FIRST LOOK FORUM
APRIL 17, 2025

Featuring cutting-edge technologies from Marquette University, Medical College of Wisconsin, UW-Milwaukee, and Versiti.

- ✔ Learn about emerging technologies.
- ✔ Connect with business leaders, investors, & entrepreneurs.
- ✔ Help bring these innovations to market.
- ✔ Engage with visionary researchers.

3:30-4:15 pm – Arrival & Registration Check-in

4:15-4:30 pm - Welcome & Opening Remarks

4:30-5:00 pm - Presentations, Part I

5:00-5:15 pm - Remarks from Institution Leaders

- **Kimo Ah Yun**, PhD, President, Marquette University
- **Mark Mone**, PhD, Chancellor, UW-Milwaukee
- **John R. Raymond**, Sr., MD, President and CEO, MCW
- **Michael W. Deininger**, MD, PhD, Executive Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer, Versiti

5:15-5:45 pm – Presentations, Part II

5:45-7:00 pm – Table Discussions & Networking

Lemonis Center for Student Success, Marquette University
1415 W Wisconsin Ave. Milwaukee, WI 53233

2025 FIRST LOOK FORUM SPEAKERS

Jonathan Marchant, PhD, MA, Marcus Professor & Chair, Cell Biology, Neurobiology & Anatomy, MCW

1. Novel Drugs for Treating Parasitic Flatworm Infections

Scientists in Dr. Marchant's lab have discovered two new compounds that could help fight schistosomiasis, a serious parasitic disease affecting millions of people and animals. These compounds work in a similar way to praziquantel, the current treatment, by targeting a key protein in the parasite. If successful, they could provide a new way to eliminate the disease, especially if praziquantel becomes less effective. Researchers are now studying these compounds further to see how well they work and if they could lead to better treatments for parasitic infections.

Habib Rahman, PhD, Professor and Chair, Mechanical Engineering, UW-Milwaukee, Founder & CEO RoboHeal, UWM

2. Swift Robotic Manipulator Mount

Roboheal's quick-change system enables easy attachment and removal of robotic arms, saving time and improving efficiency. Originally developed for a wheelchair-mounted assistive robot, it is also compatible with similar robotic arms. This system enhances flexibility and ease of use in real-world applications. Designed, tested, and built through extensive research, it ensures reliable performance and improves the adaptability of robotic arms for various tasks.

2025 FIRST LOOK FORUM SPEAKERS

Walter Bialkowski, PhD Associate Professor of Practice, Computer Science, Marquette University

3. Data Science to Optimize Hunger Relief

Despite decades of increasingly complex efforts to end food insecurity, 1 in 5 households with children in the United States still face this challenge. This initiative brings together food insecurity experts and data scientists to develop scalable, data-driven solutions. Focused on applied learning, the research leverages student-driven innovation and community partnerships, including Feeding America. This presentation will showcase two transformative technologies, MilkBuddy and Palette, which are optimizing regional food distribution and have the potential to significantly scale hunger relief efforts nationwide.

Christian Kastrup, PhD, Senior Investigator & Program Leader, Versiti Blood Research Institute & Professor of Surgery

4. Long-Acting RNA Therapies for Blood Disorders

RNA therapy, a type of gene therapy, holds the potential to cure nearly all diseases. Breakthroughs in RNA therapy led to the development of the COVID-19 vaccines and form the basis of most gene editing therapies. The future of this technology hinges on advances in delivering RNA to specific diseased tissues and extending the duration of its action. The Kastrup Lab at the Versiti Blood Research Institute, along with its spin-out companies, is at the forefront of developing current and next-generation RNA therapies.

2025 FIRST LOOK FORUM SPEAKERS

Xiaohua Peng, PhD, Associate Professor of Chemistry & Biochemistry, UWM

Taufeeque Ali, PhD Postdoctoral Scholar, Northwestern University (UWM) & Founders of SynXT Therapeutics

Tavinder Ark, PhD, Associate Professor, Data Science Institute, MCW

5. Precision Oncology Therapy Specifically Targets Tumors

A new cancer treatment pairs special tumor-targeting drugs with vitamin C to destroy cancer cells while leaving healthy cells unharmed. Vitamin C increases stress inside tumors, helping activate the drugs and trigger cancer cell death. Unlike traditional treatments that use multiple drugs and can harm healthy tissue, this approach relies on vitamin C, which is safe and well-tolerated, to improve precision and reduce side effects. In studies with mice, the therapy significantly reduced tumors without causing harm and showed promise against aggressive cancers like triple-negative breast cancer and glioblastoma.

6. Simulating a "Night on Call" for Graduating Medical Students

Night-on-Call (NOC) is a medical student training platform that evaluates near-graduates' readiness to interact with healthcare teams and perform essential patient care activities. Currently used in 7+ U.S. medical schools, NOC provides a 360° evaluation through feedback from trained actors portraying nurses, doctors, and patients. Integrated within NOC is an AI-powered tool, FeedbackAssist, that grades clinical notes, analyzes performance, and provides structured, timely feedback. Together, NOC and FeedbackAssist deliver actionable insights to improve clinical competency and ensure graduates are prepared for residency.

2025 FIRST LOOK FORUM SPEAKERS

Krassimira Hristova, PhD, Professor, Biological Sciences, Marquette University

Kyle Leistikow, PhD, Research Manager - CORE Innovation, Microbial Discovery Group, Marquette University

7. New Probiotic to Weaken Multidrug-Resistant Infections

Antibiotic resistance is one of the greatest challenges in modern medicine, and Staphylococcus aureus is one of the deadliest threats. Our research has identified a probiotic-based solution to disrupt S. aureus biofilms, weaken this pathogen's ability to cause disease, and limit the evolution of antibiotic resistance. This breakthrough technology represents a powerful, natural tool to complement existing treatments to help combat one of medicine's most pressing challenges, offering new hope for both human and animal health.

William Perry, BSE, Biomedical Engineering, UWM, Founder & CEO, PerryMedical

8. Moving Plus Sized Patients Quickly and Safely

25% of EMTs suffer from a career ending back injury within the first 4 years of their career. Money lost to compensation insurance and training new employees from this is a significant drain on emergency medical providers. A product that reduces back injuries in EMTs is bound to not only keep people employed but also save a lot of money. After working with a wide range of EMTs and the UWM Prototyping Center we believe we have such a product.

2025 FIRST LOOK FORUM TABLE FACILITATORS

Scott Bolte Scott Bolte is the Founder and CEO of Trailhead Clinical Strategies, LLC, a Milwaukee-based consulting firm established in December 2016. The company specializes in providing strategic advising for entrepreneurship, market research, and product development, with a particular emphasis on the healthcare sector. In addition to his role at Trailhead, Bolte is an active angel investor and has been a member of Milwaukee Venture Partners since 2021, contributing to the growth and development of early-stage startups.

Dr. Kristin Ciezki serves as the Director of the Therapeutic Accelerator Program (TAP) and holds the position of Assistant Professor in the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology at the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW). In her role, she oversees TAP's initiatives, which include project-based funding opportunities, expert advising, and education in therapeutic product development and entrepreneurship. Dr. Ciezki earned her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Kathleen Gallagher is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author, currently serving as the Executive Director of 5 Lakes Institute, a nonprofit organization that works to improve the technological and entrepreneurial economy and culture in the Great Lakes region. 5 Lakes Institute partners with the Midwest Research University Network (MRUN) on programming that includes: ScoutCamp, which organizes 1-on-1 meetings between the region's research institutions and investors; and The Huddle, which highlights tech- and commercialization-enabling programs and initiatives that are resources for the region. Additionally, Gallagher writes a business column for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and hosts “Midwest Moxie," a radio show and podcast that highlights founders who are building successful companies in the region. Gallagher previously spent 23 years as a business reporter at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

2025 FIRST LOOK FORUM TABLE FACILITATORS

Matthew McNeill is Vice President Intellectual Property at Rite-Hite, a Milwaukee-based manufacturer of industrial equipment designed to enhance safety and productivity. Beyond his corporate responsibilities, McNeill has been actively involved in mentoring startups through the gener8tor accelerator program since 2014, and is an active angel investor and pitch coach. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the UWM Research Foundation.

Loren Peterson is an Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Lubar Entrepreneurship Center (LEC). He is also the founder of EAS-MKE, LLC, a consulting firm that collaborates with higher education institutions, their faculty and other start-up businesses to develop and commercialize innovative research. Prior to establishing EAS-MKE, Peterson served as Managing Director and Chief Financial Officer at Venture Investors, LLC, a leading Midwest venture capital firm specializing in seed and early-stage healthcare investments.

Mike Reilly is a seasoned professional with extensive experience in business development and strategic partnerships. Most of his career focused on therapeutic wound and skin care products and devices. His assignments within Johnson & Johnson advanced him from Product Director to Worldwide VP /GM of the Wound Management Franchise. He is currently a Founder and CEO of Amruth Group, LLC, a Milwaukee start-up developing and marketing products based on proprietary BioDendrimer* technology. He has an M.M. from Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management and a B.A. in Economics from Rutgers College.

2025 FIRST LOOK FORUM TABLE FACILITATORS

Dr. Daniel S. Sem is a distinguished academic and entrepreneur with extensive experience in healthcare innovation and business. He currently serves as the President of CU Ventures, affiliated with Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW) where he also serves as Director of Technology Transfer. Dr. Sem is also President of Walsh Ventures, affiliated with Walsh College in Michigan. With over 25 years in healthcare entrepreneurship, Dr. Sem has co-founded multiple companies. Via CU Ventures, he now leads an angel group that has invested $1.5 M in pre-seed funds in 7 Wisconsin startups in the last few years. Additionally, he serves as CEO of Bridge to Cures, Inc., a nonprofit that cohosts the annual Healthcare Innovation Pitch (HIP) program, with a consortium of tech-transfer offices participating in the CTSI (Clinical and Translational Science Institue) AMPD^{NR} (Accelerating Medical Product Development through Networked Resources) program.

Dr. Paul M. Weiss is a Managing Director at Venture Investors LLC, focusing on healthcare investments. He has over 20 years of experience in the biotech and pharmaceutical industries. Prior to joining Venture Investors in 2006, Dr. Weiss served as President of the Gala Biotech business unit of Cardinal Health (now Catalent Pharma Solutions). He also held roles such as Vice President of Business Development for 3-Dimensional Pharmaceuticals and Director of Licensing for Wyeth-Ayerst Pharmaceuticals (now Pfizer).