



# BIOSCIENCES

## UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

### Inaugural Biosciences Initiative Faculty Hire

June 17, 2019



The University of Michigan [Biosciences Initiative](#) is proud to announce the onboarding of Roland Kersten, Ph.D., as its first expert faculty hire.

The Biosciences Initiative (BSI) aims to create globally leading research programs focused on solving critical problems in the biological sciences. Launched in 2017 as a U-M presidential initiative, two key elements of BSI are the hiring of 30 tenure-track faculty and a one-time investment of \$150 million in research projects. Out of the projects awarded so far, BSI has provided startup funding to hire up to 14 new expert faculty.

“This inaugural Biosciences Initiative hire of Dr. Kersten is an indication of how effectively the BSI projects leverage U-M’s comprehensive excellence, catalyze hiring in the biosciences and related disciplines, and embrace our mission to conduct research for the benefit of society,” says Jim Dalton, Ph.D., Dean of the College of Pharmacy.

A thought leader and exceptional researcher, Kersten is a natural product chemist who will join the BSI [Expanding Natural Products Drug Discovery at U-M](#) scientific research initiative, led by David H. Sherman, Ph.D., and Ashootosh Tripathi, Ph.D. Kersten has the distinction of being appointed as a U-M Biological Sciences Scholar, adding to the university’s vibrant scholarship community of the very best scientists, committed to excellence and inspired innovation. Kersten is the newest faculty member of the [College of Pharmacy’s Department of Medicinal Chemistry](#). He will be teaching medicinal chemistry and the isolation of medicinal products as an assistant professor to undergraduates, graduate students and professional pharmacy students.

The field of medicinal chemistry involves the application of a number of specialized disciplinary approaches all focused on the ultimate goal of drug discovery. George Garcia, Ph.D., Chair of Medicinal Chemistry notes that “Dr. Kersten’s accomplishments in the emergent, underexplored and high-impact field of modern plant natural product sciences as well as his broad skills

required for this role make him a phenomenal fit. We couldn't be more excited to announce that he has accepted a position here at U-M with Pharmacy's Medicinal Chemistry faculty."

Kersten joins U-M from the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research at MIT, where he most recently focused his research on unraveling ribosomal peptide biosynthesis in plants. His interests include the chemistry, biosynthesis, ecology and pharmacology of specialized metabolites produced by microbes, algae and plants. Throughout his career, he has worked closely with internationally-renowned researchers in medicinal chemistry.

While commenting on the latest fundamental member of his team, David H. Sherman, Ph.D., the lead project investigator of Expanding Natural Products Drug Discovery at U-M and Hans W. Vahlteich Professor of Medicinal Chemistry said, "Our work facilitates the drive to identify new disease targets and create high potential for developing effective therapeutics against a broad range of human diseases. With Roland's expertise added to our team, we are able to fulfill one of the key pillars of our BSI scientific research initiative and continue to build a state-of-the-art Natural Products Discovery Core in the Life Sciences Institute."

Kersten was selected through an international search conducted by [U-M's Biological Sciences Scholars Program \(BSSP\)](#). BSSP rigorously advertises for future leaders in the biosciences, and Kersten was identified from a large pool of diverse, international and excellent candidates.

Eric Fearon, M.D., Ph.D., as Chair of BSSP, says "Academic drug discovery is a crucial enterprise at research intensive universities like U-M. Roland Kersten's brilliant record of achievement and heavy-hitting research are huge assets for our BSSP and U-M community. I have complete confidence he will excel here and rapidly grow into a leading researcher in his field."

Assistant Professor Kersten will officially start in September at the beginning of the academic year.