Dr. Balunas is an Associate Professor of Medicinal Chemistry at the University of Connecticut. Dr. Balunas’s research group focuses on host-associated microbial communities as unique sources for natural products drug discovery, using these to search for new, targeted drug leads and to address critical questions within the broader field of chemical ecology. Her research ties together an in-depth understanding of how secondary metabolites function in their environment with the application of these insights to discover new medicines for a wide range of human diseases. Dr. Balunas received a dual B.A./B.A. degree in Chemistry and Biology from the University of Rochester, a M.S. degree in Plant Ecology from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and a Ph.D. degree in Pharmacognosy from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She conducted her postdoctoral research on marine natural products drug discovery at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California San Diego in conjunction with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama City, Panama.