DEAN'S REPORT

2023

UAB
SCHOOL OF OPTOMETRY
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

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UAB AND UABSO SHARED VALUES

We C.A.R.E.

Collaboration

Act with Integrity

Respect

Excellence

PILLARS

Education

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Patient Care

VISION 2024

The UAB School of Optometry is committed to understand, preserve, restore, and enhance vision, eye health, and quality of life.

A LETTER FROM THE DEAN

In looking forward to 2024, strategic planning was an important activity for 2023 as the university and each of UAB's schools revised strategic plans for 2024-28. This will be UABSO's third strategic plan in the last 10 years. Faculty, staff, students and alumni led the strategic planning process, meeting quarterly until a draft was completed in the fourth quarter of 2023 for implementation in 2024.

Strategic planning provides an opportunity to revisit successes, chart new directions, and determine which activities will help us achieve our goals. Our pillars, education, discovery, community engagement and patient care are fundamental to the school and provide thoughtful guidance. Additionally, what makes us strong is our values. In our 2024-28 strategic plan, we are adopting UAB's values, We C.A.R.E. This translates to collaboration, act with integrity, respect and excellence. Taken together, these values help us create a sense of belonging and pride for the School of Optometry.

The strategic plan will provide us with a transformed recipe for success that will bolster our ability to educate optometrists and vision scientists of the future. Our strategic plan will also position the school to make valuable contributions to university leadership's strategic goals.

Thank you to everyone who played a role in this process!

KK Nichols

KELLY K. NICHOLS, OD, MPH, PHD, FAAO
Dean, UAB School of Optometry

VISION SCIENCE DOCTORAL PROGRAM CELEBRATES BANNER YEAR

BY SATINA RICHARDSON

Vision Science Graduate Program students, each of whom have prior academic and/or professional success, are driven by the desire to make discoveries that could impact humanity. During the 2022-2023 academic year, several students made significant steps towards achieving this worthy goal.

Notably, three students received $85,000 total in research foundation awards for their individual efforts. Plus, three students were awarded prestigious Ezell Fellowships—the largest number of student winners at UAB in a single year.

"The Vision Science program had a banner year thanks to our students, who continue to pursue excellence," said Lawrence Sincich, PhD, VSGP director. "They have parlayed their personal and professional experiences into efforts to change the landscape of eye and vision care, potentially across continents."

Some of the students have substantial clinical experience and now conduct research focusing on glaucoma, myopia, diabetic retinopathy and Alzheimer's disease from a vision science perspective, to name a few disorders.

For instance, Mahmoud KhalafAllah, MD, MSc, received the Rod Tahran/Essilor Ezell Fellowship. Prior to joining the Vision Science Graduate Program, he completed an ophthalmology residency and gained a year of valuable work experience in Egypt, where he received his medical degree. His clinical training involved diagnosing and treating various eye conditions, including performing surgical procedures such as cataracts and refractive surgeries.

KhalafAllah's career goal is to become a physician-scientist specializing in glaucoma. His doctoral research studies the impact of early-onset myopia on the optic nerve head and the increased risk for glaucoma development later in life. His research findings could contribute to innovative diagnostic and therapeutic approaches for both diseases.

"I am driven to make significant contributions by unraveling the intricate interplay between myopia and glaucoma," he said. Ultimately, my goal is to bridge the gap between research and clinical practice, positively influencing the lives of patients worldwide affected by these conditions."

Ellen Antwi-Adjei, MPH, OD, earned several honors in 2023, including being named a Michael G. Harris Ezell Fellow and was awarded a fellowship from the American Association of University Women. Her PhD research assesses the efficacy and practicality of portable perimeters for glaucoma in underserved areas. The study uses ophthalmic telemedicine to bridge the gap between urban and rural eye health care.

She is inspired by the rise in ocular disease globally as well as her decades of experience in her home country, Ghana, working as an optometrist, public health advocate, and educator. In Ghana's rural and urban areas, many of the patients she saw had advanced cases of eye conditions.

Antwi-Adjei is involved with an ongoing clinical trial (AL-SIGHT) funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This rural Alabama study aims to develop a model eye health system using telemedicine to prevent vision loss and address eye health among underserved and at-risk populations.

Swetha Ravichandran, M. Optom, chose to research Alzheimer's disease after watching her grandfather battle the disease. She believes that more can be done to help neurodegeneration since society is heading towards increased life expectancy.

"Having watched my grandfather battle Alzheimer's disease further stirred my longing to tread towards this journey," she said. "As a doctoral student, I am now focused on exploring novel ocular biomarkers that could help in the diagnosis of preclinical neurological conditions like Alzheimer's disease. Further, I wish to address major gaps in the field of ocular diagnostics and biomarkers."

Prior to being accepted into the VSGP, Ravichandran completed a bachelor's degree in optometry from the Elite School of Optometry and master's in optometry from the Manipal Academy of Higher Education in India. Her goal is to work in academia conducting research and teaching didactic courses.

"Awards like those received by the students really reveal the quality of the program as well as elevate our visibility," Sincich said. "There was a 29% increase in applicants in 2023 and the success of our students is undoubtedly contributing to this uptick in interest."

Four students were accepted in 2023, with most receiving Blazer Graduate Research Fellowships to support their goals financially.

The VSGP is collaborative and multidisciplinary, with students being mentored by faculty from several academic disciplines across multiple schools and departments. Nine countries are represented among the 20 doctoral students in the program.

"Each student has a faculty team supporting them every step of the way," Sincich said. "As research educators, we want nothing more than to see each student reach their full potential."

Antwi-Adjei is grateful for the support she receives.

"Their support, feedback and encouragement keep playing an integral role in shaping my research ideas and pushing me to aspire for newer and higher pinnacles," she said. "The journey is very challenging, but when the shoulders of such giants are available to stand on, you see a brighter tomorrow."

221
Optometry Students

1,627
Total **OD Program** Graduates

9
Dual-Degree Students

1
Master's Student

20
Doctoral Students

EDUCATION SNAPSHOT

8
members **(20%)** of the 2023 class **matched** into competitive residencies

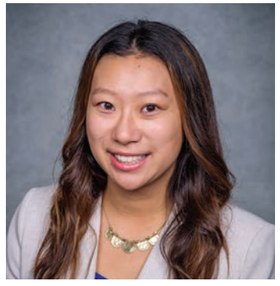
16
Residency positions available in eight UABSO programs

442
optometrists have **completed UAB residencies**

STUDENTS NAMED ASF FELLOWS

Samantha Chapman

Demetric Jones



Alice Kim

Lydia Smith

Samantha Chapman, Demetric Jones, Alice Kim and Lydia Smith, class of 2025, were selected by the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship of Alabama to serve as Alabama Schweitzer Fellows. This marks the first time that UAB optometry students were selected to participate in the program.

Fellows spend 13 months immersed in community public health projects. Their projects will improve the health and social well-being of their populations of choice throughout the state while simultaneously strengthening their leadership skills. In doing so, they will continue the legacy of the Fellowship's namesake, the famed physician-humanitarian Dr. Albert Schweitzer.

This marks the first time that UAB optometry students were selected to participate in the program.

CLASS OF 2027

356 Applicants

131 Accepted

57 Matriculated

3.65 Overall **GPA**

324 **OAT** Academic Average

HERNANDEZ SELECTED FOR PRESTIGIOUS NEURO-OPHTHALMIC RESIDENCY

Dr. Heidi Hernandez

Heidi Hernandez, OD, class of 2023, earned a highly competitive residency at The Eye Institute of Salus University (TEI). The two-year neuro-ophthalmic disease residency accepts only one resident annually and is the only one of its kind in the nation. It is the first time a UAB optometry student has been chosen for this program.

Neuro-ophthalmic disease studies vision-related problems and issues associated with the brain, nerves and muscles. Accordingly, the residency focuses on diagnosing and treating neuro-ophthalmic diseases and conditions.

The two-year neuro-ophthalmic disease residency accepts only one resident annually and is the only one of its kind in the nation.

STUDENT ORGANIZES NEW VOLUNTEER CLINICAL ROTATION

Ginny Morgan

Clinical learning during optometry school is critical. Over four years, students spend three years developing clinical skills as part of their curriculum. However, a group of students decided to pursue an additional opportunity and now see patients once per month at Equal Access Birmingham (EAB).

EAB is a student-run free clinic that provides continuity of care to the medically underserved in the greater Birmingham community. The clinic is supported by the Office of Undergraduate Medical Education of the UAB Heersink School of Medicine. **Ginny Morgan,** class of 2024, led the charge to get students involved in this voluntary exercise.

EAB is a student-run free clinic that provides continuity of care to the medically underserved in the greater Birmingham community.

RESEARCH EVALUATES HOW RETINA COULD YIELD EARLY ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE DIAGNOSIS

BY SATINA RICHARDSON

UAB School of Optometry vision scientists are participating in research to evaluate how changes in the retina might play a role in diagnosing Alzheimer's disease. Their findings could lead to non-invasive, low-cost tests and the early diagnosis of the disease, which progresses for decades before symptoms of dementia emerge.

Alzheimer's disease, a progressive neurodegenerative disease affecting approximately 6.7 million Americans aged 65 and older, is the most common cause of dementia in the elderly. By 2060, the affected population is projected to reach 13.8 million unless effective interventions or treatments become available.

In 2023, Edmund Arthur, OD, PhD, was awarded a $408,375 two-year pilot grant from the National Institute on Aging to study eye doctors' role in diagnosing Alzheimer's disease by examining the retina.

"While rapid advances in blood-based biomarkers will likely become part of the normal clinical diagnostic pathway within the next few years, there is still the need for other non-invasive biomarkers," he said.

He is collaborating with Erik Roberson, MD, PhD, neurologist and director of UAB's Alzheimer's Disease Research Center. The UAB Brain Aging and Memory Clinic provides a team-based approach to evaluating, diagnosing, and treating people experiencing age-related cognitive changes and supporting their families and caregivers.

"Our population is aging, so more and more people are living longer and experiencing age-related cognitive changes," Roberson said. "Combined with a shortage in Alabama of neurologists in general, and those trained in dementia in particular, along with the emergence of new disease-modifying therapies, the demand for appointments in our UAB Brain Aging and Memory Clinic is tremendous."

Roberson provides the participants and their blood-based biomarkers for the study, while Arthur performs the retinal imaging component of their research.

One of Arthur's goals is to develop a multimodal model incorporating two novel retinal biomarkers—the retinal peripheral capillary free zones and retinal putative gliosis—and blood-based biomarkers to screen for early Alzheimer's disease.

"The retina allows for a non-invasive look at the central nervous system, making it an ideal target for the development of early Alzheimer's disease biomarkers," Arthur said. "The idea is that an optometrist could order blood tests as additional confirmation after seeing early signs of Alzheimer's disease in the retina."

Research participants undergo a series of non-invasive tests as part of the study: visual function tests, including field of vision and sensitivity to contrast assessments, as well as multimodal retinal imaging assessment, including Spectral Domain Optical Coherence Tomography (SD-OCT), OCT Angiography, and Blue Autofluorescence imaging.

These tests are more accessible, more affordable, and less invasive than the positron emission tomography and cerebrospinal fluid analysis evaluation methods, which currently have the greatest utility.

Arthur shared that characterization, quantification, and validation of these non-invasive retinal biomarkers for early Alzheimer's disease detection will provide low-cost screening tools for Alzheimer's disease prevention trials, expedite enrollment and randomization, and could potentially serve as a tool for monitoring the efficacy of secondary prevention therapeutics.

Alzheimer's disease is currently a very hot topic and potentially an area of research growth and strength for UABSO. Tim Kraft, PhD, first researched the topic in 2014, and with renewed interest has a grant submission into the NIH to measure retinal function and anatomy in a mouse model of Alzheimer's disease. His research will also perform parallel tests on human subjects who are young, old and in the beginning stages of dementia.

Growing the tools to allow for earlier diagnosis will greatly benefit patients. "Our work will facilitate large-scale screening of older adults by point-of-care clinicians, including optometrists, and referral of at-risk individuals to neurologists and neuropsychologists for detailed cognitive health/biomarker assessment," Arthur added. "The impact could lessen the disease's overall burden on our society, patients and caregivers alike."

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EDMUND ARTHUR, OD, PHD

A NOVEL RETINAL VASCULAR BIOMARKER COULD POTENTIALLY AID IN EARLY ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE RISK DETECTION

In a paper published in *Alzheimer's Research & Therapy,* **Edmund Arthur,** OD, PhD, FAAO, found a novel retinal vascular biomarker known as the mid-peripheral capillary free zones that could be used by optometrists for early Alzheimer's disease risk detection.

NEARSIGHTED PROGRESSION IN CHILDREN IS NOT SLOWED BY VERY LOW DOSE (0.01%) ATROPINE DROPS

Research conducted by **Kathy Weise,** OD, MBA, and published in *JAMA Ophthalmology* found that the use of low-dose atropine eye drops was no better than placebo drops at slowing myopia a progression and elongation of the eyes of a diverse group of children living in the United States.

DISCOVERY SNAPSHOT

$5,145,118 **total funding** for 2022-2023, the highest in 6+ years

Ranked 6th **nationally by ASCO in overall research** out of 23 schools

Ranked 5th overall in **Federal funding**

CATARACT AND KERATOCONUS RESEARCH ADVANCED

Roy Joseph, PhD, MBA, and **Om Srivastava,** PhD, generated the lens-specific βA3/A1-crystallin conditional knockout mouse (named βA3/A1ckO) and explored phenotypic changes and the function of the crystallin in the lens. The results published in *PLOS ONE* showed that the crystallin modulates autophagy in the lens and could be a causative factor for the congenital cataract development. In a separate study published in Investigative *Ophthalmology & Visual Science,* they generated a doxycycline-inducible stromal keratocyte-specific conditional Fibroblast Growth Factor Receptor2 knockout mouse model (named: Fgfr2cKO). The model recapitulates the following human keratoconus phenotypes: (A) localized corneal thinning and corneal cone shape protrusion, (B) keratocyte apoptosis, (C) breakage in Bowman's layer between epithelium and stroma, (D) altered collagen fibrils, (E) acute corneal hydrops, and (F) stromal scarring suggesting the quiescent keratocytes transition to fibroblasts and myofibroblasts.

FIRST-TIME STUDY EVALUATES REAL-TIME CONTACT LENS COMFORT

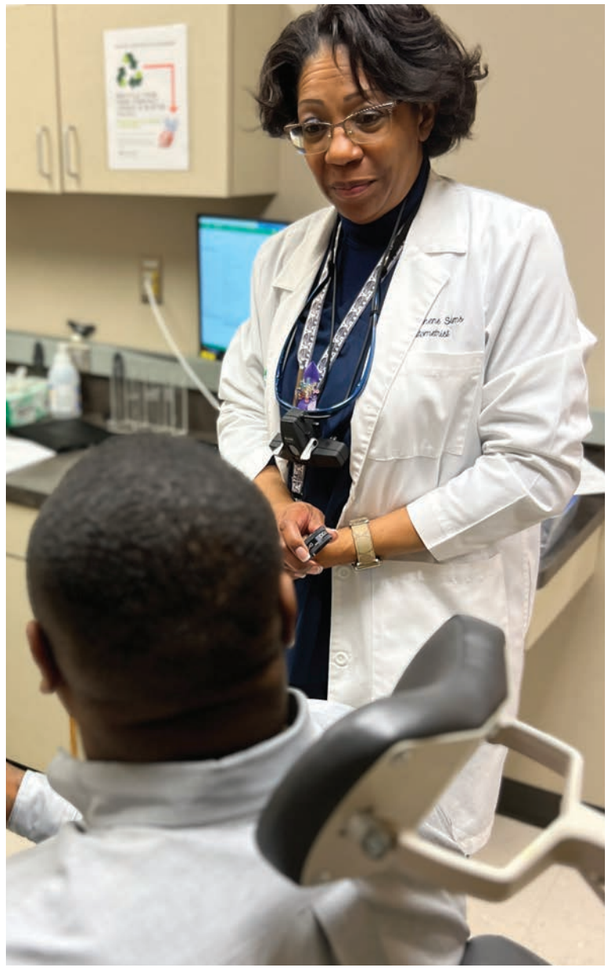
Terri Call, OD, was first author of a paper titled "Real-Time Ocular Comfort Reporting in Monthly Replacement Contact Lens Wearers." The featured research was the first study to describe real-time contact lens comfort over the life of a monthly replacement contact lens.

RESEARCHERS FIND THAT CHROMATICALLY SIMULATED MYOPIC BLUR MAY BE USEFUL AS A MYOPIA CONTROL THERAPY

Timothy Gawne, PhD, and **Thomas Norton,** PhD, published a study in *Experimental Eye Research* that they believe could provide a basis for future treatments to control or prevent the development of myopia.

CEC CELEBRATES HALF A CENTURY OF COMPASSIONATE CARE

BY NATHAN ANDERSON



Dr. Janene Sims caring for patient George Rudolph.

Community Eye Care (CEC), the UAB School of Optometry's community outreach arm, celebrated 50 years of providing vision screenings and comprehensive eyecare to underserved communities while training future optometrists to provide compassionate care. To date, the program has cared for approximately 25,000 patients.

In 1973, David W. Davidson, OD, launched Community Vision Services (CVS) as a small rotation for fourth year students to gain experience by screening children in the Jefferson County Head Start Program. CVS soon after expanded to allow second and third year optometry students to provide vision care to children and adults within Jefferson and neighboring counties. To reduce confusion with the methods course, Clinical Evaluation of Visual System (CEVS), the name of the service was changed to Community Eye Care.

What started as a screening service has grown to include comprehensive eye exams. Though some UAB schools have volunteer community clinics, CEC is a required rotation for second and third year optometry students. Today, second year screening rotations include hundreds of pediatric and adult screening locations throughout the Birmingham metro area, including schools, daycares, churches, businesses and senior centers.

Third and fourth year interns perform comprehensive eye exams Monday through Friday at a six-exam lane eye clinic at Western Health Center. The second year screening rotations includes hundreds of pediatric and adult screening locations throughout the Birmingham Metro area, including schools, daycares, churches, businesses and senior centers.

The program has evolved over the last half-century thanks to civic-minded UAB Optometry leaders and support from the school's community, the community at large and generous corporate benefactors.

CEC developed the most under current director Janene Sims, OD, PhD, and Felton Perry, OD. Now retired, Perry served as director from 1996 to 2018, and Sims was named director in 2018.

"Everything people do is based on having the ability to see," Perry recalled. "So, CEC's mission has been to take care of the eye care needs of people within Alabama," he said. "We made it so citizens across Alabama can have access to eye care."

Sims added, "We understand the importance of eye care, and we don't want people who are struggling to choose between buying food or purchasing glasses."

CEC expanded into Alabama's Black Belt under Perry's leadership when, in 2002, he partnered with the Black Belt Clinic Adult Eye Care Clinic project led by Mary Jean Sanspree, PhD, to create the Black Belt Clinic Initiative. This program provided eye and vision care in Alabama's poorest region but lost funding in 2007. This was when CEC began treating underserved Black Belt communities independently, in conjunction with local outreach programs.

Sims expanded local outreach when she joined the CEC team to further enhance the program's ability to improve students' proficiency in basic optometric examination skills by exposing them to a non-traditional clinical environment.

No matter the location, the CEC team of faculty, staff, and students has encountered unforgettable moments that demonstrate the importance of the team's efforts. Sims described a time when a screening resulted in a life-altering diagnosis.

Years ago, CEC conducted vision screenings at Birmingham's Protective Life Insurance company over four days. The IT director, William Jeffries, told Sims about his vision issues while helping set up their screening.

His exam revealed bleeding in the retina, swelling of both maculas, and a suspicious, discolored area in the retina of one eye. Sims referred him to retinal specialists at Vision America and UAB Callahan Eye Hospital, where he was diagnosed with choroidal melanoma. Although he lost vision in one eye, Sims said that CEC's intervention helped stop his condition from worsening and possibly saved his life.

"Eyecare partners, local businesses and even alumni give back to CEC, because they see our impact in people's lives," Sims said. "Because of their support, CEC will remain impactful for years to come. Every form of support, large or small, makes a difference."

Vision Service Plan (VSP) is a longtime corporate benefactor providing year-round vouchers for comprehensive eye exams and glasses. It has teamed with CEC for some of its most impactful outreach initiatives.

For instance, after 62 tornadoes hit Alabama on April 27, 2011, VSP created mobile clinics that enabled doctors to provide eye exams and distribute free glasses in Alabama's hardest-hit areas. The relief mission lasted through May, helping 1,000 people.

In 2014, VSP partnered with CEC to create Gift of Sight, an event that focuses on helping those in need during the holiday season. The annual giving event has provided free comprehensive eye exams and glasses to more than 2,000 patients.

Going forward, Sims hopes to expand CEC's opportunities to interact more with the UAB community.

"We want to do more right here at UAB," she said. "When we have people who are hospitalized or in palliative care and need eyecare at UAB, who better to see them than CEC? As I look toward the future, I am filled with joy thinking about the difference we make today and will continue making for years to come."

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Students conducting comprehensive eye exams at the Foundry Farm.

GIFT OF SIGHT REACHES 10 YEARS, TREATS PATIENT 2000

BY NATHAN ANDERSON

In its tenth year, the UAB School of Optometry's biggest giving event, Gift of Sight, has provided free comprehensive eye exams and glasses to more than 2,000 patients to date. CEC, the school's community outreach arm, coordinated the annual event, while celebrating its 50th anniversary of providing vision screenings and comprehensive eyecare to underserved communities.

"Gift of Sight offers us the chance to provide quality eye care to those who otherwise would not receive it during the holiday season," said CEC Director Janene Sims, OD, PhD, FAAO. "This event further demonstrates UAB's commitment to community development and providing the highest quality of patient care to as many patients as possible."

Two hundred and fourteen patients were seen during the 2023 Gift of Sight, which was held from November 27th to December 1st at the Western Health Center in Midfield, AL. The five-day event saw patients with a variety of ocular conditions including keratoconus, eyelid abnormalities, hypertensive retinopathy, diabetic retinopathy, macular edema, strabismus, amblyopia and moderate refractive errors.

Since the program began in 2014, CEC has provided its services and glasses at no charge to patients with the support of donations from partners, sponsors, donors and volunteers during the holiday season.

"Eyecare partners, local businesses and even alumni give back to CEC because they see our impact in people's lives," Sims said. "Because of their support, CEC will remain impactful for years to come. Every form of support, large or small, makes a difference."

CEC, which consists of UAB optometry faculty, staff and students, provides comprehensive eye exams and screenings to underinsured and low-income residents in the Birmingham metro area throughout the year. It also provides care to residents in the Black Belt and other underserved communities across the state.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SNAPSHOT

1420 free glasses

2742 free patient screenings

2384 CEC patient appointments

SVOSH PROVIDES CARE IN ST. LUCIA

The Student Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity (SVOSH) trip team — including five students and two doctors — spent three days providing comprehensive eye exams to 290 people in St. Lucia. This was the first time since 2019 that the student group has traveled abroad to provide care.

UAB EYE CARE FINDS SUCCESS AT 1917 CLINIC

BY NATHAN ANDERSON

"On several occasions, I have been able to consult with a patient's infectious disease doctor, nurse or social worker simply by walking down the hall," Rothstein said. "Students also benefit from these interactions and are able to shadow other disciplines if we have a light patient load for the day."

Since UAB Eye Care's 1917 Clinic location opened in 2022, 250 patients have received care. The success of this external location has paved the way for growth that will allow a greater number of patients to be seen there in the future.

The 1917 Clinic's mission is to address the needs of patients, their families, doctors, researchers and the community in responding to the urgent and unique issues surrounding HIV/AIDS. It is the largest HIV healthcare unit in Alabama and one of the country's leading HIV clinics.

"Given our newness at this location, we thought it would be best to start slowly to see how things went," said Andrew Rothstein, OD, one of UAB Eye Care's onsite attending doctors. "The 1917 Clinic turned out to be a resounding success. The demand was higher than expected, and before we knew it, we were completely booked for three months or more.

"The unsung heroes of the eye clinic's success are the 1917 Clinic's non-eye providers that continue to stress the importance of eye care to their patients. Without their referrals, many of these patients would not know the necessity of regular ocular health exams. This is particularly important in patients with HIV, as they have a high prevalence of ocular diseases, many of which are asymptomatic in the early stages."

UAB Eye Care has had a longstanding referral-based relationship with the clinic, moving onsite once 1917 relocated to a larger building in 2020. Leadership sensed that having eye care onsite would provide comfort for patients already receiving care in the Dewberry building, increasing show rates and compliance.

Furthermore, optometry's addition to the multidisciplinary clinic as an onsite healthcare provider helps detect patients' eye conditions earlier and treat them onsite. Being in immediate proximity to patients, staff members can coordinate with other specialties to help treat patients with urgent eye care needs too.

"On several occasions, I have been able to consult with a patient's infectious disease doctor, nurse or social worker simply by walking down the hall," Rothstein said. "Students also benefit from these interactions and are able to shadow other disciplines if we have a light patient load for the day."

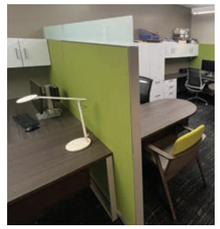
Erika Marrs, class of 2024, said that working at the 1917 Clinic has allowed her to gain experience that would be rare to encounter anywhere else.

"We can see pathology that we wouldn't normally get to see which is a great experience as a student," Marrs said. "I have also enjoyed working with the patients in the clinic. They are very appreciative of our care and for providing a safe, comfortable environment for them."

In preparation for the 1917 Clinic rotation, optometry students undergo specific training about the effects of HIV/AIDS on the eyes. Diversity, equity and inclusion education designed for this population is also required.

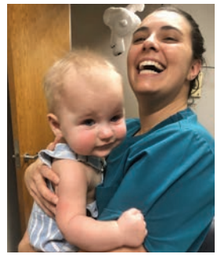
"The 1917 Clinic serves an incredibly diverse patient population," Rothstein said. "While our students are well-rounded, completing diversity training specifically geared toward this clinic prepares them for their time with us. Studies have shown that patients who are part of the LGBTQ+ community are disproportionately affected by HIV, as are patients who identify as transgender. The students' training addresses how to care for these populations specifically."

In the future, Rothstein hopes to expand the number of days patients are seen during the week while creating more awareness for the optometry services offered at the 1917 Clinic.



LOW VISION CLINIC RENOVATED

The Low Vision clinic was updated to make the space more accommodating. Among the updates were reconfiguring the space and adding new furniture. These changes are part of the renovations in the Henry Peters Building that began in 2018 to modernize the building throughout.



DIAGNOSIS EXEMPLIFIES COMMITMENT TO THOROUGH, EVIDENCE-BASED CARE

Thorough patient care provided by UAB Eye Care's pediatric team led to two young brothers being diagnosed with bilateral subluxation, a rare genetic mutation characterized by subtle iridodenesis (colored part of eye shaking with eye movements) and misshapen pupil). Their mother noticed and sought care for her sons.

This special case became the focus of Dr. Abigail Witmer's presentation at the 2023 American Academy of Optometry meeting. The pediatric resident was one of 16 among 300 applicants in the country selected to do a podium presentation at Academy. Her presentation, titled The Tale of Two Brothers, explained the diagnosis and exemplifies our doctors' commitment to providing thorough, evidenced-based care.

CONCUSSED PATIENT BENEFITS FROM CONTACT LENSES

Michael Hull, an experienced marathoner, decided to celebrate his 40th birthday by competing in the Ironman competition. While on a 90-minute training bike ride, he was thrown from his bike while traveling at a high speed. The accident resulted in a severely broken clavicle and a concussion.

Because sound and light were intolerable, he wore ear covers and sunglasses. The sound of his daughters walking around the house was even unbearable. His orthopedic care for a concussion didn't relieve the pain. Hull visited Kathy Weise, OD, MBA, in the MTBEye Concussion Clinic. The amber contact lenses she prescribed treated the photosensitivity he was experiencing due to the concussion within three weeks. Three months after his accident, Hull completed a half Ironman, setting a personal record by 10 minutes.

PATIENT CARE SNAPSHOT

24,606
Patient Visits

92.2%
Patient Satisfaction

SPRINGER LECTURE CELEBRATES 25 YEARS

BY SATINA RICHARDSON

"These individuals are passionate teachers and respected practitioners who contribute greatly to optometry and vision science. Autry is a fitting addition to the rich history of this event."

KELLY NICHOLS,
UAB OPTOMETRY DEAN

The 2023 Springer Lecture marked a significant milestone for the endowed series—25 years. The first endowed lecture funded by the Nathaniel E. Springer Memorial Fund occurred in 1999. This year's speaker was Jill Autry, OD, RPh. Autry, much like Donald Springer, OD, who was the impetus for the lecture series' establishment, is passionate about optometry, the betterment of the profession, and lifelong learning.

Donald was instrumental in founding the UAB School of Optometry in 1968. His father, Nathaniel, was influential in the foundation of optometry in Alabama when he helped write the first optometry law in 1916 and opened his Anniston, AL, practice three years later. Donald, one of three children, eventually joined his father's practice. Nathaniel's impact on the profession continued until he died in 1967.

Following Nathaniel's death, the Springer family generously provided the funds to endow a lectureship in his honor, creating the Nathaniel E. Springer Memorial Lectureship in 1999.

"I am proud that this is still happening and am proud of everything Donald did and the family coming together to do something that benefits the school," said Rita Springer, Donald's widow. "His interest was always to better optometry and help the state."

The lecture series has featured a who's who of respected optometrists and vision scientists. This is in keeping with the lecture's purpose: to bring distinguished visual scientists or clinicians to the UAB School of Optometry to share knowledge with faculty and students.

"The lectureship continuously enhances the educational experience of our optometry students. These lectures expose them to some of the most knowledgeable minds in the eye care profession," said Kelly Nichols, UAB Optometry dean. "These individuals are passionate teachers and respected practitioners who contribute greatly to optometry and vision science. Autry is a fitting addition to the rich history of this event."

Autry began her career as a pharmacist and transitioned to optometry after realizing that she wanted the challenges and responsibilities of being a doctor. She explored dentistry and medicine but realized that optometry suited her best.

Following graduation from the University of Houston College of Optometry and an internship in Australia, Autry joined Eye Center of Texas, a Houston OD/MD practice. There, she founded and co-supervises the UABSO-affiliated Eye Center of Texas residency program, which focuses on ocular disease with an emphasis in refractive and ocular surgery. With dual degrees and years of ophthalmology experience, she also consults and lectures extensively for optometric continuing education (CE) nationally and internationally.

The objective of Autry's lecture was to demonstrate how she learned to manage various pathological conditions over the years and impart that knowledge to residents, students, her local optometrists, and attendees at her CE presentations. The title of her lecture, "See One, Do One, Teach One," speaks to this process.

"Healthcare professionals hear and see didactically how to handle a patient in school and take it to the next level by doing or taking care of these patients in residency and/or practice. When you get good at doing so and seeing many different presentations of the same issue, teaching others so they can develop the skills keeps the cycle going," she described.

Autry stressed to the students that only so much can be taught in the classroom. Learning continues after graduation, and knowledge must continue building to treat patients at the highest level.

"It is certainly an indescribable honor to be associated with the Springer family and what they have meant to UAB and to optometry, as well as being considered in the same category as previous Springer lecturers. A humbling opportunity, to say the least," Autry said.

Dr. Jill Autry (right) presented the 25th annual Springer Lecture on October, 18, 2023.

FIRST GRADUATING CLASS CELEBRATES 50 YEARS

The UAB School of Optometry's first graduating class marked its 50th anniversary. Bernie Scott, OD, Michael Raim, OD, and Ron Dachelet, OD, members of the 1973 class, attended the 2023 Convocation and Hooding Ceremony to recognize this milestone.

In his remarks, Dachelet described what it was like to attend UAB optometry during the early years when the School was in the Crippled Children's Hospital. That facility closed following the eradication of polio.

"There were only seven students—we called ourselves 'the magnificent seven—and because the class was so small, Dr. Peters taught his courses at a table outside his office," Dachelet said.

In addition to Dean Henry Peters, faculty included Dr. John Amos, former dean and emeritus professor, and Dr. Boyd Eskridge. Also, the first class took classes with dental and medical school students, like students do today.

While there were seven students in the first class, the School currently accepts up to 55 students and is housed in the Henry Peters Building. Students remain involved in AOSA and, like Dachelet, often hold national leadership roles. Also, in contrast to the 1970s, when there were seven schools, there are 26 optometry schools nationwide. That number continues to grow.

When asked about the significance of this milestone, Kelly Nichols, dean, said, "This is such an important historic event for the School and I am thrilled to have spent time with the class of 1973 graduates. Their pride for the school and the memories of their time at UABSO show just how far the School has come in the past 54 years, all while maintaining a long-standing history of excellence."

THREE ALUMNI WON TOP 25 EXCELLENCE IN BUSINESS AWARD

Three alumni won the Top 25 Excellence in Business award. The UAB Excellence in Business Top 25 program was created to identify, recognize and celebrate the success of the top 25 alumni-owned or alumni-managed businesses.

In 2016, Tommy Pinkston, OD, and Aimee McBride, OD, class of 2012, became business partners with the goal to build a unique private practice in the mountains of western North Carolina.

Haywood Family Eye Care has been open for over 60 years and was eventually bought by UAB School of Optometry graduate Leroy Roberson, OD. McBride had worked alongside Roberson since graduation and purchased the practice from him in 2014.

Tommy Pinkston, OD

Aimée McBride, OD

Jennifer Drake, OD

The clinic has undergone significant renovations and has seen considerable growth over the last decade. In 2021, the practice moved from a 2,000 sq foot 4 exam lane facility to a new standalone 5,000 sq foot 8 exam lane clinic.

"While our office may be located in a small Appalachian town, our goal is to operate a clinical private practice that rivals any office in the country in the way we care for patients," Pinkston said. "We believe that people should not have to travel far to receive excellent care."

Alumnus Jennifer Drake, OD, class of 2008, also received a 2023 Top 25 Excellence in Business award. She owns Drake Eye Care and Eyewear in Murfreesboro, TN.

DEVELOPMENT SNAPSHOT

$639,996
Donor Impact

$103,500
Scholarship dollars awarded

81 Endowed Scholarships and annual awards

12 Scholarships awarded by the **Alumni Association**

GARDNER NAMED 2023 ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

Caleb Gardner, OD, class of 2008, is an Alabama Optometric Association leader who diligently champions scope expansion in the state.

For the past 15 years, Gardner has been dedicated to practicing full-scope optometry for his patients and has worked to enhance patient care within Alabama. He has also been a member of many professional organizations, even serving as the president of ALOA, where he endeavored to expand optometry's scope of practice.

Gardner explained that Dr. L. Don Snellgrove, the president of the ALOA during UAB Optometry's formation who played an integral role in the School's establishment, taught him the importance of advocating for optometry within Alabama. Gardner would also purchase his first practice from Snellgrove, renaming it Gardner Eye Care.

"As president of the ALOA, I led a team of motivated Alabama optometrists to push for scope expansion. That year, our optometry scope bill passed the Senate but died in the House," he said. "It was the closest we had come to updating our antiquated optometry law since the early 90s when it was last re-written. However, our collective efforts have led to a much stronger network of ODs around the state who will continue the push for scope expansion until we achieve ultimate success."

ANSLEY NAMED YOUNG ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

Tim Ansley, OD, class of 2014, is recognized for his advocacy for the profession and service to his community.

Ansley is the owner of Inverness Eye Care and Brocks Gap Eye Care in Hoover, AL. The Inverness practice was voted "Best Eye Care Practice" in Shelby County in 2022 and 2023, while the Brocks Gap location was voted Hoover's "Best Eye Care Practice" in 2023. Both serve as externship sites for UABSO students to help students prepare for their future careers.

"This year alone, we will host seven externs from the UABSO 2024 class," he said. "Our doctors pride themselves in helping train and fully prepare students to enter the workforce upon graduation."

He is a strong advocate for optometry in the state of Alabama. Ansley serves as vice president and government relations chair for the ALOA, member director for Central Alabama's Independent Doctors of Optometric Care IDOC Alliance and is a board member for the UABSO Alumni Association. For his contributions to the profession and his community, Ansley was named the ALOA 2019 Young Optometrist of the Year.

2022-2023 ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD

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Dr. Andrew Rothstein


Dr. Edmund Arthur


Dr. Janene Sims


Dr. Jason Nichols


Dr. Jillian Ziemanski


Dr. Katherine Clore


Dr. Katherine Weise


Kathryn Trammell


Dr. Nickolas Onken


Dr. Safal Khanal


Dr. Terri Call

Amy Logan, OD, FAAO, assistant professor, and **Andrew Rothstein,** OD, assistant professor, were accepted into the Healthcare Educators Academy as mentees. **Rothstein** was also accepted into the Center for the Study of Community Health as a Center Scholar.

Edmund Arthur, OD, PhD, assistant professor, received a $408,375 National Institute of Health Pilot Grant.

Janene Sims, OD, PhD, associate professor, received the Dean's Distinguished Faculty Award at the 2023 Convocation and Hooding Ceremony. Sims was also accepted into the Center for the Study of Community Health as Center Scholars.

Jason Nichols, OD, MPH, PhD, FAAO, professor and the UAB Office of Research's senior associate vice president for research, received the Max Schapero Memorial Lecture Award from the American Academy of Optometry. **Nichols** also received the #EBGameChanger Award from the Eye Business magazine.

Jillian Ziemanski, OD, MS, PhD, FAAO, assistant professor, was awarded the UAB President's Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Katherine Clore, OD, professor and director of Continuing Education, completed her term as president for the Association of Optometric Contact Lens Educators.

Katherine Weise, OD, MBA, FAAO, professor, director of Pediatric Optometry Service, was accepted into the National Academy of Sciences as an Expert in Myopia.

The Dean's Outstanding Staff Award was given to **Kathryn Trammell,** program manager II, at the 2023 Convocation and Hooding Ceremony

Nickolas Onken, OD, assistant professor, received a Gold Certificate from UAB's Center for Teaching and Learning

Safal Khanal, OD, PhD, FAAO, assistant professor, was elected into the Annual Program Meeting Committee of the Anatomy/Pathology section at ARVO 2023. **Khanal** also earned a $250,000 myopia research grant from the American Academy of Optometry.

Terri Call, OD, associate professor and director of the Primary Care Clinic, was named the 2023 ALOA Educator of the Year.

IN MEMORIAM

DAVID R. WHIKEHART, PHD

AUGUST 21, 1939 - AUGUST 5, 2023

Professor Emeritus David R. Whikehart, Ph.D., passed away peacefully on Saturday, August 5, 2023. He was a beloved husband, father, grandfather, professor emeritus, researcher, sailor, photographer, and avid model railroader. He was born on August 21st, 1939, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to Mary Evelyn and Ralph Whikehart.


NOSA Chapter

STUDENT SUCCESS

Cyril Nyankerh, OD, Vision Science Graduate Program student, received the Members-in-Training Outstanding Poster Award at ARVO 2023.

Ellen Antwi-Adjei, OD, MPH, Vision Science Graduate Program doctoral student, received a $25,000 fellowship from the American Association of University Women.

Mahmoud KhalafAllah, MD, MSc, Vision Science Graduate Program doctoral student, was accepted into the 2023 ARVO Science Communication Training Fellowship.

Keyur Savla, Vision Science Graduate Program doctoral student, received a Dissertation Fellowship of $10,000 from the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi.

NOSA chapter won Chapter of the Year at the 2023 National Optometric Association conference.

Robert Morgan, class of 2024, was elected treasurer of the AOSA board of directors.

Hannah Morrison, class of 2024, was awarded the $10,000 Optometry Cares 2023 Bernard Maitenaz Scholarship.

Steven Chen and **Isabella Simmons,** class of 2025, were accepted into CooperVision Student Leadership Societies. **Chen** also received a grant from the Ocular Wellness and Nutrition Society.

Swetha Ravichandran, Vision Science Graduate Program student, received a $25,000 fellowship from the Alzheimer's of Central Alabama Lindy Harrell Predoctoral Scholar Program.


Dr. Cyril Nyankerh


Dr. Ellen Antwi-Adjiei


Dr. Mahomoud KhalafAllah


Keyur Savia


Robert Morgan


Hannah Morrison


Steven Chen


Isabella Simmons


Swetha Ravichandran

UAB SCHOOL OF OPTOMETRY
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Henry Peters Building
1716 University Boulevard
Birmingham, AL 35294

uab.edu/optometry