

## Strong Student Test Scores Place Skaggs School of Pharmacy at UC San Diego in Top 10

*Pharmacy school is one of 10 in U.S. to achieve 100 percent pass rate on first-time attempts at 2014 licensing exam*

September 22, 2015 | Heather Buschman, PhD

In 2014, only 10 of the nation's 132 pharmacy schools achieved a 100 percent pass rate on first-time attempts at the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination (NAPLEX). The University of California, San Diego Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences was one of them, passing all 54 students who took the exam for the first time.



Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at UC San Diego  
Class of 2014.

This isn't a first for the Skaggs School of Pharmacy. Now eight of the school's nine graduating classes — from the school's first graduating class in 2006 to the class of 2014, the most recent year for which test scores are available — achieved a 100 percent first-time attempt pass rate.

"You don't consistently achieve 100 percent first-time pass rates on this exam without outstanding teaching faculty who

are also leaders in the field," said James McKerrow, MD, PhD, dean of the Skaggs School of Pharmacy. "What attracted me to this school two years ago was the quality of the teaching. I sat in on a few classes and was blown away by what the students are learning — the depth of knowledge they have on drug metabolism and interactions is something I never had the opportunity to gain in medical school."

According to McKerrow, pharmacy students receive a unique educational experience at UC San Diego, where he and the rest of the faculty are training pharmacists for success in the next decade, not just today. Recent California legislation changed the pharmacist's role from one of a pill dispenser to a new type of primary health care provider. Pharmacists are now able to initiate, monitor and change prescriptions, without a doctor's intervention. Pharmacists are increasingly called upon to work with other health care professionals in managing chronic illnesses, adjusting drug doses, counseling patients, identifying drug interactions, and monitoring and managing therapeutic outcomes.

As some of the future pharmacists who will help shape and define this new role, Skaggs School of Pharmacy students are trained to work closely with doctors and to discuss medical issues directly with patients. The pharmacy students take classes and work side-by-side with UC San Diego medical students. Together, they see patients in UC San Diego Health hospitals and at the Student-Run Free Clinic. The pharmacy students learn the right kinds of questions to ask and how to work together as a team, McKerrow says.

Team work is a theme at the Skaggs School of Pharmacy. "I think our students are well prepared for the NAPLEX at least in part because we use a pass-fail grading system, which is unusual for a pharmacy school, but means our students work together to master the material rather than compete against one another to get the highest grade," said Brookie Best, PharmD, professor of clinical pharmacy and pediatrics and associate dean for admissions and outreach. "Instead of focusing on getting one more point or memorizing facts just long enough to pass an exam, our students take the time to truly understand and apply the concepts we discuss in class."

In addition to its educational achievements, the Skaggs School of Pharmacy also consistently ranks in the top 10 pharmacy schools in amount of research grant funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The grants help support clinical studies, as well as the approximately 30 drug discovery and development labs in the school. UC San Diego pharmacy students are required to complete independent research projects at some point during their four years at the school. The research isn't just for the sake of learning — the students advance science and medicine by joining faculty in their leading-edge research, presenting their findings at conferences and publishing peer-reviewed papers in scientific journals.

"Our pharmacy program is one of the most rigorous in the country," Best said. "Our students say they love the school because classes are small, they have many opportunities to connect with faculty and they are encouraged to work together to solve problems and make a positive impact on patient lives."

The Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at UC San Diego matriculated the first class of 25 Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) students in the fall of 2002. The first class took —

and all passed — the NAPLEX in 2006. The school's steady-state enrollment is 240 PharmD students, 60 PhD students and 30 pharmacy residents.

All 10 schools with a 100 percent pass rate on first-time attempts on the [2014 NAPLEX can be viewed here](#) [↗](#).

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