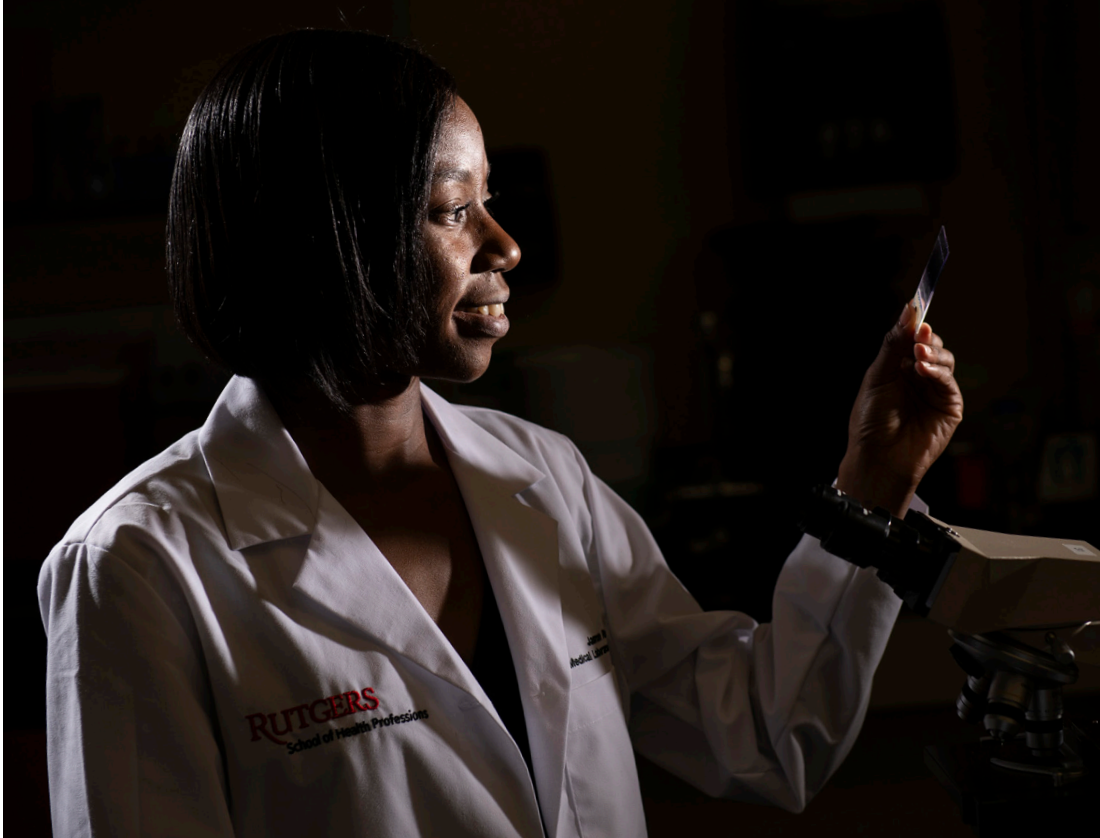
Over the last few years SHP has prioritized philanthropy, focusing on cultivating relationships for both annual and major gifts in order to support student scholarship, pro bono clinic expansion, program enhancement, and space improvement. This past year showcased the results of their efforts as philanthropy at the school increased by more than 500% over the previous year. Such patronage from generous alumni and friends will further the school’s service initiatives such as the Health Outreach Practice Experience (HOPE) clinic—which provides free services to the underinsured in Plainfield, NJ, and the soon-to-open speech-language pathology clinic that will offer free speech-therapy services to those in need in Newark, NJ.

Housed within one of the most diverse universities and within one of the most diverse states in the country, SHP has also made strides in its efforts to more closely represent the communities we serve. Special emphasis on the recruitment of diverse applicants has made SHP a welcoming home to students with a broad array of backgrounds and experience, and as many as 58% of the SHP student body identify as underrepresented minorities.

Despite extraordinary circumstances due to the extended duration of the pandemic, SHP faculty, staff, students, and administrators worked together to produce the high-caliber educational experience for which SHP is known. Thanks in no small part to tremendous work demonstrated by Dean Mahon and SHP faculty and staff, SHP maintained high rankings in U.S. News & World Report with two programs placing within the top 25 in the nation in their unique categories.

Finally, Dean Mahon has been leading the development of the new RBHS strategic plan. We are most grateful for her leadership.

SHP offers incredible experiences to its students and invaluable service to our greater communities. Thank you to all who have contributed to the success of this past year. I look forward to another dynamic year ahead.



LEADERS OF TOMORROW

At Rutgers School of Health Professions, our students are the health care professionals of tomorrow.

As the century's first quarter draws toward a close, we are continually reassessing how to keep students in the vanguard of cutting-edge care.

At a time when the medical world increasingly embraces interdisciplinary care as the wave of the future, our school, with more than 30 health professions programs, is uniquely positioned to offer opportunities for team-based care. Our students also work collaboratively with others within Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences and beyond.

We have worked to make sure that our students' clinical experiences prepare them for real-world interaction with a diverse population, where sensitivity and cultural competency are essential to good, comprehensive care. When the COVID-19 pandemic halted a pro bono physical therapy clinic in the underserved community of Newark, the faculty and student board members of the Rutgers-Newark Community Participatory PT Clinic worked tirelessly to implement telehealth services so they could continue to serve their patients and communities.

The effort ensured that clinical education continued for our students and that people who counted on the clinic to maintain their mobility and good health could still receive services. Looking at the benefits of telehealth, the clinic chose to continue telehealth services even after it reopened.

With the COVID-19 pandemic loosening its grip on New Jersey, our school moved forward with new and revamped programs to meet future health care needs.

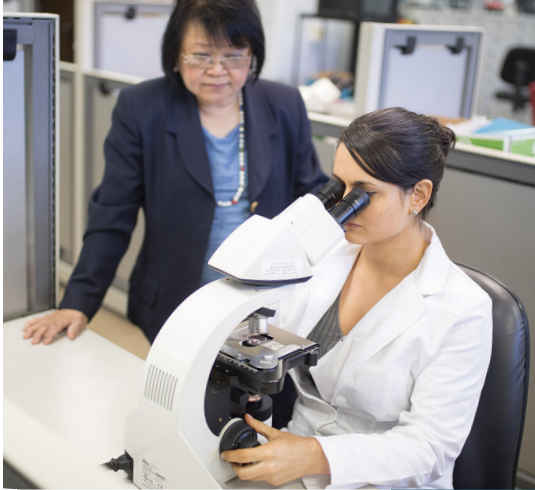
We are excited to be opening a new Speech-Language Pathology master's degree program focused on service to multiethnic, socially diverse populations. Our students will learn how gender, geographic locations, and socioeconomic status, as well as cultural backgrounds, impact speech and language development. They will gain clinical experience in a pro bono, bilingual speech-language pathology clinic being established in Newark—where nearly a third of the population lives below federal poverty guidelines.

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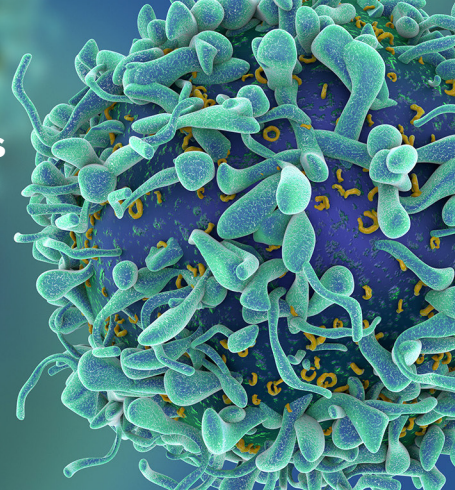


We are also launching a new Doctor of Occupational Therapy program that will not only meet a need for programs and practitioners in New Jersey, but will also deliver more interdisciplinary health care opportunities. Entrance into both new programs was highly competitive, and our first classes, launched in September, filled quickly.

At a time when big data is revolutionizing health care, we've expanded degree programs in health informatics. Our new Doctor of Health Informatics program will give leaders in health care the ability to combine data analytics, informational management, and clinical research, while the new Master of Science in Health Information Management program will teach students how to leverage data and advanced information technology systems.



Students won prestigious scholarships, presented research to professional peers, and published scholarly works.

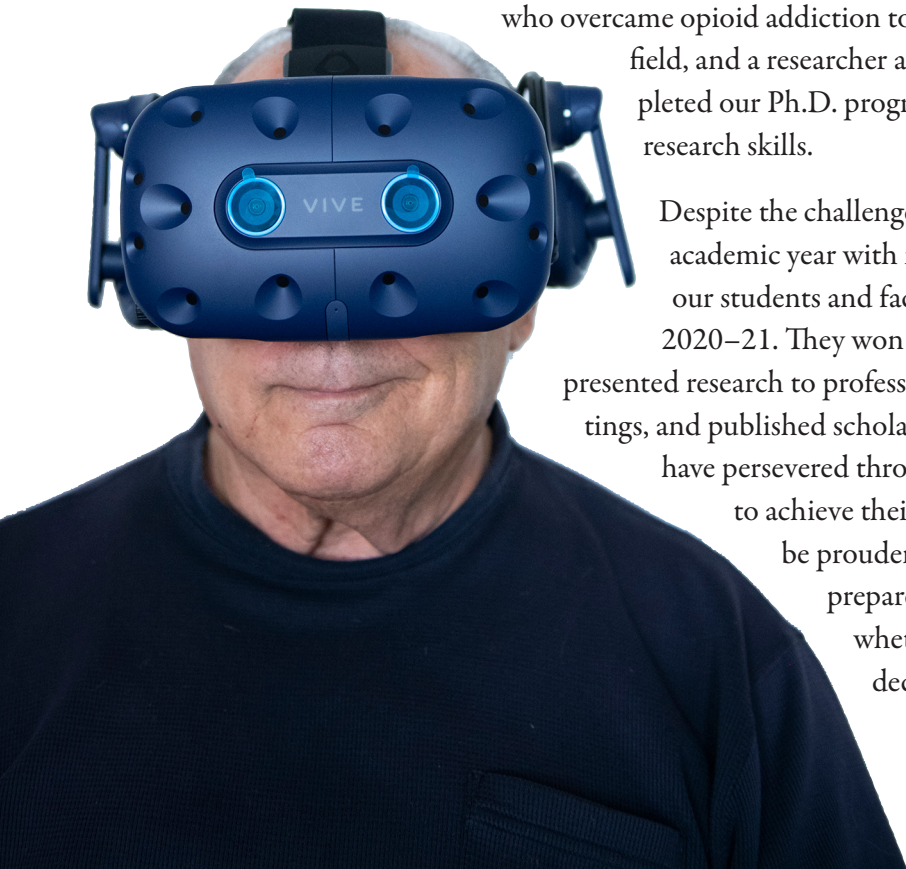


As the only university in New Jersey offering a cytopathology degree program, we've revised our curriculum to reflect changes in diagnostic cytology practice and shortened the time for completion, as well as broadened access to applications for individuals from diverse backgrounds. We see it as critical to ensuring a well-qualified workforce, especially as diagnostics became key in managing the pandemic.

With the world's aging population rapidly increasing, we've also redesigned our master's program to meet the needs of gerontology professions into the future.

At Rutgers School of Health Professions, our student population reflects the diversity of our world. This year's graduates included a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient who is the first in her family to graduate college, a student who overcame opioid addiction to work in the mental health field, and a researcher at Kessler Institute who completed our Ph.D. program to hone his investigative research skills.

Despite the challenges of completing a full academic year with many classes held remotely, our students and faculty continued to excel in 2020–21. They won prestigious scholarships, presented research to professional peers in Zoom settings, and published scholarly works. Our students have persevered through unprecedented times to achieve their degrees and we could not be prouder of them. They are well prepared for the challenges ahead, whether today, tomorrow, or decades from now.



EDNA DOLZ, DOCTOR IN CLINICAL NUTRITION (D.C.N.)

Despite hurricane, pandemic, and health issues, she was determined to complete her degree.

After Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico, Edna Dolz powered up her laptop on a generator and studied with a miner's lamp strapped to her head while working toward her online doctoral degree.

She had begun the online program with one course in 2010 but took a medical leave of absence before returning as a part-time student. Then came Maria in 2017. More health problems and an earthquake set her back again. The pandemic was nearly the final blow, with Dolz confined to her home along with the rest of the country, struggling to complete a research project.


Yet, she persevered and is proud to have graduated with the Class of 2021.

"I thought about quitting. But I said, 'Little by little, I'll get there,'" said Dolz, 47, a registered dietitian.

DCN associate professor Jane Ziegler, DCN, RDN, LDN, said she was amazed at the hurdles Dolz overcame to get her degree. "She held a very special place in my heart because of everything she went through. I don't think I could have done it," said Ziegler. "But we just couldn't give up on Edna. She's delightful and so respectful and you just wanted to do anything you could to get her through the program. She really earned the degree."

Ziegler said there is a demand for dietetics practitioners and researchers with expert-level knowledge and skills in Puerto Rico. In addition to Dolz, one other student from Puerto Rico is enrolled in the doctoral program and another has graduated.

"They need advanced clinicians," Ziegler said. "I think she'll be able to really go forward and help the residents of Puerto Rico, where they have been trying to improve nutrition care."



They need advanced clinicians and we wanted to support her in getting through the program. I think she'll be able to really go forward and help the profession in Puerto Rico.

—DCN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JANE ZIEGLER





CHRISTOPHER M. CIRIGLIARO, PH.D.
HEALTH SCIENCES, APPLIED PHYSIOLOGY

With his newly minted Ph.D., this scientist is ready to advance research into spinal cord injuries.

His interest in spinal cord research was sparked as an undergraduate student while working with an elderly man who was paralyzed and had exhausted his insurance. As an athletic trainer, Chris Cirigliaro volunteered to implement a physician-prescribed exercise regimen three times a week for three years.

“Working with this older man made me aware of the devastating effects of spinal cord injury on the entire body and how great it would be to one day work in this field and help persons with this condition,” he said.

Later, as a senior research coordinator for the James J. Peters Veterans Affairs Medical Center satellite research laboratory at Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation in West Orange, he knew he needed a doctoral degree to obtain grant support and advance his research career to improve the lives of those with spinal cord injuries.

In 2012, Cirigliaro enrolled in the Rutgers School of Health Professions Ph.D. program in the Department of Rehabilitation and Movement Science.

While in the program, Cirigliaro was lead author on four studies done in collaboration with other Rutgers researchers that addressed questions related to bone health of those with spinal cord injuries.

Having graduated in the spring of 2021, he applied to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for a highly competitive Career Development Award to investigate the effect of two physical interventions—exoskeletal-assisted walking and transcutaneous spinal cord stimulation—on bone mass and strength in persons with spinal cord injuries.

“Without that doctoral degree, it just wasn’t possible to move forward,” he said.

His mentor, associate professor Mary Jane Myslinski, Ph.D., said that Cirigliaro was tenacious in accomplishing his research activities, while keeping his academic performance at a high level. “Chris stood out for his ability to juggle work, school, family life, and adversity with a smile and a positive attitude,” she said.

Cirigliaro was lead author on four studies done in collaboration with other Rutgers researchers that addressed questions related to bone health of those with spinal cord injuries.

Dreamer is first-generation college graduate

At the age of six, Jennifer Morquecho came to the United States from Ecuador, joining her parents who had arrived first in search of a better life. She had learned English, gone to community college, and transferred to a four-year university when her immigration status suddenly became uncertain. She is a Dreamer, a recipient of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

But in 2017, she couldn't renew her status under the Trump administration's efforts to halt the program. She left school, took a job, and waited for the law to change, as her mother worried that her chance for a college education had evaporated.

But her mother had friends who had gone to Rutgers who suggested that the university would welcome her and that she might be eligible for financial assistance even as an undocumented immigrant. She transferred to Rutgers School of Health Professions in 2018, saying she felt accepted and supported as she waited to see if she could renew her DACA status.

"I knew I wasn't alone, and the fight wasn't over, so I kept pushing forward and being optimistic," she said. "I made great friendships at Rutgers and was not judged for my immigration status. When the Supreme Court couldn't remove DACA it was a big win for all the recipients like myself, and I felt very appreciative."

Rutgers awards financial aid to Dreamers who meet qualifications.

Morquecho, a first-generation college graduate, aspires to be a manager or a director in a hospital or acute care center, helping patients in release of information, management, and billing. Speaking English and Spanish, she also wants to work with Latinx patients.

"Being bilingual, I know I can help the Spanish community understand what health care is and the options available to them," she said.



"I knew I wasn't alone, and the fight wasn't over, so I kept pushing forward and being optimistic," she said. "I made great friendships at Rutgers and was not judged for my immigration status."



JASMINE FLOWERS, PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAM

Student finds school a safe place to reflect on race



In an essay, Jasmine Flowers, a student in the Physician Assistant program, wrote what it meant to her when faculty and students provided a forum for discussion during a time of racial unrest in the summer of 2020:

As a Black student in America, it never feels comfortable to discuss my experience in a room full of non-Black colleagues.

An open forum filled with future physician assistants, faculty, and staff presented the first opportunity for me to be genuine about my race and the impact this country has had on people who look like me.

The Physician Assistant Department's Committee on Inclusion and Diversity organized the virtual forum after a member of our committee posed these questions: How can we respond to current events? And how can we address our student body? I was in tears as I spoke about how George Floyd's murder has affected me.

I was proud of myself for being vulnerable and honest without sugarcoating how I felt in order to not offend anyone else. In response, I was met with sweet messages of support from my classmates and faculty.

After speaking, I was proud of myself for being vulnerable and honest without sugarcoating how I felt in order to not offend anyone else. In response, I was met with sweet messages of support from my classmates and faculty.

As we concluded, the question was posed—What can we do to change things moving forward?

To those who say they want to be allies, be sincere in your actions. Don't post the occasional #istandwithyou or #blm, without following it up with genuine discussions with your Black colleagues about the impact it has had on them and researching the history of Black injustices in this country. We all have a role to play, and it is time for all of us to make an impact so that future generations of Black Americans hear a different message than the one I heard while growing up.

RUTGERS GLOBAL HEALTH CASE COMPETITION

Interdisciplinary teamwork serves vulnerable populations

Impressive. Inspiring. Creative. Collaborative.

These were just some of the words judges used to describe the interdisciplinary student teams and the proposals they presented during the first Global Health Case Competition, which Rutgers Global Health Institute hosted virtually in April.

Two Rutgers School of Health Professions students were members of the winning team, which proposed the “ZipPea Pantry” to support New Brunswick’s food insecurity network. The pantry would deliver food sourced from the city’s food banks and community kitchens to residents unable to access these services for reasons that include transportation, work schedules, domestic responsibilities, and physical abilities.

The SHP students were **David Chapinski**, Health Informatics, and **Jessie Sullivan**, student and graduate assistant, Clinical and Preventive Nutrition Science. The team won cash prizes and support from the Global Health Institute to explore whether their solution can be implemented.

The 10-week competition involved 48 Rutgers students from more than 30 undergraduate and graduate programs. In January, they formed eight interdisciplinary teams that worked throughout the semester with a faculty mentor to devise solutions to the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities in New Jersey. Their task was to propose a commu-

nity-based initiative that would address health care access and delivery, housing and food insecurity, COVID-19 health communication, or pediatric mental health.

Another team with a SHP student didn’t place in the contest—but was contacted by a local agency that wants to help implement its plan.

Hannah Baker, a student in the Doctor of Clinical Laboratory Science program, and her fellow teammates in the nursing, pharmacy, city planning, and public health fields proposed a resource team to address housing concerns for families with low incomes in New Brunswick. “If it helps only one family, we’ve made a difference,” she said.

It was the culmination of a 10-week experience that involved 48 Rutgers students from more than 30 undergraduate and graduate programs university-wide.



ADAPTING TO THE PANDEMIC

Physician Assistant program found new ways to learn

With the camera rolling, physician assistant student Hiral Jani was in her house practicing a shoulder exam on a “patient”—actually, her father. She palpated his shoulder, checked for range of motion, and looked for evidence of atrophy, swelling or tenderness.

Her peers watched the videotape and offered feedback. “You were very calm, confident and in control,” said one student, who also noted that Jani could improve by listing the types of injuries for which she was testing.

Before the pandemic, patient assessments were taught in small groups on fellow classmates, with instructors providing feedback in real time. But when COVID-19 upended class routines, faculty adapted—and discovered that virtual peer reviews by other students and faculty were an effective way for students to learn, sharpening their skills to assess not only others but themselves and improving their work.

The peer review component is becoming a permanent part of the physical assessment curriculum. “The benefit of a virtual setting is that by watching a recording of a classmate, you have the time to slow down to analyze everything they are doing,” said student Ryan Elie.



**STEPHANIE COCHRANE, M.S., LECTURER,
CLINICAL LABORATORY SCIENCE**

Excellence in Teaching awardee

Stephanie Cochran has outstanding teaching skills and has been recognized as a leader in her field since joining the SHP faculty in 2019, according to her nomination for the 2021 Excellence in Teaching Award.

She incorporated simulation and numerous interactive learning strategies into her Hematology I and II courses, reinforcing subject matter through hands-on activities, which her students say helps them better understand their course material.

Her teaching methods and ideas have been recognized on a national level, as she was invited to give two presentations at the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science Clinical Laboratory Educators Conference. It is quite impressive for a new faculty member to be presenting at a national level two years in a row.

“I never had a professor care so much for the success of her students,” said a student on Cochran’s nominating form.



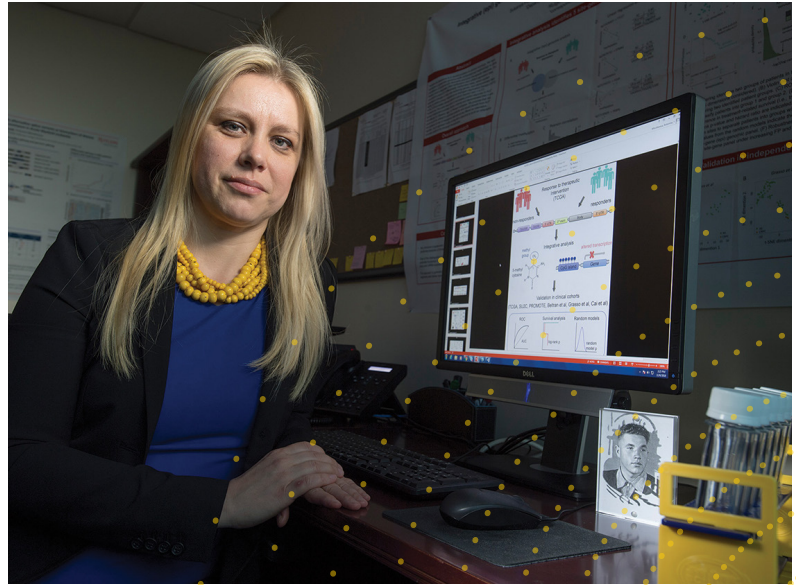
RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY: A RECORD YEAR

2020–21 was a stellar year for research and scholarship at Rutgers School of Health Professions.

Despite the difficulties of operating in a pandemic year, our faculty’s commitment to research and discovery never wavered. They applied for and received a record amount in grant funding—\$10.5 million.

Among the grants were two highly competitive, multi-year RO1 awards from the National Institutes of Health, and a prestigious NIH fellowship awarded to a student researcher conducting a study in one of our rehabilitation and movement research labs.

Five years ago, our school focused on growing our research capabilities, and we are seeing tremendous rewards.



In 2016, the seeds were sown to expand our research mission with the recruitment of 10 research faculty members, providing them with support to build extramurally funded research programs. A highly experienced director was recruited to support grant submissions, while the creation of a dean's grants program provided start-up funding to develop research projects.

To support scholarly pursuits, our school established the Methodology and Statistics Support Team (MSST) to provide statistical and study design assistance, led by a statistician and scholar with two experts in educational outcomes, qualitative and mixed methods research.

As faculty members gained recognition for innovative research, their success fueled increases in grant funding. Since 2017, our school has received more than \$31 million in grants, with this year's awards more than double the amount of the previous year.

Carrie Esopenko, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Rehabilitation and Movement Science and a noted researcher in the area of traumatic brain injury, received a \$3 million RO1 grant for a long-term, multi-year study on the impact of intimate partner violence on women.

With help from an RO1 \$1.3 million grant, **Antonina Mitrofanova, Ph.D.**, associate professor in the Department of Health Informatics, is continuing major research into prostate cancer treatment. Her breakthrough work on new ways to personalize prostate cancer treatment was published in *Nature Cancer* and news of the study appeared in more than 20 science journals worldwide. This year, she also received an \$800,000 award from the American Cancer Society and recognition that she is one of an elite group of scientists on track to make key contributions in cancer research.

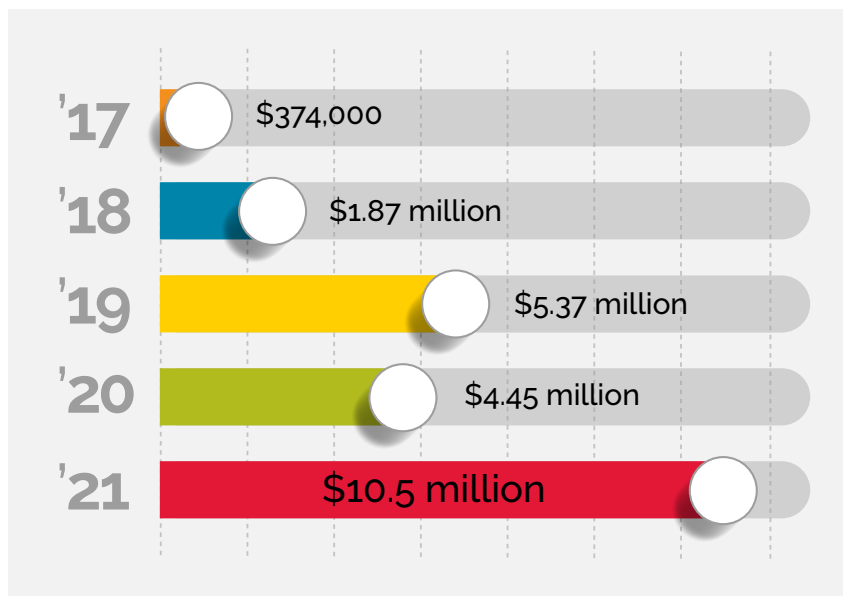


Faculty Publications

244

The research interests of our faculty offer exciting discovery opportunities to students.

John Palmieri, a Rutgers medical student and Ph.D. candidate who is working with physical therapy professor **Judith Deutsch, Ph.D.**, director of the Rivers Lab in Newark, won an NIH fellowship to support his work exploring using virtual reality to make intense exercise more enjoyable and motivating for persons with Parkinson's disease, with the potential to enhance their motor function.



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Meanwhile, students in our M.S. in Clinical Research Management program had opportunities to aid in one of the world's largest clinical trials for a COVID-19 vaccine.

During a difficult year in which health care took center stage, our faculty's work made an impact in a world struggling to cope with a global pandemic.

Paul Chiou, M.P.H., lecturer in M.S. in Diagnostic Cytology, published his work on how personality traits can be used to better recruit and retain laboratory personnel in a field with a severe shortage of workers.

Ann Murphy, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions and director of the Northeast and Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center, and her team provided trainings and consultation services for school personnel across New Jersey. Her team also provided guidance on how teachers can manage burnout and adolescent mental health issues, fielding dozens of media requests from across the nation.

In the areas of rehabilitation, nutrition, health informatics, community outreach, health disparities and psychiatric rehabilitation, our researchers and scholars are making invaluable contributions that are changing lives.



SUCHISMITA RAY, PH.D.



New diagnostic method may predict relapse risk in RX opioid addiction

Rutgers SHP scientist Suchismita Ray, Ph.D., used a diagnostic technique for the first time in the opioid addiction field that has the potential to determine which opioid-addicted patients are more likely to relapse.

Using an algorithm that looks for patterns in brain structure and functional connectivity, researchers were able to distinguish prescription opioid users from healthy participants. If treatment is successful, their brains will resemble the brain of someone not addicted to opioids.

“People can say one thing, but brain patterns do not lie,” said Ray, lead researcher and associate professor in the Department of Health Informatics. “The brain patterns that the algorithm identified from brain volume and functional connectivity biomarkers from prescription opioid users hold great promise to improve over current diagnosis.”

In the study, published in *NeuroImage: Clinical*, Ray and her research colleagues used MRIs to look at the brain structure and function in people diagnosed with prescription opioid use disorder who were seeking treatment, compared to individuals with no history of using opioids.

“Opioid use disorder has reached epidemic proportions in the United States, raising an urgent need for diagnostic biological tools that can improve predictions of disease characteristics,” Ray said.

CARRIE ESOPENKO, PH.D.

Neck strength may protect against repetitive head damage in athletes

Strong muscles in an athlete's neck can reduce brain damage from repetitive head impacts, a Rutgers SHP study has found.

The study, published in the journal *Neurotrauma Reports*, is the first to investigate the link between neck strength and damage to the brain's white matter—the tissue that processes and conveys information—in athletes who experience repetitive head impacts.



“Neck strength is thought to limit the transfer of force to the brain and decrease the effect of repetitive head impacts on brain structure,” said author Carrie Esopenko, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Rehabilitation and Movement. “The findings are a first step in learning how to reduce the risk of brain trauma, neural damage and associated cognitive effects in these athletes.”

In the study, physical therapists assessed the neck strength of 56 collegiate athletes who are at high risk for repetitive head impacts, such as soccer players who use their head to direct the ball, and other athletes in non-contact sports such as tennis and basketball.

The researchers found that athletes with greater neck strength who experienced high exposure to repetitive head impacts had more intact white matter, particularly in regions prone to damage from brain trauma. The association between neck strength and white matter integrity was especially true in female soccer players.

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COVID-19 IMPACT

Workforce development team aids in COVID-19 vaccine trials

Rutgers was instrumental in getting the coronavirus vaccines to the public—leading one of the largest phase 3 clinical trials sites in the world for the FDA emergency-use authorized Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Behind the university's efforts was a Rutgers-led collaborative—the N.J. Alliance for Clinical and Translational Science (NJACTS), established two years ago to create clinical trial innovations that can speed the translation of research discoveries into improved patient care.

Barbara Gladson, Ph.D., associate dean for academic affairs, and **Doreen Lechner, Ph.D.**, program director of the M.S. in Clinical Trial Management degree program, are co-leaders of workforce development for NJACTS.

When Johnson & Johnson and Moderna reached out to Rutgers' clinical trial unit, the workforce development group was uniquely positioned to help. "They needed to scale up quickly and didn't have the workforce," said Gladson.

While their work was put to the test sooner than they ever anticipated in the race to develop a coronavirus vaccine, the workforce development team was ready.

With infrastructure already in place, the team was poised to provide time-sensitive training to existing and newly hired clinical staff, including students in our M.S. in Clinical Research Management degree program, so they could begin recruiting the thousands of people needed for the clinical trial.

One of those students, Lauren Castelli, immersed herself in the training modules provided by the Association of Clinical Research Professionals, and immediately went to work as a clinical trial coordinator obtaining informed consent for trials being conducted by Johnson & Johnson.



When Johnson & Johnson and Moderna reached out to Rutgers' clinical trial unit, the workforce development group was uniquely positioned to help.



BUILDING A SERVICE NETWORK FOR UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

As a school that trains health professionals, we are committed to helping communities stay healthy.

Our Doctor of Physical Therapy program has long operated a pro bono physical therapy clinic in our Bergen Building, providing the greater Newark community with physical therapy services and education on wellness and health. During the pandemic, our faculty and students worked hard to transition into telehealth, which kept continuity of care for patients.

With the addition of a new M.S. in Speech-Language Pathology program, we're opening a second clinic in Newark, bringing us closer to our goal of creating a network of interdisciplinary care in underserved communities—which we expect will expand to include nutrition and psychiatric rehabilitation services.

Having our own space will also mean an opportunity to integrate other health care services in an interdisciplinary setting, which is the health care environment of the future.



Our Physician Assistant faculty and students have been working in Plainfield for more than a decade, partnering in the operation of a free clinic that provides primary care to those with limited access to health care services. The program is assuming full operation of the clinic, which allows for more hours and services.

Having our own space will also mean an opportunity to integrate other health care services in an interdisciplinary setting, which is the health care environment of the future.

Our free clinics offer care that is often unaffordable or inaccessible to people who might otherwise go without health care. For our future practitioners, these sites are training grounds that provide opportunities to serve and learn.

SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY

Students learn to serve all populations in new clinic

The clients may have communication difficulties that are misinterpreted or misdiagnosed because of their cultural background. They could be children with autism. They might be transgender and need to align their voice with their gender identity.

As part of their clinical experience, students in our new M.S. in Speech-Language Pathology program will train at a newly established on-site pro bono speech pathology clinic in Newark, assessing, diagnosing and treating a wide range of patients, including many who are underserved.

“Newark ranks as one of the most diverse cities in the U.S. in terms of ethnoracial, linguistic, and economic background, and our goal is to meet the needs of any and every client who comes through our door,” said Stephanie Hubbell, M.S., CCC-SLP, the program’s director for clinical education.

In Newark, where many lack access to speech-language services, the program fills a gap.

“Communication is a human right and should be accessible to everyone,” said Hubbell, a speech-language pathologist and former special education administrator and Peace Corps volunteer. “As the state university of

New Jersey, we have an obligation to ensure the community’s access to speech-language services that maximize communicative effectiveness and improve quality of life.”

The SLP master’s program focuses on treating multiethnic populations—including dialectal speakers of English and bilingual/multilingual individuals—with speech, language, communication, and swallowing disorders.

The curriculum and clinical experiences are designed to teach students to be mindful of different cultural norms and how they might affect patient behavior and treatment.

“Our program is unique and forward looking,” said Hubbell. “We don’t want our students to view the world through a singular lens.”

The clinic, located in the Bergen Building in Newark, will serve as a training hub for students who will work under faculty supervision. It is planning to offer free services in English, Spanish and other languages.





RAQUEL PEREZ, M.S., R.R.A., R.T.
CLINICAL COORDINATOR AND LECTURER
DEPARTMENT OF CLINICAL LABORATORY AND
MEDICAL IMAGING SCIENCES

Driven to Keep Women Healthy

In a quest to improve access to health care for women, Raquel Perez volunteers twice a month to drive into New York

City's five boroughs in a mobile mammography van, stopping at churches and community centers to screen women for breast cancer at no cost.

"It is difficult for the communities that face many disparities to get yearly screenings," said Perez, faculty in our Medical Imaging Sciences program.

She performs mammographies in areas where there is limited access to screening and treatment due to socioeconomic factors and lack of education.

The Mount Sinai Mobile Mammography van is equipped with state-of-the-art digital 3D mammography technology that produces images of breast tissue in 1-millimeter thin layers, allowing for better detection of cancer.

Perez performs mammographies on 15 to 25 women during her 12-hour days. Many of her patients are African-American and Latinx, ethnic groups statistically shown to have higher rates of cancer due to limited access to health care.

She also provides education to her patients on the importance of yearly screenings, as women sometimes avoid them fearing screenings are painful or may cause cancer.

"Every woman should have access to this service because you need to catch cancer as early as possible to improve chances of survival," said Perez. "It's a great service to the community and women. I feel honored to be a part of this."



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PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAM

After COVID-19 closure, PA finds free clinic a permanent home

When COVID forced the closing of the Plainfield location where Physician Assistant faculty and students had been operating a medical clinic, the PA program sprang into action to find it a new home—renewing a commitment to providing the underserved community with health care.

For more than a decade, PA faculty and students had partnered with community organizations to operate a free clinic to increase access to primary care for the state’s most vulnerable populations. For various reasons, these free clinics closed, each time leaving the PA program to find new partners.

This time, the PA program decided to take on sole responsibility for the clinic and find it a permanent location. A nonprofit organization headed by Nan Daly, a nurse from the former clinic, and her husband Dave, a Rutgers alumnus, has donated medical office space in Plainfield. Faculty will oversee and manage the primary care practice—at no cost to patients.

“Instead of being a guest at another’s clinic, we are establishing our own practice at this site,” said medical director Elizabeth Di Prospero, M.D. “To raise a clinic from ground up takes a village. We are grateful to the donors who are making this possible, and to the legal, financial, and administrative staff at Rutgers who have guided us along the way.”

The Health Outreach Practice Experience (HOPE) clinic moves from being housed in a church to a medical suite, with a reception area and two private patient rooms. It opened in July 2021, providing services each Wednesday at its new Park Avenue, Plainfield location.

“This is a reimagined HOPE clinic that expands access to services for this community as well as integrating additional health services into the primary care setting,” said Karen Shapiro, M.B.A., M.P.H., chief administrative officer for SHP.

More than 500 patients annually have relied on the HOPE clinic for primary care services.

Beyond ensuring access to health care for those who need it, the practice provides valuable clinical experience for PA students, who volunteer alongside faculty to provide health care services to those without insurance.

“We are developing a program that aligns with the school’s message of service, education, and scholarship,” states PA faculty clinician and clinic co-director Frank Giannelli, PA-C, Ph.D.



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OUR ALUMNI: VITAL TO OUR SUCCESS

Support from our alumni can shape the student experience in so many ways.

Returning as adjunct faculty, academic committee members, and student mentors, our alumni help to give our students and future health practitioners the best education, clinical, and research experiences possible.

They not only give of their time, but they are also donors whose generosity allows others to achieve their dream of becoming health professionals. And, in the tumultuous 2020–21 academic year, it was more important than ever that we have the means to support our students.

Among our alumni who gave this year, two made historic gifts, with one pledging the largest gift in SHP’s history in recognition of the impact our school made on his success.

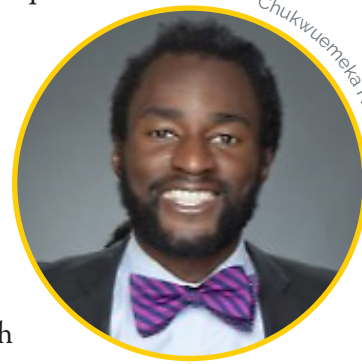


Alumna **Laura Matarese, Ph.D. Nutrition '07**, established a new scholarship for doctoral students in the Department of Clinical and Preventive Nutrition Sciences.

Dennis Concannon, P.A. '77, who graduated in the first class of the Physician Assistant program, gifted SHP with a portion of his estate. It is the first estate gift that has been made to SHP and will widen opportunities for learning.

Recognized as leaders and role models, our alumni are accomplished health professionals. This year, two Doctor of Physical Therapy alumni were among 33 practitioners nationwide named as 2020 Emerging Leaders by the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). They are **Chukwuemeka Nwigwe**, of Los Angeles, and **Leiselle Pilgrim**, of Miami, who was quoted in APTA Magazine on the need to diversify the profession to mirror the population being served.

Other alumni recognized include **Mona Therrien, D.C.N., R.D.N., L.D.**, named Outstanding Dietitian of the Year for the state of Maine, and **Daniel Greenwood, MS, R.D.N., L.D.**, chosen as Outstanding Dietitian of the Year for the state of Minnesota by their state affiliates of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.



Chukwuemeka Nwigwe



Leiselle Pilgrim

R



SHAILJA DIXIT, M.D., M.S., M.P.H.
BIOMEDICAL INFORMATICS, CLASS OF 2005

“Never say no to an opportunity.”

As co-founder of the biotechnology research and development company ApexBio, Shailja Dixit has already experienced success as an entrepreneur, working with multiple pharmaceutical clients, growing revenues, and building teams globally.

ApexBio also incubated a new concept focusing on women’s mental health, an area that Dixit is passionate about, and she is now CEO of a spinoff company called Curio, a digital therapeutics company pioneering solutions and interventions across the behavioral health continuum for women throughout the cycle of life. More than 60 million American women suffer from mental illness, spread across all ethnic, socioeconomic and age ranges.

An immigrant, Dixit said her time at Rutgers was her first exposure to the American education system. She credited mentorship and encouragement from faculty members as important to her success. “You need people who will be supportive but also give you very honest feedback and criticism. You don’t want to be surrounded by those who only tell you the things you want to hear.”

Despite Dixit’s plate being full as an entrepreneur, she finds time to support Rutgers students in a meaningful way.

In March 2021, she was a panelist at a RUAA/Rutgers Business School webinar celebrating successful alum, providing insights on entrepreneurialism and business in health care tech. When asked if she had any advice for entrepreneurs, she says, “Never say no to an opportunity. Ask yourself, what’s the worst that can happen? Once you answer that question, you lose some of that fear.”

Dixit’s time at Rutgers was her first exposure to the American education system. She credited mentorship and encouragement from faculty members as important to her success.





CHRISTINE HAN, B.S. CLINICAL LAB SCIENCE, CLASS OF 2011



“We take pride in helping patients.”

For clinical lab scientist and laboratory manager Christine Han, the past year was filled with unimaginable challenges. Working in a Southern California hospital in a pandemic epicenter, her lab raced to validate the COVID-19 diagnostic test to make sure it worked—a month-long process condensed by necessity to a week.

“It was very intense. We had so many patients coming through the emergency department not knowing if they had COVID or not. It was a relief that we had something to diagnose the patient with,” said Han. “It was one of the greatest experiences I’ve had as a clinical lab scientist.”

Her work as lead clinical lab scientist managing one of six laboratories at Scripps Mercy Hospital in Chula Vista earned her the hospital’s Technical Employee of the Year.

“It was something I didn’t expect because I was just doing my job,” said Han.

After getting her bachelor’s degree at Rutgers, she earned her M.S. in biotechnology at Columbia University and is working on a second master’s degree in leadership of health care organizations.

She said she graduated from her bachelor’s program well prepared to succeed. She keeps in touch with former associate professor Deborah Josko, Ph.D., whom she reached out to when she won her award, saying that she was proud to be a Rutgers alumna.

She’s also proud to be a laboratory scientist, playing a key role in fighting the pandemic.

“We’re always in the background, behind the scenes. People might not know us, but we take great pride in helping patients,” she said.



DENNIS B. CONCANNON
PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT, CLASS OF 1977

Alumnus Gives Back

His mother was a pioneer for her time—a captain in the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps during World War II who learned to fly her own plane, and later, earned a master’s degree in social work. His father, a corporal in World War II, became a postal clerk, putting aside a desire to become a dentist to raise a family.

His salary paid the mortgage, while hers was invested in college for their children—because nothing was more important to John and Mildred Concannon than a good education.

Their son, Dennis B. Concannon, is now making his own investment in education by gifting a portion of his estate to our Physician Assistant program. In 1977, he one was of the program’s first graduates.

“I’ve heard a bit about paying it forward,” said Concannon, now a Montana retiree. “And I wanted to recognize some of the organizations that were important in my life, that helped to guide me.”

Concannon had long thought about a career in medicine, influenced by his uncle, Dr. William A. Barrett, a prominent urologist, who showed up in the emergency room when, as a child, Concannon had sliced open his hand on a broken bottle. His uncle brought in a renowned hand surgeon who spent hours repairing the damage. “I enjoyed the best medical care, and I wanted to do the same for anyone I treated,” he said.

But when Concannon graduated from the program, many states—including New Jersey—did not allow PAs to practice. Instead, became a clinical trial researcher at Johnson & Johnson. He also taught in the PA program as an adjunct professor.

He later established Concannon Enterprises and worked as a research management consultant until retiring in 2015.

While donors can specify areas where their gifts should be used, Concannon made his gift, currently estimated at \$250,000, open to the greatest needs of the department.

Unrestricted gifts are especially impactful as they can be used to support many areas of need, including student scholarships, research, talent recruitment, and more.

Concannon said he hopes to create opportunity “both for the people who want to go to the school and for the program to be able to offer the best possible education.”

You can
make an impact
with a gift to SHP.
Visit
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MATTHEW PUTTS, M.S., PH.D.
M.S. IN REHABILITATION COUNSELING,
CLASS OF 2011

Distinguished Alumnus

Ten years ago, as a student in our M.S. in Rehabilitation Counseling program, Matthew Putts, Ph.D., worked at Employment Horizons, a nonprofit agency, managing hiring contracts for people with disabilities to perform janitorial and groundskeeping work.

After completing his Ph.D., he went on to become CEO of the agency, which assists people in overcoming barriers to employment. With him at the helm, the agency has steadily grown both in the number of individuals receiving services and the number of employers working to hire those with disabilities.

Under his guidance, Employment Horizons weathered the COVID storm. Putts served on a statewide post-COVID-19 task force, developing guidelines for reopening member programs. As a result of his work, Employment Horizons was one of the first agencies the state Department of Labor allowed to reopen.

An advocate in his field, he has produced several publications on post-traumatic stress disorder, motivational interviewing, and the use of technology in counseling. He is chair of the executive committee for ACCSES New Jersey and serves as a member of the Morris/Sussex/Warren Workforce Development Board.

With all of his accomplishments, Putts has made time to support his alma mater. He serves on the department's Rehabilitation Counseling Advisory Committee and writes letters of support for grants which helped the program successfully obtain two \$1 million RSA Long Term Training grants which provide scholarships for our master's degree students.

He supports practicum and internship placements for students and hires program graduates. He speaks to students regularly about careers in rehabilitation counseling, including conducting a Zoom presentation for one of our courses in spring of 2021.

**With all of his
accomplishments,
Putts has made time
to support his
alma mater.**



LAURA MATARESE, PH.D.
NUTRITION, CLASS OF 2007

Nutrition Alumna Establishes Scholarship

Rutgers School of Health Professions alumna Laura Matarese, Ph.D., has created a scholarship for doctoral students in the Department of Clinical and Preventive Nutrition Sciences.

Matarese said she didn't realize how simple it was to make a difference for students through the establishment of a scholarship.

"It is a way of giving back that I never knew was within my reach. I really thought you had to be a billionaire to make an impact through philanthropy. I sincerely hope this first step on my part will result in others coming forward to donate," she said.

"A scholarship, even a small one, could be one of many reasons why someone finishes a degree or not. Then when you consider the implications of that degree on society, the gift is even more important. For example, the person with that degree will likely go on to help others—maybe even cure cancer."

The award will be called the Dr. Laura Matarese Doctoral Scholarship in Nutrition.

An accomplished clinician, educator, mentor, role model and recipient of the 2020 Distinguished Alumni Award, Matarese is a tenured professor at East Carolina University Brody School of Medicine. She has been an adjunct professor in the SHP Department of Clinical and Preventive Nutrition Sciences since 2008.

She is internationally recognized for her contributions to clinical nutrition, having introduced new policies and procedures for nutrition interventions to optimize patient care for individuals with intestinal failure, HIV, and those on parenteral and enteral nutrition.

She was tapped to work in COVID-19 research and presented a lecture on the topic at a continuing education workshop hosted by SHP.

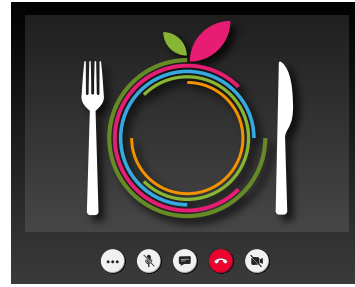
"It was a way of giving back that I never knew was within my reach."



JULY 2020 ... JUNE 2021

July

Clinical and Preventive Nutrition Sciences faculty and the **Student Dietetic Association** host a free Zoom CPE course viewed globally on managing nutrition for patients with COVID-19.



August

More than 500 educators attend a virtual conference on returning to school amid a pandemic, led by **Ann Murphy, Ph.D.**, associate professor in Psychiatric Rehabilitation and director of the Northeast and Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center.



September

Ni Gao, Ph.D., and **Weili Lu, Ph.D.**, associate professors in the Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions, both receive three-year, \$600,000 research grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



October

Bianca Thompson-Owen, M.S., assistant dean for Enrollment Management and Student Success and director of the Educational Opportunity Fund program, is named an Emerging Leader in the inaugural Chancellor Staff Awards.



November

Dean Gwendolyn Mahon, M.Sc., Ph.D., faculty, alumni, and a student are honored with awards from New Jersey Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association for their work in the field.



December

Our first **Celebration of Impact** reception recognizes scholarship donors and their family members, while scholarship recipients describe how financial support helps them thrive at SHP.



January

A paper co-authored by **Sandra Kaplan, P.T., D.P.T., Ph.D.**, DPT professor, on guidelines for physical therapy for children with developmental coordination disorder wins the 2020 Toby Long Award for best paper published in Pediatric Physical Therapy Journal.



February

Our **Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions** has been awarded \$2.5 million for peer specialist training and certification in the state of New York.



March

The **B.S. in Medical Laboratory Science** receives the maximum accreditation award of 10 years from the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences.



April

M.S. in Diagnostic Cytology student **Eun-Suk Park, B.S.**, won a funding award from the American Society of Cytotechnology Foundation's Pandemic Relief Fund based on a video testimonial on how the award will allow her to complete her degree.



May

Rutgers SHP joins **International Academic Partnerships Program-Greece**, an international effort to advance health communication research, education, and practice across health professions in Greece and the U.S.



June

Deborah McKernan-Ace, M.O.T./O.T.R., C.O.T., Tiffany Benaroya, O.T.D., and Jennifer George, O.T.D., from the Occupational Therapy Assistant program publish in the Journal of Occupational Therapy on effective teaching strategies learned during the pandemic.





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Office of Admissions

65 Bergen Street, Suite 149

Newark, New Jersey 07107-1709

shp.rutgers.edu