

# DEAN'S REPORT 2021



UAB School of Optometry





VISION STATEMENT

The University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry aspires to make significant contributions to eye and vision care knowledge and vision science and to provide meaningful service to humanity.

VALUES

- Excellence
- Collaboration
- Service
- Compassion
- Integrity
- Diversity

PILLARS

- Education
- Discovery
- Community Engagement
- Patient Care

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Dean’s Group

- Chris Boutwell, MAc**  
Executive Director of Administrative Operations

**Keshia Elder, OD, MS, FAAO**  
Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

**Adam Gordon, OD, MPH, FAAO**  
Chair of the Department of Optometry and Vision Science

**Kristine Hopkins, OD, MSPH, FAAO**  
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

**Tim Kraft, PhD**  
Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies
- Steve Pittler, PhD, FARVO, FAAO**  
Director of the Vision Science Research Center

**Gerald Simon, OD**  
Associate Dean for Student Affairs

**Lawrence Sincich, PhD**  
Director of the Graduate Program

**Elizabeth Steele, OD, FAAO**  
Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs

A Letter from the Dean

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued, the UAB campus and School of Optometry were able to return to near-normal operations during the 2021 academic year. The Henry Peters Building was at capacity for the first time since March 2020 as all faculty, staff and students returned to campus at once by the fall semester. The UABSO family was finally reunited!

When we are together, faculty and staff are reminded of their invaluable role in producing well-educated optometrists and vision scientists. Our students can have a more traditional student life experience which facilitates lasting friendships. Their UAB experience is truly better when we are together.

The year required as much resilience as the previous year. Once again, however, everyone rose to the occasion and overcame unprecedented challenges. This report showcases our successes as well as how, even under unusual circumstances, the commitment to the School’s four pillars (education, discovery, community engagement and patient care) was upheld, and surpassed. We couldn’t do this without the dedication of our faculty, staff, and students—2022 looks bright indeed!

Enjoy!

*KK Nichols*

Kelly K. Nichols, OD, MPH, PhD, FAAO  
Dean, UAB School of Optometry





# UABSO by the Numbers 2021

## DEVELOPMENT & ALUMNI

Donor  
Impact  
For 2021  
\$468,568

69  
ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS TO  
SUPPORT OPTOMETRIC AND  
VISION SCIENCE STUDENTS

## PATIENT CARE

27,175  
PATIENT  
VISITS AT  
UAB EYE CARE  
AND THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OPTOMETRIC  
GROUP

1,963  
PATIENT  
VISITS AT  
WESTERN  
HEALTH  
CENTER

## RESEARCH

\$3.204 million

TOTAL FUNDING FOR 2019-2020

Ranked 4th  
Nationally

IN OVERALL RESEARCH  
FUNDING OUT OF 23 SCHOOLS  
(\$3.56 MILLION)

Ranked 2nd

IN NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE  
FUNDING



## EDUCATION

414  
OPTOMETRISTS  
HAVE COMPLETED  
RESIDENCIES

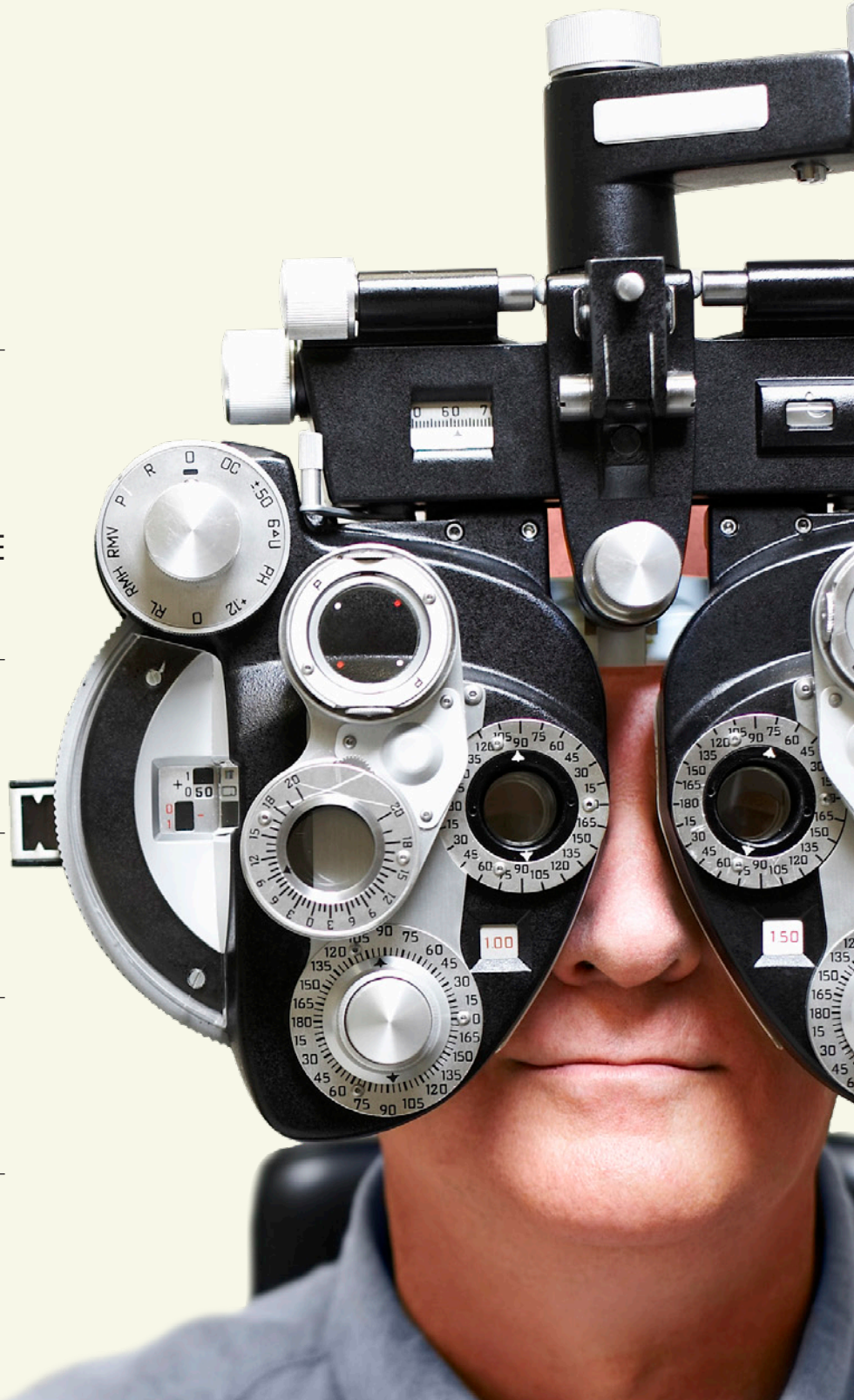
14  
CLASS MEMBERS  
(29%) OF THE 2021  
CLASS MATCHED  
INTO COMPETITIVE  
RESIDENCIES

197  
OPTOMETRY  
STUDENTS

21  
DOCTORAL  
STUDENTS

16  
DUAL-DEGREE  
STUDENTS

12  
RESIDENTS IN  
SEVEN PROGRAMS



## CLASS OF 2025

345  
APPLICANTS

150  
INTERVIEWS

56  
STUDENTS

3.66  
OVERALL  
GPA

321  
AVERAGE  
OAT SCORE





“

We feel it is important to support optometric education through endowed gifts of any type deemed appropriate by those giving the gift,”

Dr. John Amos

## Amoses establish School’s first named faculty endowment

by Caleb Jones

**D**rs. John and Catherine Amos, former UAB School of Optometry (UABSO) Dean and alumna, respectively, have established the Dr. John F. Amos Endowed Faculty Scholar in Optometry. This is the first named faculty endowment in the School’s 52-year history.

The gift will be used to enhance the existing John F. Amos Endowed Support Fund for the purpose of creating an endowed faculty scholar fund. There is an option to grow the fund to an endowed professorship or an endowed chair to support the research, scholarly, and/or clinical efforts of a distinguished faculty member in the School of Optometry.

“We feel it is important to support optometric education through endowed gifts of any type deemed appropriate by those giving the gift,” John said. “We have endeavored, in the past, to support endowed student scholarships and now welcome the opportunity to expand our giving through the establishment of a faculty endowment. We encourage others to consider supporting optometric education in the manner that best suits their passion and situation.”

The Amoses are highly regarded by colleagues for their outstanding commitment to the optometric profession and the UAB School of Optometry. Each has been influential in the lives of countless patients who have benefited from their care, and the couple has served as exemplary role models for the students, residents, and alumni of the school. Their generosity contributes to the advancement of optometric education, commemorating their remarkable careers and dedication to UAB.

“John and Cathie are longtime members of the UABSO family,” said Dean Kelly Nichols. “Because of their generosity and other benefactors like them, the School is able to recruit the best and brightest students and faculty. I am grateful for their steadfast commitment to the advancement of optometric education.”

John joined the UABSO faculty in 1972, where he went on to publish two major textbooks and papers in every major optometric journal, as well as present hundreds of continuing education courses across the country. Dr. Amos was appointed as the first director of the UABSO residency programs in 1978. He served six years as the chair of the department of optometry and director of the professional

program for UABSO. He was named interim dean in 2000 and dean in 2003, a position he held until 2010, shortly before he retired. In 2015, John was honored as an emeritus professor and dean by The Board of Trustees of The University of Alabama.

Cathie has made her mark on history at UABSO and in the optometric profession. She became the first female to graduate from the School in 1974. In 1981, she became the first female president of the Alabama Optometric Association (ALOA). Cathie also served as a member of the Board of Directors of the UABSO Alumni Association and served as its first female president from 1985 to 1986. She currently serves the UAB National Alumni Society board as its president-elect.

After the passing of their son, Clark F. Amos, five men who were friends and colleagues helped establish

the Clark F. Amos Endowed Optometry Presidential Scholarship. Over 700 gifts in support of the scholarship came into the School. The scholarship is awarded to a fourthyear optometry student who has an interest in pursuing post-graduate education and whose stated intent is to choose optometric education as a career or is doing a residency. The first scholar-

ship was awarded in the spring of 2005.

The couple has been generous enough to provide multiple gifts to the School throughout the years. The Drs. John and Catherine Amos Endowed Scholarship was created in 2007 to provide financial assistance to deserving students in the UAB School of Optometry.

The Amoses’ most recent scholarship, the Dr. Catherine S. Amos Endowed Optometry Scholarship, was created in 2020 in honor of Cathie’s remarkable career. The impact she has had on the field of optometry will forever be remembered through this generous gift and the students it will support.

“Every year, for many years, deserving students benefit from the Amoses’ generosity,” Nichols said. “Now, by naming an endowed scholar, there is the opportunity for their gifts to affect other areas of the School for years to come. I am incredibly grateful for their kindness, passion and commitment to optometry and I know I also speak for our School and the entire profession.” ■

**DR. JOHN F. AMOS  
ENDOWED  
FACULTY SCHOLAR  
IN OPTOMETRY**

**EST. 2021**



EDUCATION

# Diversity education lays foundation for decreased healthcare disparities

by Satina Richardson

The education students receive at the UAB School of Optometry extends beyond subjects related to optometry and vision science. It includes educational opportunities that will produce graduates who are prepared to build doctor-patient relationships that can yield better outcomes and decrease healthcare disparities.

During March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, didactic classes became virtual and new ways to learn clinical skills were introduced due to social distancing requirements.

Technology introduced at that time, such as telehealth and TelScreens, HIPAA-compliant digital projection systems connected to cameras showing the patient and slit lamp images, remains in use.

The cry for social justice that occurred in 2020 following the tragic murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery resulted in the introduction of diversity education to the curriculum. Such opportunities had previously only been available to faculty and staff.

First year students completed a course called Cultural Awareness Building Blocks during orientation.

“This course is an essential part of our orientation experience,” said Gerald Simon, OD, associate dean of student affairs. “Altering the week-long agenda was a timely and appropriate change.”

Led by UAB’s Office of Equity Diversity and Inclusion, the session provided the framework for gaining a nuanced understanding of the various meanings and the potential impact

of diversity in higher education. The impact of identities, interactions and relationships is explored, and the session presents strategies and resources to better navigate and embrace cultural differences.

“Offering this opportunity to first year students lays a rich foundation for seeds of cultural humility in their future practice and hopefully a perspective shift that will lead to more equitable and inclusive patient care experiences,” said Michelle Allen, EdD, diversity education director in UAB’s Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Keisha Elder, OD, MS, FAAO, the School’s first director of diversity, equity and inclusion, is leading diversity education efforts at the UAB School of Optometry. She added that having

a diversity exercise during orientation also sets the tone for how students should conduct themselves as UAB optometry students.

“Diversity is one of our core values, so the session also helps students get a better idea of what this, and other core values mean to the School,” she said.

All students will also receive training annually as part of the optometry curriculum.

According to Allen, “It is important that students are offered opportunities like this throughout their matriculation and career to ensure that they are perpetually assessing and implementing strategies that support the need for equity and inclusion related to their diverse identities and model this for individuals within their scope

of care as well.”

Clinical management is one of the optometry courses that now includes diversity education. When Elder, also an associate professor, teaches during this course she communicates what cultural competency means and how providing culturally competent care yields a better quality of care, better outcomes and decreases health disparities.

“I want to make sure that our students interacting with patients see that we have similarities and differences,” she said. “They need to provide culturally sensitive care that can break down communication barriers between patients and doctors, make sure the patient is comfortable interacting with them and having them as a member of their healthcare team.” ■



“

Culturally competent care yields a better quality of care, better outcomes and decreases health disparities.”

Keisha Elder, OD, MS, FAAO, diversity director

## Diversity challenge launched in recognition of Juneteenth

UAB School of Optometry faculty and staff performed one action daily to further their understanding of power, privilege, oppression and equity during a 21-Day Diversity and Equity Challenge. The challenge began on June 19th in recognition of Juneteenth.

Juneteenth commemorates the emancipation of enslaved people in the US. The holiday was first celebrated in Texas, where on that date in 1865, in the aftermath of the Civil War, enslaved people were declared free under the terms of the 1862 Emancipation Proclamation.

Faculty and staff chose one article, video, chapter from a book, movie, etc. to experience daily during the challenge. Prompts fell into eight categories of activities: read, listen, watch, notice, connect, engage, act, and reflect, with activities being recorded in a provided tracking tool. The school’s version of the 21-day challenge was adapted from similar programs and simplified to encourage participation.

Keshia Elder, OD, MS, FAAO, UAB School of Optometry, director of diversity, equity and inclusion and the school’s Diversity Committee led the 21-Day Diversity and Equity Challenge. Other schools on the UAB campus as well as other optometry schools participated in the experience. ■



# New microscope to advance vision science discoveries at UAB

By Satina Richardson

Thanks to collaboration between the campus vision science community, UAB is one of the first, if not the first, academic center in the United States to acquire a new state-of-the-art microscope. The microscope is the only one of its kind in the southeast region and one of few available in the United States due to the newness of the technology.

The Nikon AXR Confocal Microscope has advanced artificial intelligence built into many aspects of its function, which greatly simplifies microscope setup and leads to the acquisition of the most optimal images for research purposes.

“The instrument should allow vision scientists to view microstructure and dynamics of the eye at unparalleled levels of detail that may reveal novel previously unappreciated phenomenon that lead to new treatments for ocular disease,” said Steven Pittler, VSRC co-director and UAB School of Optometry vision science professor. “UAB scientists in other fields can also

benefit from the use of the instrument for the study of non-ocular tissues and other organisms.”

According to Pittler, the microarchitecture of the anterior and posterior eye and brain structures will be studied and applied to the understanding of diseases such as glaucoma, retinal degeneration including age related macular degeneration (AMD), retinitis pigmentosa (RP) and diabetic retinopathy.

Combined funds from a National Institutes of Health/National Eye Institute (NIH/NEI) P30 Vision Core Grant, the UAB School of Optometry, the UAB School of Medicine Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences (Buck Trust), and the Vision Science Research Center (VSRC) made the acquisition possible.

The P30 Center Core Grant from the NIH/NEI funds in part the four research support cores which provide a variety of services at centralized locations on campus, ranging from comprehensive data analysis to basic

equipment repair. Renewed in 2020, the P30 has continuously helped fund the university’s vision research since 1979.

The VSRC, one of 24 UAB University-Wide Interdisciplinary Research Centers, was established to draw together vision scientists from the entire UAB campus. There are currently more than 82 appointed faculty members representing 17 departments and five schools at UAB and at the Birmingham VA Medical Center.

“This instrument is one of the most significant investments the P30 has made in its lifetime and should advance vision science discoveries in laboratories of researchers across campus,” said Brian Samuels, associate professor of ophthalmology, Dennis Endowed Professor in Glaucoma Research and P30 director.

We were in a unique position to have accumulated significant unused funds over the previous year as we worked to move all of the cores to a centralized location in Volker Hall on campus. We owe a great deal of gratitude to Drs. Kelly Nichols, Christopher Girkin, and Pittler for their generosity in matching these unused P30 funds in order to cover the cost of the instrument.”

Samuels added that without combined support, this purchase would not have been possible.

“This instrument will likely become a cornerstone for research laboratories across campus for years to come, but also an attractive resource that will help us recruit some of the most sought-after vision scientists to UAB,” he said. ■

## VISION SCIENCE STUDENTS ACHIEVE UABSO FIRSTS

Two Vision Science Program Students achieved firsts in the history of the program and at the UAB School of Optometry.



**Mai Nguyen** received an F31 Ruth L. Kirschstein Predoctoral Individual National Research Service Award. This five year NIH grant totals \$189,180. Her proposed project is titled “Characterization of DHDDS RP59 Knock-in Models of Retinitis Pigmentosa.”



**Seth D. Fortmann**, an MD/PhD student, received an F30 NIH/NEI research grant totaling \$208,840. His research is focused on the molecular mechanisms that underlie prevalent retinal diseases, specifically age-related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy.



“

This instrument is one of the most significant investments the P30 has made in its lifetime and should advance vision science discoveries in laboratories of researchers across campus,”

Brian Samuels  
Associate Professor of Ophthalmology



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Caring for the community adapted, continued during pandemic

by Caleb Jones

Eye and vision care are vital to maintaining your health and wellness. Comprehensive eye exams are recommended at all stages in life and millions of people benefit yearly from the services offered by optometrists. Despite the logistical obstacles COVID has posed to eye care professionals, the reality is that people need comprehensive eye care to live healthy lives. That’s why at Community Eye Care (CEC), the goal has remained clear: provide quality

eye care to the uninsured and underinsured. CEC is the community service arm of UAB Eye Care. Led by Dr. Janene Sims, director, the program sends clinical faculty and optometry students throughout Birmingham and the state of Alabama to provide free comprehensive eyecare to underserved communities. The program’s work has become even more important as the pandemic continues to exacerbate health disparities,



“Life sometimes presents obstacles, but obstacles are what we see when we take our eyes off the goal.”

Dr. Janene Sims,  
Director of Community Eye Care

Sims wins Odessa Woolfolk Community Service Award

Janene Sims, OD, PhD, FAAO, was honored with the 2021 UAB Odessa Woolfolk Community Service Award. This award was established by UAB to recognize one of its faculty who has rendered outstanding service to UAB’s community.

As the school’s Community Eye Care director she helps second and third year interns hone their optometry skills and learn to provide compassionate care. Sims is the organizer of Gift of Sight, optometry’s largest giving event of the year. In its eighth year, this event provides free eye care, special testing, and glasses to uninsured and underinsured patients. Many of the patients are from

homeless shelters and rehabilitation facilities in the Birmingham metro area. She is co-chair of the school’s Diversity Committee. When the nation was fighting for social justice in 2020, Sims created EyeCare4Justice. The initiative brings attention to matters of injustice and inequality. Sims routinely organizes health fairs and other community service projects at her home church of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, located in Birmingham’s Ishkooda community as well.

“Serving others has always been a part of my life,” Sims said. “My parents taught us that no matter what you have, you can always bless someone else who



is less fortunate. As a farm girl, I would watch my dad personally deliver fresh vegetables to elderly neighbors who could not afford them. When they offered to pay, he would say there was no charge. My upbringing provided me with the willingness and love for helping others.” ■

causing many people to lose their livelihoods and vision insurance. Simply put, “folks don’t disappear when something happens to the world,” Sims said. “Some people have conditions that require their eyes to be checked every year, and they depend on us to make it happen.”

To adapt to the current times, CEC had to alter many of its operations to be able to comply with COVID-19 safety regulations while still being able to do quality work.

For example: every year the program holds an event called Gift of Sight, where free eye exams and glasses are provided to eligible members in the community. The annual event is essential for patients who otherwise would be unable to receive eyecare.

“In previous years, we would only do Gift of Sight one week,” Sims explained. “In 2020, since our space was limited due to social distancing demands, we made up for it by using the entire month of November and the first week of December. We called it Gift of Sight Season, instead of Gift of Sight Week. This year we scheduled patients for the first two weeks in December.”

The altered format allowed Gift of Sight to continue, and the expanded month-long timeline in 2020 allowed

CEC to see 277 patients—more than they were able to help pre-pandemic. In 2021, 212 patients received care during the two weeks of the eighth annual event.

By implementing new social distancing guidelines and even providing mobile drive through clinics, CEC was able to safely continue visiting senior centers, pre-schools, clinics, and Black Belt communities to provide eye care throughout 2021 while the pandemic persisted.

Through it all, UAB School of Optometry students have been able to grow, adapt, and become better clinicians. According to Sims, CEC offers them the opportunity to sharpen their skills in real world situations where they may have to be creative to succeed.

Whether it be learning how to communicate with non-verbal children, or simply getting used to treating all different types of people, CEC offers students real world clinical experiences and lessons that can’t necessarily be learned in a classroom. “Community Eye Care makes you think outside the box. You can’t always do things traditionally.”

Sims said she is excited about the future of CEC and says they will continue to adapt and add new locations to better meet the needs of the community. ■



PATIENT CARE

Optical renovations usher in new phase of building updates

By Satina Richardson

Constructed in 1974, the Henry Peters Building has undergone several renovations. This series of updates that began in 2015 included classroom, pre-clinic, locker room and lounge spaces being added or expanded. A new simulation lab was added on the fourth floor. Existing common areas throughout the building were updated or made larger as well.

In 2021, the construction of a new optical space signaled the start of renovations on the ground floor where UAB Eye Care, the clinical arm of the UAB School of Optometry, is located.

Optical moved from its longtime location in the clinic’s front corner

to the center of the main lobby. The structure is all glass and brightly lit, with the frames selection on full display. There are new patient encounter pods in the front of optical that provide a private space for student interns to take patient histories, dispense glasses, or discuss insurance benefits.

A seating area is in the entrance as well as an optician station and in the back are two offices where administrative and technical work takes place. Optical’s lab location remains unchanged.

“These additions will enable the clinic to function more efficiently and enhances our ability to meet the

needs of our patients,” said Melendi Morton, clinic operations manager. “The space is bright, modern and sets a positive tone for everyone being served by our team of opticians and students.”

The clinic lobby is now better utilized too. For decades, the patient waiting area was a vast open space lined with chairs.

“The previous waiting area space was not being fully utilized,” Morton said. “Even at full patient capacity, there was a lot of unused space. Moving optical to this space gave us the opportunity to redesign the space to provide more room for other growing departments in the clinic.”

Seven new exam lanes, specialty clinics and the University Optometric Group—the school’s faculty practice—now occupy the space that optical vacated. More patient seating and two new conference rooms complete the space.

Randle Tibbs, optician supervisor, said that the renovations do more than enhance the patient experience. Thanks to the renovations, students have enhanced learning opportunities.

“The space has a private-practice feel that prepares them for their road ahead as professional optometrists,” Tibbs said. “Optical is a critical part of the patient care experience, particularly in the current changing landscape.” ■



Clinic expands low vision services

UAB Eye Care expanded its low vision services in response to the expected increased in demand for low vision care. The clinic is one of few in Alabama to offer a telemedicine option to low vision patients who cannot travel or are located in rural areas.

Each with expertise in the area, Terri Call, OD, Crystal Maharrey, OD, and Mark Swanson, OD, are the low vision providers at UAB Eye Care. Low vision services, a specialized niche in the eye care of patients with vision impairment, can be difficult to find. The care involves helping patients maximize their remaining vision with devices and training that are specific to their disorder and is provided by an optometrist with low vision training.

Telemedicine care is a unique addition to the low vision services at UAB Eye Care. Virtual evaluations and virtual device training sessions increase the availability of care to patients who are unable to travel and can enhance the optometrist’s ability to assist the patient with environment-based challenges such as lighting and physical space considerations.

UAB Eye Care has been a provider of low vision services for decades and has a strong partnership with the UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation (CLVR). A joint endeavor between the Departments of Optometry and Ophthalmology in the early 2000s, the CLVR is a space dedicated to advanced low vision care and has welcomed optometry interns since its inception. UAB Eye Care’s low vision services have since remained a primary low vision option for appropriate patients, with meaningful collaboration from the CLVR for both education and patient care.

Adding telemedicine capabilities opens the door for patients who will benefit and exposes optometry students to the technology. ■



“These additions will enable the clinic to function more efficiently and enhances our ability to meet the needs of our patients.”

Melendi Morton  
Clinic operations manager





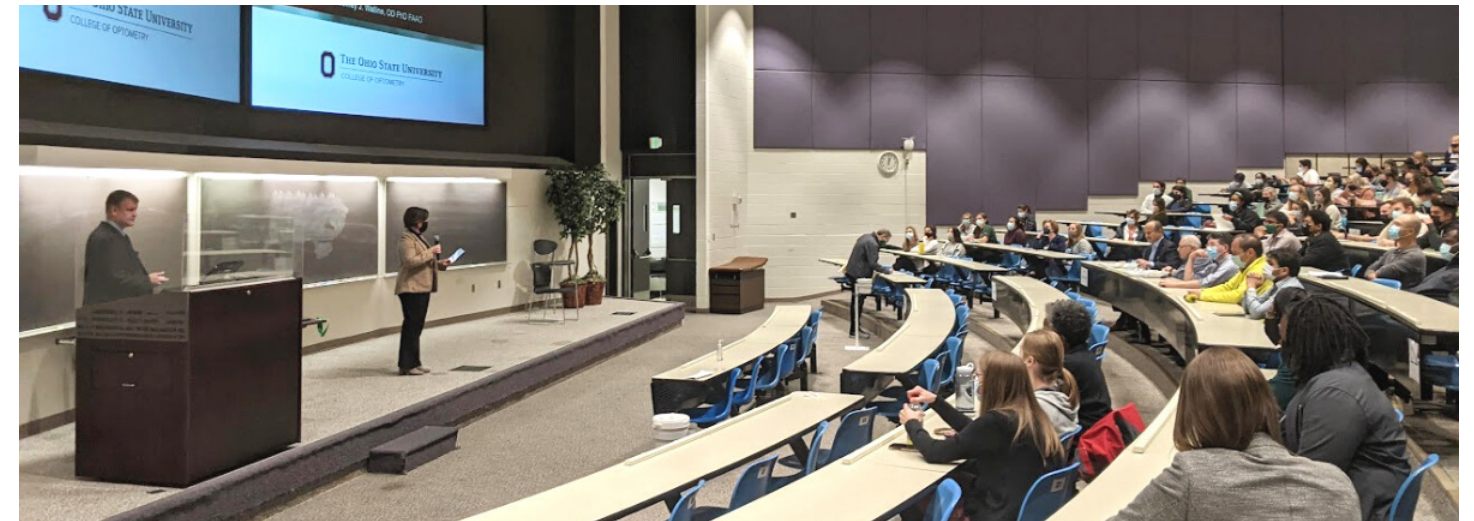
“

**It is a very exciting time to be a part of the advancement in care of our most common patients, those myopic children. We now have options for myopia control and can apply them to our patients with confidence based on scientific discovery.”**

Jeffrey Walline, OD, PhD

## Walline delivers 2021 Springer Lecture

by Satina Richardson



Jeffrey Walline, OD, PhD, delivered the 2021 Springer Lecture. This was the 23rd year for this esteemed event, which is supported by the Nathaniel E. Springer Memorial Fund established in 1999 by the Springer family and Donald Springer, OD, in memory of his father. Springer was instrumental in founding the School of Optometry.

Walline has led several pediatric contact lens studies to evaluate the effect of contact lens wear on myopia progression and children’s self-perceptions. He had a training grant from the National Eye Institute (NEI) and is currently the principal investigator of a short-term training grant and study chair of a multicenter clinical trial, both sponsored by the NEI. He also had the largest industry-sponsored grant ever conducted at The Ohio State University. His work has been presented internationally, and findings from Walline’s studies published globally by non-scientific media.

The associate dean for research at The Ohio State University College of Optometry, Walline’s presentation was titled Myopia Matters.

Takeaways from Walline’s presentation to students were to follow your passion and that myopia control may be a new standard of care. An additional takeaway was that research evolves and requires unfunded diligence.

“My career – and the careers of most scientists – began in one direction but pivoted to more fruitful, meaningful, and interesting questions to answer,” he said. “Changes are required for a variety of reasons that include personal interests, professional opportunities, and simple luck. Now my career is on a fairly straight path, but one that broadens over time and hopefully continues to answer important clinical questions.”

Walline’s early research focused on what was once a burgeoning area of interest, myopia control. Years ago, he provided continuing education to small uninterested optometrists who attended simply to meet the requirements. In contrast, Walline now lectures to hundreds of optometrists who are eager to learn about the latest knowledge and technology available to treat young myopic patients.

“Optometrists are now practicing evidence-based medicine when it comes to myopia management, and the standard of care is rapidly shifting from alleviation of symptoms to a medical model of reducing the future risks and treating the disease at the core,” he said. “It is a very exciting time to be a part of the advancement in care of our most common patients, those myopic children. We now have options for myopia control and can apply them to our patients with confidence based on scientific discovery.”

To conclude his lecture, Walline presented questions about the myopia control that researchers could soon answer:

- What slows myopia progression with multifocal CL?
- How does multifocal CL affect eye growth?
- Do multifocal CLs change accommodation?
- Is outdoor time, choroid, or ipRGC related to progression?
- Is delaying the onset of myopia possible?

Walline received his Doctor of Optometry degree from the University of California, Berkeley School of Optometry, and his master’s degree in physiological optics and PhD in vision science from The Ohio State University College of Optometry. ■



SUCCESSES

Faculty & Staff Excellence

Hopkins receives statewide teaching honor



A professor dedicated to treating young patients and training future optometrists, **Kristine Hopkins, OD, MSPH, FAAO**, was named the 2021 Alabama Optometric Association (ALOA) Educator of the Year. Hopkins joined the UAB School of Optometry faculty in the summer of 1998 working in pediatric clinical services and founded UAB Eye Care’s Vision Therapy Clinic. UAB Eye Care is the clinical arm of the school. She left to work in an Atlanta-area private practice in 2012. However, her love

for teaching influenced a return to UAB in 2015. Upon returning to the school, she took the helm as chief of vision therapy services and has remained in this role during most of her UAB career. Young optometry patients are her specialty. While both children and adults participate in the vision therapy program, the highest percentage of patients are children. Her clinical responsibilities include treating young patients as an attending in UAB Eye Care’s Pediatric Clinic as well. Involved in research, she has been an investigator with the Pediatric Eye Disease Investigator Group (PEDIG) since 1998. PEDIG is an international network of pediatric optom-

etrists and ophthalmologists supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) who have done over 20 clinical trials on the management of amblyopia (“lazy eye”) and dozens of additional trials on the management of strabismus (eye turns). Hopkins is currently the study chair for a PEDIG esotropia trial. She has led two NIH-supported clinical trials of vision therapy in the treatment of convergence insufficiency. In addition to research on amblyopia, strabismus, convergence insufficiency and vision therapy, Hopkins has been involved in research related to myopia control, focusing disorders, and eye movements in children and in patients with schizophrenia. ■

NICHOLS BECAME ASCO PRESIDENT AND NAVER/AEVR SECRETARY



**Dean Kelly Nichols** was named ASCO president for 2021-22. Nichols is the first ASCO president who also served as president of the American Optometric Student Association (AOSA). Dean Nichols was also elected secretary of the board of directors for each the National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (NAEVR) and the

Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR) for the 2021-2023 term. Few optometrists have held board positions.

STEELE NAMED DEAN’S DISTINGUISHED FACULTY AWARD RECIPIENT



The Dean’s Distinguished Faculty Award recognizes exemplary leadership and service and is only given when an individual rises to the occasion in an exceptional way. During the 2021 Doctoral

Convocation and Hooding Ceremony, the award was presented to **Elizabeth Steele, OD, FAAO**, professor and associate dean for clinical affairs.

PUCKER NAMED INTERNATIONAL CONTACT LENS FELLOW



**Andrew D. Pucker, OD, PhD**, successfully completed his fellowship in the British Contact Lens Association (BCLA). Only about 200 contact lens professionals from the

international community of contact lens industry and practice have achieved this distinction since it was introduced in 2006.

TURNER RECEIVED UAB TEACHING AWARD



**Candice Turner, OD**, received the 2021 UAB President’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. Also, in 2021 she was promoted to associate professor, non-tenure earning.

ELDER SELECTED FOR HEALTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



**Keshia S. Elder, OD, MS, FAAO**, was selected to participate in the Health Leadership Academy. She is a member of the 2022 cohort, which includes a select few from a cross-section of individuals from UAB schools, the UAB Health System and UAB Medicine.

RESEARCHER AWARDED NEI/NIH R21 GRANT



**Yuqiang (Bob) Bai, PhD**, was awarded an NEI/NIH R21 grant to develop an interferometry system with unprecedented sub-micron resolution to understand tear film structure and function in dry eye disease. The grant is for two years, totaling \$370,101.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AWARDED DRY EYE CAREER DEVELOPMENT GRANT



**Jillian F. Ziemanski, OD, PhD, FAAO**, received the 2021 Korb-Exford Dry Eye Career Development Grant for \$25,000 from the American Academy of Optometry Foundation. Her project is titled *Cytokine Priming of the Complement System at the Ocular Surface: Application to Primary Sjögren’s Syndrome*.

MORTON AND TIBBS HONORED WITH FIRST-TIME AWARD



The year 2020 was marked by constant change due to the COVID-19 pandemic start. **Melendi Morton** and **Randle Tibbs** proved to be exceptional during the most challenging time in the school’s history. For their efforts, the two were awarded the first-ever Dean’s Outstanding Staff Award at the 2021 Doctoral Convocation and Hooding Ceremony.

NICHOLS NAMED UAB’S SENIOR ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH



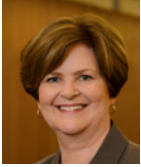
**Jason Nichols, OD, MPH, PhD, FAAO**, was named UAB’s senior associate vice president for research. Nichols’ existing responsibilities included leading entrepreneurial and clinical trial initiatives in the Office of Research, serving on the Center for Clinical and Translational Science Executive Committee, and ongoing return to research operations planning. He will now also assume leadership duties of the merged offices of Research Development & Internal Programs as well as Research Engagement & Partnerships.

OECHSLIN SELECTED FOR HEALTHCARE EDUCATORS ACADEMY



**Tamara Oechslin, OD, PhD, FAAO**, was selected for the UAB Healthcare Educators Academy’s 2021-2023 cohort, which is the second in the programs history. The three pillars of this experience are teaching others, career advancement and career fulfillment and meaning.

CLORE ENDS THREE-YEAR TERM AS CHAIR



**Katherine Clore, OD**, concluded her three-year term as chair of the Association of Optometric Contact Lens Educators. Currently, Clore is an associate professor and serves as chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee, director of the Continuing Education Department

and co-chair of the Professional Program Academic and Honor Council. She is service director of the University Optometric Group, the faculty private practice, as well.

PITTLER AND LOGAN BECOME FELLOWS OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF OPTOMETRY



**Steven Pittler, PhD, FARVO**, and **Amy Logan, OD**, became Fellows of the American Academy of Optometry. Pittler is a professor and director of the UAB Vision Science Research Center, while Logan is an assistant professor. In qualifying for and maintaining the fellowship, individuals are evaluated against the highest standards of professional competence in their areas of expertise.






SUCCESSES

Faculty Hires and Promotions


QUINET JOINED AS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

 **Julie Quinet, PhD**, joined UABSO as an assistant professor, tenure track. Quinet’s current research focus is the study of the oculomotor system and more specifically, the neuronal network involved in coordinated eye movements in three-dimensional space.


OPTOMETRY WELCOMED KHANAL AS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

 **Safal Khanal, OD, PhD, FAAO**, joined optometry as a tenure-track assistant professor. In his role, Khanal will lead an independent research program, in addition to teaching professional and graduate courses and contributing to professional service. His current research focus is on understanding the mechanisms of eye growth regulation and refractive development and formulating novel, effective strategies targeted at preventing the onset and slowing the progression of myopia in children.


ROTHSTEIN WELCOMED AS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

 **Andrew Rothstein, OD**, was welcomed as an assistant professor. He earned his bachelor’s degree in Zoology, with honors, before attending The Ohio State University College of Optometry. Rothstein serves as a clinical attending in the Primary Care Clinic as well as in numerous specialty clinics including the PATH clinic and the UAB 1917 clinic.

SIMON NAMED ASSOCIATE DEAN

 **Gerald Simon, OD**, was named associate dean for student affairs. Simon spent a decade with Cole Vision Corporation and was recruited to work for UABSO as director of minority recruitment and as an associate clinical professor in 2000. Since 2004, in addition to being an associate clinical professor, he has served as director of student affairs.

VISION SCIENCE GRADUATE PROGRAM LEADERSHIP APPOINTED

 **Tim Kraft, PhD**, became the acting associate dean for research and graduate studies. While **Lawrence Sincich, PhD**, became the director of the graduate program and was promoted to professor. Each previously served as interim director of the Vision Science Graduate Program from 2019 to 2021 prior to these appointments.

GORDON PROMOTED TO PROFESSOR


 **Adam Gordon, OD**, was promoted to professor. He joined the faculty in 1984 and serves as the Department of Optometry and Vision Science chair, director of the Cornea and Contact Lens Service and coordinator of the residency program in cornea and contact lenses.




SUCCESSES

Student Success


POLEON NAMED 2021 PREVENT BLINDNESS RISING VISIONARY AWARD RECIPIENT

 **Shervonne Poleon**, Vision Science Graduate Program student, received the 2021 Prevent Blindness Rising Visionary Award. The Prevent Blindness Rising Visionary Award is presented annually to an optometry student or resident, ophthalmology resident, primary health care, nursing, or other health professional student or resident in the United States who has the best essay based on the 2021 Focus on Eye Health National Summit theme: Our Changing Vision.



JACKSON NAMED NOA STUDENT OF THE YEAR

 Alumnus **Walter Jackson, OD**, was named National Optometric Association Student of the Year. The Class of 2021 graduate, who also served as the national president of the National Optometric Student Association (NOSA) also received the Dr. Marvin R. Poston Leadership Award. The honor recognizes outstanding optometry students and members of NOSA. All award recipients chosen embody the entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to diversity of Poston, a founding member of Vision Service Plan.

STUDENTS GAIN NATIONAL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS, SCHOLARSHIP AT NOA CONVENTION


   At the 2021 National Optometric Association (NOA) National Convention, three students from the UAB School of Optometry were elected leaders of NOSA and awarded a scholarship. **Kierra Goins** (class of 2022) was elected recording secretary, **Daniele Ewert** (class of 2023) was elected treasurer, and **Darian Travis** (class of 2023) was awarded the Dr. Will Kelley Memorial Scholarship.

LANE AND CAMP RECEIVED THE 2021 AAOF/VSP PRACTICE EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIPS

  **Annie Lane** and **Riley Camp** are recipients of the 2021 AAOF and VSP Practice Excellence Scholarships. The travel grant enabled these outstanding students to attend a premier education opportunity in primary eye care,

as well as attend a reception hosted by VSP Global to help foster networking opportunities and teach the importance of Academy Fellowship. The students were nominated by one of the clinical faculty and selected from the list of nominees by the UABSO Awards and Scholarship committee.

TRAVIS AWARDED J. PAT CUMMINGS SCHOLARSHIP

 The American Academy of Optometry Foundation, in collaboration with Johnson & Johnson Vision, announced that **Darian Travis**, class of 2023, was a winner of the 2021 J. Pat Cummings Scholarship. This award is bestowed annually to a second or third year optometry student who best demonstrates the ideal eye care standards of practice, achievement in both academic performance and extracurricular activities, and participation with other professional pursuits such as involvement with patients through internships, community service, and other volunteer activities.

PLATT WINS NOSA LOGO DESIGN CONTEST

 **Emily Platt**, class of 2024, won NOSA’s logo contest. The former art student’s design is now the official logo for the organization. NOSA is an international service organization of over 1,000 optometry students dedicated to increasing access to eyecare for minority and underserved communities.





# Alumni Association: A look back

The Alumni Association is grateful to have continued several traditions that support the School's students who will soon become our colleagues and fellow alumni.

The Association continued the Alumni Transition Panel for the fourth-year class. This event gives fourth year students an opportunity to ask young alumni questions about their experiences moving from optometry school to the workforce. The Association also supported student appreciation events throughout the year, including Homecoming.

A top priority is to support UAB-SO students in a variety of ways, this includes easing the financial burden that often comes with attending optometry school. To that end, in 2021 the Association awarded nine scholarships to the following deserving students:

- Dr. Jimmy D Bartlett Endowed Optometry Scholarship:

- **Sara Browning**, class of 2024
- Dr. Elbert A. "Bert" Coshatt Endowed Optometry Scholarship: **Lauren Metzler**, class of 2023
- Dr. Jess Boyd Eskridge Endowed Optometry Scholarship: **Tessa Fredel**, class of 2022
- Dr. Terrence N. Ingraham Endowed Optometry Scholarship: **Hugo Hernandez**, class of 2023
- Dr. Charles A. "Scotty" McCallum Endowed Optometry Scholarship: **Tracy Hutchings**, class of 2021
- Dr. E. C. Overton Endowed Optometry Scholarship: **Erin Bishop**, class of 2024
- Dr. L. Don Snellgrove Endowed Scholarship in Optometry: **Kayla Tucker**, class of 2022
- Dr. Edgar M. Warr Alumni Endowed Optometry Scholarship: **Hailey Dunlow**, class of 2024
- Dr. Bradford W. Wild Endowed Scholarship in the School of Optometry: **Whitney Powell**, class of 2021



**Dr. Rob Pate**, class of 2007, was recognized as the 2021 Alumnus of the Year and **Dr. Brandon Runyon**, class of 2013, as our 2021 Young Alumnus of the Year.

There are great things happening at UABSO, and we are eager to support the students and future optometrists of this great profession. ■

## Pate named Alumnus of the Year



The UAB School of Optometry Alumni Association named **Rob Pate, OD**, class of 2007, 2021 Alumnus of the Year. Pate has held numerous positions in professional optometry organizations, including Alabama Optometric Association (ALOA) president, Southern Council of Optometrists International (SECO) trustee, and zone president. He served as chair of the American Optometric Association (AOA) Special Olympics Opening Eyes Program and speaker for the InfantSEE® Program. In the past, he has also been selected as the Young OD of the Year for the AOA, ALOA and SECO. He is currently in private practice in Auburn, AL. ■

## Runyon named UABSO Young Alumnus of the Year



The UAB School of Optometry Alumni Association named **Brandon Runyon, OD**, class of 2013, the 2021 Young Alumnus of the Year. Runyon is the former residency program coordinator and chief of optometry at Chinle Service Unit in Chinle, AZ. He currently works in a new position with Virginia Eye Consultants in Norfolk, VA. As he continues his career, Runyon is hopeful that he can continue to inspire others to fully utilize their education and training in clinical practice. He plans to continue to lecture and share knowledge at various state and national meetings, and ideally will continue to pursue clinical teaching of students and/or residents. ■

## The 2020-2021 officers of the Alumni Board

- President**  
Sharon Day, O.D., '87  
Gardendale, AL
- President-Elect**  
Jamie Hill, O.D., '09  
Charleston, SC
- Secretary/Treasurer**  
Valencia Wells, O.D., '09, Birmingham, AL
- Immediate Past President**  
Candice Turner, O.D., '03  
Birmingham, AL

BOARD MEMBERS-AT-LARGE		
<b>Terms Expiring 2021</b>	Samara Perryman, O.D., '17	Sarah Erwin, O.D., '15
	Gussie Branch, O.D., '16 Oneonta, AL	Troy, AL Barren Springs, VA
<b>Terms Expiring 2023</b>	Joel Jenkins, O. D., '83 Athens, GA	Crystal Maharrey, O.D., '18 Birmingham, AL
		Alicia Thibodeaux, O.D., '16 Gallup, NM
<b>Terms Expiring 2022</b>	Tim Ansley, O.D., '14 Helena, AL	Nicole Guyette, O.D., '14 Hoover, AL
<b>Terms Expiring 2024</b>	Haley Perry, O.D., '09 Fletcher, NC	Jonathan Davis, O.D., '18 Decatur, AL

## Graduates receive UAB Excellence in Business Award



**Shad Wheatley, OD**, and **Warren Gwynn, OD**, won a UAB Excellence in Business Top 25 Award given by the UAB National Alumni Society. The two graduated from the UAB School of Optometry in 2002 and 2014, respectively, and are owners of Eye Care on the Ridge.

Wheatley founded Eye Care on the Ridge in 2011. Gwynn joined the Southwestern Virginia practice as an owner in 2015. The practice has evolved from one with a part-time doctor to a practice that serves six counties, has three locations, six doctors, and more than 30 staff. ■







The UAB School of Optometry Dean's Report is published annually. Send address changes and correspondence to Sarah Gullledge, UAB School of Optometry, HPB 124C, 1720 2nd Ave South, Birmingham AL 35294, or [sarahmg@uab.edu](mailto:sarahmg@uab.edu).

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