

A young woman with dark hair is smiling and giving a thumbs-up gesture. She is wearing a VR headset and holding a VR controller in her left hand. She is wearing a teal-colored shirt. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

DEAN'S REPORT 2022



SCHOOL OF OPTOMETRY

The University of Alabama at Birmingham



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3 **A LETTER FROM THE DEAN**
- 4 **EDUCATION**
International optometry program launched
- 8 **DISCOVERY**
School of Optometry adds faculty and grants to its growing field of research
- 11 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**
Student gives back, plans eye clinic in family's hometown
- 14 **PATIENT CARE**
Infant helped by new Pediatric Aphakia Clinic
- 16 **SPRINGER LECTURE IN 24TH YEAR**
- 18 **FACULTY, STAFF AND STUDENT SUCCESS**
- 21 **ALUMNI DEVELOPMENT**

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

Dean's Group

Chris Boutwell, MAc
Executive Director of Administrative Operations

Keisha Brown, OD
Director of Diversity Equity and Inclusion

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

Tim Kraft, PhD
Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies

Gerald Simon, OD
Associate Dean for Student Affairs

Steve Pittler, PhD, FARVO, FAAO
Director of the Vision Science Research Center

Lawrence Sincich, PhD
Director of the Graduate Program

Elizabeth Steele, OD, FAAO
Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs

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

A Letter from the Dean

If I were to select one word to summarize 2022, it would be **GROWTH**. Several new faces joined the School's community over the last 12 months and anyone who has spent time in the Henry Peters Building has grown accustomed to welcoming new smiling faces amongst faculty and staff.

The research team has particularly expanded, welcoming tenure-track assistant professors who eagerly staffed their labs and began careers in academia. The pertinent research they began prior to joining the faculty of the UAB School of Optometry will continue, ensuring the continued success for our research team.

Academic offerings were expanded as the Doctor of Optometry Program for International Students welcomed its first cohort with open arms. While international students have always been part of the UABSO community, this program is for optometry students educated abroad and facilitates their goal of practicing optometry in the United States.

Our growth has brought renewed energy to the School of Optometry as well as a refreshed approach to how the needs of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and patients should be met. It is easy to see that we are poised for success well into the future.

KK Nichols

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

EDUCATION

International optometry program launched

The Doctor of Optometry Program for International Students (DOPIS) welcomed three internationally trained students to the inaugural cohort in the summer of 2022.

Program applicants must hold a doctoral, master's or bachelor's in optometry degree from an accredited or recognized international optometric college/university. Through the UAB School of Optometry's program, they can earn a Doctor of Optometry degree in 24 months. This program is open to individuals living in the United States as well as to those living abroad. The DOPIS program is accredited by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education.

"International students have long been part of the UABSO family," said Kelly Nichols, UAB School of Optometry dean. "The new program facilitates the opportunity specifically for international optometry students who want to practice in the United States to achieve their goal."

Shankari Garcia, Shivali Sharma and Keyur Savla made up this initial cohort. Garcia, from the United States, holds a Bachelor of Optometry from Anglia Ruskin University in the United Kingdom and has a master's in clinical optometry from Salus University. Sharma, from Canada, holds a Bachelor of Optometry from Ashton University in Birmingham, England. Savla, from India, holds a Bachelor of Optometry from the Lotus College of Optometry in Mumbai and is also pursuing a doctorate in vision science from UAB.

Each of the students experiences both didactic and clinical studies, which exposes them to a variety of teachings. The cohort's initial clinical teachings are guided by Jennifer Craig, OD, coursemaster for the DOPIS Clinical Skills Lab.

This intensive five-week course covered the skills needed to perform a comprehensive eye exam. It included a review of skills they already knew and provided the opportunity to learn new skills. At the end of the course, each student had to perform a comprehensive eye exam successfully so they could begin fall clinical rotations alongside third year optometry students.

"Since these students had already been practicing in another country, they were familiar with some of the skills we teach our students, so that laid a good foundation for the additional skills we teach our students here," Craig said. "They were all incredibly dedicated and worked tirelessly in the short amount of time we were given to hone these skills in order to be successful in clinic and provide excellent patient care."

The DOPIS students entered the program with varied professional goals. For Savla, "Academia would be the ultimate ideal career opportunity. However, the industry also has a lot of research and training opportunities, and I am open to exploring those."

Director of Student Affairs, Connie Wright, said that the DOPIS program is a welcome addition to the School's catalog of academic offerings, which includes three dual-degree programs (OD/MPH, OD/MBA and OD/MS), as well as three in-house and five affiliated

EDUCATION

211

Optometry Students

10

Dual-Degree Students

1

Master's Student

20

Doctoral Students

426

optometrists have completed residencies

10

members (25%) of the 2022 class matched into competitive residencies

16

residents in eight UABSO programs

CLASS OF 2026

356

Applicants

153

Interviews

48

Matriculated

3.63

Average GPA

321

OAT Academic Average

1,586

total OD program graduates

"There are a limited number of international programs like this in the United States so applicants are eagerly expressing interest in this opportunity at UAB."

Connie Wright
Director of Student Affairs



International optometry continued

residencies. The Vision Science Graduate Program offers students the opportunity to earn a master's or doctorate in vision science.

"There are a limited number of international programs like this in the United States so applicants are eagerly expressing interest in this opportunity at UAB," she said. "The university is one of few optometry schools based in the heart of a renowned academic health center which gives us an advantage that others don't have."

Wright added that the goal is to grow the program over the next few years along with fine-tuning this accelerated program at UABSO.

Refractive and ocular surgery residency added

A new residency in ocular disease with an emphasis in refractive and ocular surgery is now available through the UAB School of Optometry. Based at the Eye Center of Texas in Houston with four positions available, the program affiliation began in June 2022 and is accredited by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education.

The mission of the 13-month program—Residency in Ocular Disease and Refractive and Ocular Surgery—is to provide qualified postdoctoral optometry graduates with advanced competency in all areas of ocular disease and co-management of ocular surgery. Patient care, didactic education, and scholarship promote the development of this knowledge and skill. Residents who complete the program are expected to provide an advanced level of clinical care in ocular disease and co-management of ocular surgery. Amanda Bachman, OD, and Jill Autry, OD, RPh are co-supervisors for the program.

Adding this new residency affiliate brought the total number of residency programs to eight, with a total of 16 positions available. There are three in-house opportunities at UAB Eye Care, the clinical arm of the UAB School of Optometry. The five affiliated programs are in Birmingham, Atlanta, Tuscaloosa, Nashville, and Houston.



"This is an incredible honor, and I am humbled to be the first CooperVision Endowed Scholar at the UAB School of Optometry."

Adam Gordon, OD, MPH, FAAO

Gordon named CooperVision Endowed Scholar

Adam Gordon, OD, MPH, FAAO, was named the UAB School of Optometry's first CooperVision Endowed Scholar – Myopia Management and Contact Lenses.

"This is an incredible honor, and I am humbled to be the first CooperVision Endowed Scholar at the UAB School of Optometry," Gordon said. "I am grateful for the opportunity to hold this position and continue to work with talented faculty, students, residents, and staff. This generous endowment from CooperVision is an investment in the future of contact lens and myopia management education, research, and patient care at the School."

As the selected scholar, Gordon is empowered to use the allocated funds to explore topics of his choice related to myopia control and contact lenses. He is committed to all aspects of cornea and contact lenses; however, the use of medically necessary contact lenses for patients with keratoconus, post-surgical conditions and ocular surface diseases is of particular interest. The use of lenses for myopia control is of special interest as well.

Gordon, who is a professor of optometry, director of the Cornea and Contact Lens Service at UAB Eye Care and chair of the School's Department of Optometry and Vision Science, was selected by Kelly K. Nichols, UAB School of Optometry dean, to receive this honor.

"Dr. Gordon is an exemplary educator of his patients, students and the cornea and the contact lens resident he supervises," she said. "His knowledge base is expansive, and we are pleased to help further his learnings with CooperVision's support."

The endowed scholar is a portion of CooperVision's gift to the School. This gift also funds research awards for students earning dual Doctor of Optometry and master's in vision science degrees. Additionally, practicing optometrists pursuing a doctorate in vision science and conducting research in contact lenses and/or myopia management are potentially eligible for support due to this generous gift.

DISCOVERY

Faculty and grants added to growing field of research

When it comes to research faculty recruitment and research grants, 2022 was a very good year for the UAB School of Optometry.

Four new faculty members joined the School of Optometry, bringing an expansion in areas of expertise. There also was a 4-percent growth in funding through a total of more than 20 grants that were either new or renewed within the vision science department.

"I'm very proud of the overall health of the research program in the School of Optometry," says Timothy Kraft, PhD, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies. "We've had a combination of successful recruiting of new faculty who have quickly had success in achieving funding to get their research programs started, as well as new awards by senior faculty."

Kraft says faculty recruitment is a priority for the School of Optometry, partly because several current members are nearing retirement, and school officials want to be proactive in maintaining a full, experienced staff.

"We're looking for both a rejuvenation and an expansion," Kraft says. "We're working to maintain a high quality of involvement with our faculty in both clinical science and translational science by hiring faculty who will communicate with each other and potentially work together."

The four new assistant professors are already funded and their labs are staffed, and they are all on the tenure track.

Edmund Arthur, OD, PhD, FAAO: Earned his OD from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana, followed by a PhD in Vision Science with a Biostatistics minor from Indiana University. Arthur's PhD dissertation focused on detecting preclinical retinal changes in diabetic patients using advanced retinal imaging.

"Dr. Arthur is interested in using the eye as a prognosticator of systemic diseases such as diabetic retinopathy and Alzheimer's, where the eye can tell us things about the body," Kraft says. "He has been a very prolific grant writer, and got an outstanding score on his first R21 submission."

Safal Khanal, OD, PhD, FAAO: Received his optometry and vision science training in Nepal and the Philippines before joining the University of Auckland School of Optometry and Vision Science in New Zealand, where he gained his first postdoctoral fellowship. He then moved to the U.S. for his second postdoctoral fellowship at UAB.

"Dr. Khanal works on dry eye and the mechanisms of myopia from a molecular standpoint," Kraft says. "He has already won two awards, including a \$100,000 grant (from the E. Matilda Ziegler Foundation for the Blind)."

Julie Quinet, PhD: Earned her PhD in Neurosciences from the Claude Bernard Lyon I University in France. She came to UAB after several postdoctoral positions, including at the University of Rochester in New York and the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

"Dr. Quinet has excellent funding through a five-year R01 grant for primate research on binocular vision, and she also teaches binocular vision material to our students," Kraft says. "She's a really good fit for our school."

Yuchen Wang, PhD: Received his PhD in Molecular Pharmacology from Purdue University, then spent time at the University of Florida Scripps Biomedical Research lab studying the molecular mechanisms that govern the selective wiring of rods and cones.

"Dr. Wang arrived in July with a prestigious NIH R00 award, which funds multiple years of post-doctoral fellowship," Kraft says. "He's working on the development of synaptic connections in the retina. There are a number of eye diseases in which that's a problem."

Overall, more than three-fourths of the School of Optometry's faculty is involved in some sort of research.

"That means a lot of clinicians are working on research projects along with their main task of teaching clinical instruction," Kraft says. "So there is a healthy integration of research within the school that is both new and old, and runs across many different disciplines."



Edmund Arthur, OD, PhD, FAAO



Safal Khanal, OD, PhD, FAAO



Julie Quinet, PhD



Yuchen Wang, PhD

R01 to study effects of vesicants on ocular tissues

Marina Gorbatyuk, PhD, has been awarded a three-year, \$445,500, R01 grant co-funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the National Eye Institute (NEI).

She will study the effects of chemical vesicants such as lewisite and nitrogen mustard. Exposure to vesicants typically results in skin blistering and corneal tissue damage in humans.

“The eye is 10 times more susceptible to exposure to vesicant chemical warfare agents than other organs, for example, the skin or the respiratory tract,” Gorbatyuk says. “The lack of molecular understanding of the underlying mechanism driving the ocular tissue pathobiology in victims of vesicant exposures impedes the development of effective medical countermeasures. In this proposal, we attempt to uncover the key molecular signaling controlling acute and chronic stages of ocular injury because of direct exposure to vesicants.”

The long-term goal of the research is to generate effective medical countermeasures (MCMs) to prevent vesicant-induced ocular damage and promote healing.

“Understanding the underlying mechanism responsible for the ocular damage and progressive ocular injuries resulting from vesicant exposure is critical to the development of effective mechanism-based MCMs,” Gorbatyuk says.



Marina Gorbatyuk, PhD

A professor of vision science at the UAB School of Optometry, the new grant is Gorbatyuk’s third NEI R01 grant. In addition to the new grant, she is currently funded by her second R01, which she received in 2018. The \$1.25 million five-year NEI grant studied the regulation of protein synthesis in photoreceptors of mice with inherited retinal degeneration. Gorbatyuk’s first grant was received in 2010, also for five years. It examined the activation of the unfolded protein response in mice with inherited retinal degeneration and validated therapeutic approaches based on cellular network reprogramming in degenerating photoreceptors.

RESEARCH

\$4,280,900

total funding for 2021-2022

Ranked 5th

nationally by ASCO in overall research out of 23 Schools

77%

faculty participation in research efforts

20+

new research or renewed grants and contracts in 2022

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Student gives back to family's hometown

Prior to applying to optometry school, Dustin Scott was a Community Eye Care (CEC) work study. This experience allowed him to witness firsthand the impact that visits to the Black Belt to provide free eye and vision care had on the communities.

Now a student at the UAB School of Optometry, Scott participates in Black Belt visits as a part of his clinical learning experience. Scott, class of 2024, re-mains so in awe of how these events affect people that, although his studies are demanding, he pursued the idea of having a CEC clinic in York, AL.

Janene Sims, OD, PhD, CEC director said, “Dustin asked me if we could hold this event in his hometown. The CEC planning team and York’s Mayor along with his staff held a Zoom planning meeting and the event took shape over a few months.”

York as a location came to mind because Scott has roots there. His father’s side of the family is from there, and most of them live in York and the surrounding areas. Also, he knew there is a need for the care that CEC provides which includes free comprehensive eye exams, glasses, and referrals for additional care, if necessary.

York is a small town of 2,500 located in west Alabama’s Sumter County, one of the poorest counties in Alabama and in the nation year-over-year. According to 2020 Census data, the median household income was less than \$30,000. The racial make-up of York is 87 percent African American, 9 percent White and three percent other races.

“African Americans are at an increased risk for several systemic conditions, and ocular diseases that can threaten vision, but this area has very little access to quality general healthcare, let alone eye care,” Scott said. “Eye care often takes a backseat on the priority list.”

The first CEC clinic in York was held on September 10 at the York West End Junior High School. CEC interns, residents, faculty, and staff saw 53 patients in just five hours. Appointment slots filled quickly. Conditions discovered included central retinal vein occlusion, hypertensive retinopathy, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, pupil abnormality, and undiagnosed hypertension—optometrists can help detect systemic conditions including hypertension, diabetes, and even certain cancers with a dilated eye exam.

“For some patients, we provided them with their first eye exam and pair of glasses,” Scott said. “I hoped that we would provide help that people needed. I also wished that this event would not be

COMMUNITY IMPACT

7,213

Community Eye Care patients

1,159

free glasses for the underserved

2,873

community screenings



Dustin Scott, class of 2024

School leads World Games eye care program



Kathy Weise, OD, MBA, FAAO

The UAB School of Optometry led efforts to provide eye and vision care to World Games athletes during the multi-sport international event in Birmingham, July 7-17, 2022.

While the approximately 3500 athletes were in the city, Kathy Weise, OD, MBA, FAAO, UAB School of Optometry professor, was the first eye care provider called if an athlete experienced an ocular injury or emergency. Weise's team included Mark Swanson, OD, MSPH, FAAO, UAB Eye Care's director of ocular disease, as well as dedicated ophthalmologists from the UAB Department of Ophthalmology.

Weise is a longtime provider of eye care for UAB athletes. She is the lead UAB athletics team eye doctor and founder of BlazerVision.



Student gives back continued



Dustin Scott's family

a singular trip and that we would be able to come back and help more people."

Local family members attended to support Scott's efforts with his mother flying from San Diego, CA, and his brothers from Houston, TX.

"I attended Optometry school with the desire to help people," Scott said. "If you took a random sample of people and asked them what sense would be the most devastating to lose, I'd bet the majority of them would say sight. It's truly rewarding to help people with the sense we all undoubtedly value."

"If you took a random sample of people and asked them what sense would be the most devastating to lose, I'd bet the majority of them would say sight. It's truly rewarding to help people with the sense we all undoubtedly value."

Dustin Scott, student

Partnership helps men getting second chances

Alabama Appleseed Center for Law and Justice's legal work celebrates second chances for incarcerated men ages 50-plus and getting a new lease on life after decades of incarceration for offenses without physical injury. A partnership with UAB Eye Care is eliminating the barrier of access to eye and vision care for those preparing to reenter society.

Most of Appleseed's clients have few resources readily available so the organization provides essentials, including clothing, transportation and referrals for medical care. All of this is part of the six-month or more reentry support Appleseed provides to help clients relearn the basics of living everyday life. Providing access to free eye and vision care plus free glasses through UAB Eye Care is part of the program.

Community Eye Care (CEC), the community service arm of the UAB Eye Care, became an Appleseed partner in 2021. Since then, the CEC team has provided care to all Appleseed clients experiencing the reentry process.

"Decades without a thorough eye exam can be detrimental to a person's health, so Appleseed prioritizes eye exams, in addition to other general medical exams, for the average client," said Alex McKenzie LaGanke, JD, MPA, Appleseed staff attorney. "Being able to provide our clients access to eye care through UAB Eye Care not only ensures safe driving and workplace safety but also rules out various illness and disease, among other precautions, all of which are essential to successful reentry."

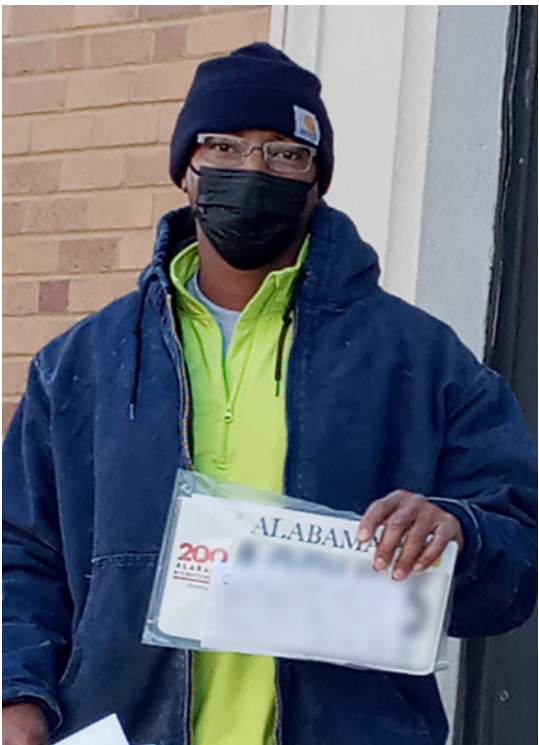
Janene Sims, OD, PhD, CEC director, reiterated the importance of eye care as part of a routine healthcare regimen. She explained that not having a comprehensive eye exam over a period of time puts someone's vision at risk since some conditions, like glaucoma, aren't obvious until vision loss occurs. Because eye doctors can detect problems

from systemic conditions, including high blood pressure, certain cancers and diabetes, other health conditions could go undiagnosed and untreated without a comprehensive eye exam.

Joe Bennett is one of Appleseed's clients who visited UAB Eye Care. In 1997, Bennett was given two life-without-parole sentences. He was released in 2021 at 53-years-old due in part to changes in Alabama laws. After receiving eye care as part of the Appleseed reentry program, Bennett has been working full-time.

"This was the most thorough eye examination I have ever received in my life," he said. "I am pleased and appreciative to be a patient of UAB Eye Care."

Sims said the CEC and Appleseed make a great team. "Our partnership with Appleseed lines up perfectly with our goal of providing quality care to those in need regardless of their ability to pay," she said. "We feel fortunate to play a role in enhancing the lives of people in need and look forward to a relationship that will last for years to come."



"This was the most thorough eye examination I have ever received in my life," he said. "I am pleased and appreciative to be a patient of UAB Eye Care."

Joe Bennett

PATIENT CARE

Infant helped by new Pediatric Aphakia Clinic

After his pediatrician found an abnormal red reflex in his eyes, baby Kash Kennamer was referred to an ophthalmologist who diagnosed the infant with aphakia. Then at four months old, Kash underwent cataract surgery. Following a referral from Callahan Eye Hospital, one week later, his parents brought Kash to UAB Eye Care's new Pediatric Aphakia Clinic started by Natalie West, OD.

"My husband Tate and I drive from Huntsville so Kash can receive care," his mother Hannah said. "We wanted to ensure that he would receive the best care possible and we knew that he could at UAB. I feel confident in the doctor's knowledge and ability to take the best care of our son."

Aphakia is the lack of natural focusing lenses in the eye due to bilateral congenital cataracts, which Kash had removed. West explained that unlike

most adults who undergo cataract surgery, most infants do not receive implants to replace the natural lens of the eye. The continual changes in eye growth over the first 12-18 months of life and the potential need for more surgeries make implants impossible.

"This leaves the infant with a very high prescription that needs to be corrected in order to provide good visual input to the brain," she said. "Contact lenses are a great option compared to glasses for some of these patients. Contact lenses offer better visual optics for patients compared to glasses, due to the thickness in the glasses prescription needed for these patients. Contact lenses also allow a better chance of continual wear of the prescription because babies cannot take them out, compared to the babies' ability to pull at and remove glasses

from their face."

Contact lenses proved to be Kash's best option. West fitted Kash for hard contact lenses in both eyes to correct his high prescription.

Hannah said, "This experience has not been the easiest but seeing how big his smile is and interactive he is once his contacts are in makes it all worth it. We have learned so much about our son and his condition through all of his doctor visits and his daily eye care routine. We feel all the doctors have been very transparent with us and it has allowed us to trust them in taking care of our son."

Although the experience has been challenging so far, Kash's prognosis is great. In 2019, the Infant Aphakia Treatment Study (IATS) reported that for a group of 96 children who underwent cataract surgery between the ages of one to seven months old, the median visual acuity at age five years old was 20/45.

While the clinic is new, providing care for aphakic infants isn't new to UAB Eye Care's pediatrics department. Kathy Weise, OD, MBA, pediatric service director, has been providing care for aphakic infants since 2015. West began working with her and these patients in 2019 during her residency training and has continued since joining the faculty in 2020.

When asked about her goal as leader of the new Pediatric Aphakia Clinic, West said, "Many of our current patients and families in this clinic drive several hours to see us. My goal is to train future optometrists in this area to increase access to quality eye care for this specialized patient population."

PATIENT CARE

25,107

patient visits at UAB Eye Care and the University Optometric Group

2 In-house clinics added

- Adult Double Vision Clinic
- Pediatric Aphakia Clinic

2 Offsite clinic locations added

- The 1917 Clinic at UAB
- United Ability Pediatric Clinic



Former optical space repurposed

The area that previously housed the optical department has been designed to give the space new purposes. Seven new exam lanes, two conference rooms, new office space and additional patient seating now occupy the area where optical used to be. This and the School of Optometry renovations on the ground through fifth floors received a 2022 People's Choice Award from Birmingham's American Institute of Architecture. Managed by the architecture firm Birchfield Penuel & Associates (BPA), the renovations began in 2018.



1917 Clinic presence marks milestone

UAB Eye Care, the clinical arm of the UAB School of Optometry, began seeing patients at the 1917 Clinic, the largest HIV health care unit in Alabama and one of the country's leading HIV clinics. Eye care at the clinic began on February 14, 2022.

This is the first time eye care has been provided onsite at the 1917 Clinic. Moving to a larger space made the addition of optometry into the multidisciplinary clinic possible.

Semes honored as the 2022 Springer Lecturer

In its 24th year, the annual Springer Lecture brings a distinguished vision scientist or clinician to the UAB School of Optometry to share knowledge with students and faculty. Leo Semes, OD, FAAO, was the 2022 guest lecturer.

Semes, a UABSO emeritus professor, and retired clinician scientist, titled his lecture *How Discovery Favors the Prepared Mind*. He explained the meaning of the title.

"This phrase comes from Louis Pasteur when he delivered his opening address to the faculty at the University of Lille," Semes said. "My interpretation is that one should be aware of opportunities by being curious and asking good questions."

The presentation proved this point by conveying that all questions are important and that something can be learned from each patient encounter. Additionally, some of the broader research projects cited gave the audience a sense of what new doors can open from scientific publishing and presenting.

Semes is a longtime member of the School's family. He joined the faculty in 1979 and retired in 2016. His roles included acting as the chief in the Division of Primary Care Services and serving as director of Continuing Education for 25 years. At the time of retirement, he was a professor and director of externships.

During Semes' tenure he contributed significantly to the scientific community, earning a reputation for clinical research. He served numerous professional organizations and received several awards, including being a recipient of the Dean's Distinguished Service Award. Currently, he is a well-known continuing education speaker within the field of optometry.

"Dr. Semes' important work has distinguished him as a leader in optometric research and clinical care," said Kelly Nichols, OD, MPH, PhD, FAAO, UAB School of Optometry dean. "It is our pleasure to recognize someone as prominent in their field. On behalf of the school and the optometric

community, we are very excited about Dr. Semes' selection as this year's Springer Lecturer."

The lecture is supported by the Nathaniel E. Springer Memorial Fund, which was established in 1999 to bring distinguished vision scientists or clinicians to the School of Optometry to share knowledge with faculty and students.

The fund was created by Donald Springer, OD, who was instrumental in the founding of the School of Optometry and a leader in optometry in Alabama and the nation, along with other members of the Springer family in memory of Springer's father Nathaniel E. Springer. Donald Springer died in 2011.



Dr. Leo Semes is pictured with Theresa Springer, wife of the late Dr. Donald Springer.



Faculty, Staff and Student Success

Faculty & Staff Excellence



Janene Sims, OD, PhD, associate professor, was named 2022 ALOA Educator of the Year.



Lei Liu, PhD, professor, received the Alabama Vision Achievement VI Research Award from the Alabama White Cane Day Committee.



Jason Nichols, OD, MPH, PhD, professor and the UAB Office of Research's senior associate vice president for research, received the 2022 Donald R. Korb Award.



Keshia S. Elder, OD, MS, MS, FAAO, professor, became the first African American female in the nation to lead a school of optometry. Elder also received the Dr. Millicent Knight Trailblazer Award from the National Optometric Association.



Gerald Simon, OD, associate dean for Student Affairs, received the Dean's Distinguished Service Award at the 2022 Hooding and Convocation Ceremony. Simon was also named National Optometric Association Optometrist of the Year.



The Dean's Outstanding Staff Award was given to **Chris Boutwell**, executive director of administrative operations, at the 2022 Convocation and Hooding Ceremony.



Kelly K. Nichols, OD, MPH, PhD, FAAO, dean, was awarded the Dr. Frank Fontana Career Achievement Award at the 2022 Southeastern Congress of Optometry (SECO).



The University of Alabama System Board of Trustees approved **Kent Keyser**, PhD, as professor emeritus in the Department of Optometry and Vision Science.



Katherine Weise, OD, MBA, FAAO, professor, director of the Pediatric Optometry Service was selected to serve as co-chair of Pediatric Eye Disease Investigator Group (PEDIG), effective January 2024.



Lawrence Sincich, PhD, professor of the vision science and director of the graduate program, received the 2022 President's Award for Excellence in Teaching.

The **teaching faculty** was awarded the Dr. Jack Bennett Innovation in Optometric Education Award at the 2022 Optometry's Meeting held in Chicago, IL.

Faculty Hires & Promotions



Katherine Clore, OD, **Lei Liu**, PhD and **Gerald Simon**, OD, were promoted to professor.



Terri Call, OD, and **Tamara Oechslein**, OD, were promoted to associate professor.



Edmund Arthur, OD, PhD, FAAO, joined as an assistant professor, tenure track.



Andrew Rothstein, OD, joined as an assistant professor.



Yuchen Wang, PhD, joined as a tenure track assistant professor in research.



Nicholas Onken, OD, a pediatric optometrist, joined as an assistant professor.



Keisha Brown, OD, named director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

SNAPSHOT: 2022 New Grants

DR. MARINA GORBATYUK
National Institutes of Health Award
The mechanism of vesicant-induced ocular injury
\$445,500

DR. YUCHEN WANG
National Institutes of Health
Trans-synaptic mechanism of retinal synapse formation and function
\$248,999

DR. SAFAL KHANAL
The E. Matilda Ziegler Foundation for the Blind, Inc.
The role of S-cone neural activity in eye growth regulation and refractive development
\$100,000

UAB Vision Science Research Center Pilot Grant
Exosome signaling in eye growth regulation and myopia
\$20,000

DR. JILLIAN ZIEMANSKI
American Academy of Optometry Foundation
Cytokine priming of the complement system at the ocular surface: Application to primary Sjögren's syndrome
\$25,000

DR. TIM KRAFT
John's Hopkins University
Absolute sensitivity of mammalian cones
\$22,000

DR. EDMUND ARTHUR
Genentech Career Development Award for Underrepresented Minority Emerging Vision Scientists
Quantifying differences in the retinal peripheral capillary free zones in diabetic retinopathy
\$100,000

UAB Integrative Center for Aging Research (ICAR) Pilot Grant
Characterizing and quantifying changes in the retinal peripheral capillary free zones in diabetic retinopathy
\$25,000

Student Success

Two students were recognized at the 2022 National Optometric Association (NOA) National Convention.



Daniele Ewert, class of 2023, served another term as National Optometric Student Association

treasurer and awarded the NOA Future Contact Lens Leader Scholarship, sponsored by CooperVision.



Brittany Martin, class of 2023, received the Dr. Marvin R. Poston Leadership Award, sponsored by

Vision Service Plan. Also, Martin was one of 10 optometry students from across the country invited to participate in the VSP Vision™ Premier Program annual meeting, SHiFT22 held in Scottsdale, AZ. At the conference, Martin was one of two students on the Emerging ODs Panel.



Samantha Chapman, class of 2025, reached the final round of the 2022 AOSA Optometry Student Bowl XXXI.



Adam Sauls, class of 2023, was elected treasurer on the 2022-2023 AOSA Executive Council.



Will Mann, class of 2026, became a trustee elect.



Demetric Jones and **Smit Patel**, class of 2025, were elected representatives for the Diversify Optometry Program. Jones represented the School's NOSA chapter, and Patel represented the School's AOSA chapter.

NOSA chapter won the 2022 President's Diversity Champion award given by UAB's Office of the President and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.



In Memoriam

Dr. William J. Benjamin

MARCH 18, 1955 – MARCH 24, 2022



Professor Emeritus William J. "Joe" Benjamin, OD, MS, PhD, served as associate dean from 2013 to 2014 and interim chair of the Department of Optometry from 2011 to 2014. He was a senior scientist in the Vision Science Research Center from 1995 to 2014 and served as the director of the Clinical Eye Research Facility from 1996 to 2005.

Dr. Lester Caplan

MARCH 27, 1924 – DECEMBER 2, 2022



Lester Caplan, OD, MEd, FAAO, professor emeritus, and a pioneer of clinical contact lens research, joined the faculty of the UAB School of Optometry in 1979. In his associations at the School over the years, he served as chief of Contact Lens Services, assistant dean for Clinical Services, and director of the Externship Program—which he founded in the 1980s. Though he retired from UABSO in 2002, he remained active in various areas of the School for many years.

ALUMNI & DEVELOPMENT

Legacy family celebrates shared experience

Paris Mullins, Jr., OD, class of 1985, opened his practice in May of 1986 and was the single doctor until May of 2021 when his son Nic Mullins, OD, class of 2021, joined him as a partner at the practice. In honor of their shared alma mater and new partnership, Magnolia Place Eyecare's logo is fashioned after the legacy pins they received at Nic's graduation from the UAB School of Optometry.



"I feel so blessed that I have the unique opportunity to be with my son on a daily basis," Paris said. "What parent would not? It's been intriguing and even a little weird taking off my 'dad's hat' and putting on the 'colleague hat.'"

Growing up, Nic witnessed how much his father enjoyed being an optometrist so he had always considered the profession as a career option. He ultimately decided to pursue optometry while attending Auburn University, changing his major to put himself on the path to becoming an optometrist.

"As I began shadowing him, I got to see what truly makes this profession enjoyable and this has held true after seven months of practicing myself," he said. "The relationships we get to make with our patients are unlike most

DEVELOPMENT & ALUMNI

\$890,192.10

donor impact for FY 2022

85

student scholarships awarded



Legacy family continued

other healthcare professions and these patient relationships are what make the profession so much fun.”

Nic said his experience at the UAB School of Optometry left him well-prepared to practice alongside his father.

“There is only so much you can learn from lectures,” he explained. “Getting the experience first-hand in clinic as early as we did at UAB is awesome and it helped us gain more knowledge and confidence in our clinical skills. Also, the wide variety of rotations UAB offers is great because in private practice optometry you are going to see a wide variety of patients. I feel very prepared to take care of just about any patient that comes in the door.”

Paris never expected any of his four children to follow in his footsteps. According to Nic, his father never pressured he and his siblings to pursue optometry or any particular profession. Paris instead supported them in whatever way he could throughout their childhoods. In fact, the proud father was the last to know about Nic’s decision to become an optometrist. Nic just happened to gravitate in this direction.

Although not an optometrist, Nic’s twin sister, Carmen, is a low vision occupational therapist in Houston, TX.

“It gives me great satisfaction and pride that my patients will be so well cared for after me, and by my own son!” Paris said.

Alumni Association Impact

IMPACT No. ONE

Donated
**\$50,000 to purchase
the school’s first
in-house laser**, a Nidek
Ophthalmic YAG/SLT
laser system.

IMPACT No. TWO

Continued the tradition of
**hosting an alumni transition
panel**, providing an opportunity
for students to interact with
young alumni as they prepare
to enter the workforce.

IMPACT No. THREE

Provided **\$1500
in student travel grants**
as well as helped sponsor
student appreciation events
throughout the year.

IMPACT No. FOUR

Provided
**nine student
scholarships**
to deserving
students.



Findley named Alumnus of the Year

For his thought leadership and contributions to the profession of optometry, Howell Findley, OD, is the 2022 UAB School of Optometry Alumni Association Alumnus of the year.

Within the optometry profession, the Commonwealth Eye Surgery optometrist is known for his impact in two areas aside from his optometric legislative advocacy efforts in Kentucky. First, he is a pioneer in the optometric comanagement of ophthalmic surgery and an optometrist’s role in managing ocular disease. Findley was among the first optometrists in the nation to develop a comanagement system. The second area of impact has been Findley’s dedication to training optometry externs at Commonwealth Eye Surgery located in Lexington, KY.



Wells named Young Alumnus of the Year

Valencia Wells, OD, class of 2009, is the UAB School of Optometry Alumni Association’s 2022 Young Alumnus of the Year. She cites this honor and receiving the same honor from the Alabama Optometric Association (ALOA) as being highlights of her career thus far.

As the owner of Morris Avenue Eyecare in Birmingham, AL, Wells uses her talents to have impact in the Birmingham area and her state. Her commitment to excellence with every opportunity yielded leadership opportunities locally as well as nationally.

The 2021-2022 officers of the Alumni Board

PRESIDENT
Sharon Day, OD, '87
Gardendale, AL

PRESIDENT-ELECT
Jamie Hill, OD, '09
Charleston, SC

SECRETARY/TREASURER
Valencia Wells, OD, '09
Birmingham, AL

**IMMEDIATE PAST
PRESIDENT**
Candice Turner, OD, '03
Birmingham, AL

BOARD MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

TERMS EXPIRING 2021
Gussie Branch, OD, '16
Oneonta, AL

Joel Jenkins, OD, '83
Athens, GA

TERMS EXPIRING 2022
Tim Ansley, OD, '14
Helena, AL

Haley Perry, OD, '09
Fletcher, NC

Samara Perryman, OD, '17
Troy, AL

TERMS EXPIRING 2023
Sarah Cleghern, OD, '14
Birmingham, AL

Nicole Guyette, OD, FAAO, '14
Hoover, AL

TERMS EXPIRING 2024
Jonathan Davis, OD, '18
Decatur, AL

Sarah Erwin, OD, '15
Barren Springs, VA

Crystal Maharrey, OD, '18
Birmingham, AL

Alicia Thibodeaux, OD, '16
Gallup, NM



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