



**The University of Alabama at Birmingham**

Search for Multiple Roles:

The Susan and Dowd Ritter/Research to Prevent Blindness Endowed Chair; The Kelley and C.T. Fitzpatrick Endowed Chair; and the Vice Chair for Research

Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences

University of Alabama at Birmingham Marnix E. Heersink School of Medicine

Birmingham, Alabama

## THE SEARCH

The Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences (DOVS or Department) at UAB Callahan Eye, Heersink School of Medicine (HSOM), University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) invites applications for highly successful research-intensive faculty members to join a thriving and well-funded vision science research environment. This department is looking to fill two endowed chairs. One is the Susan and Dowd Ritter/Research to Prevent Blindness Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology, and the other is the Kelley and C.T. Fitzpatrick Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology. As the department looks to significantly increase and expand its research enterprise, the opportunity exists for one of these endowed chairs to assume the role of Vice Chair of Research in the Department.

The department has nearly 50 full- and part-time clinical and research faculty, including its partners, and is based in the freestanding UAB Callahan Eye Hospital, part of the UAB Health System. UAB Callahan Eye Hospital has 17 operating rooms, where physicians perform over 16,000 surgeries annually. UAB Callahan Eye operates across an expanded network of more than 10 satellite clinics within Central Alabama responsible for 122,000+ ophthalmology clinic visits in 2023. UAB Callahan Eye is the only eye specialty hospital in Alabama and one of the few eye hospitals in the world dedicated to advancements in both eye care and ophthalmology research. UAB Callahan Eye is also home to a 24-hour eye emergency department and is the only Level I Ocular Trauma Center in the region. As such, the hospital is a key service of the UAB Health System and its close relationship to the department has been critical to the success of both organizations.

UAB is home to a thriving and well-funded vision science research enterprise, which includes an NIH P30 core grant. The interdisciplinary research team in the Department is currently composed of scientists,

clinician scientists, biologists, endocrinologists, engineers, and optometrists focusing their research activities towards understanding the pathogenesis of and improving treatment for age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, myopia, and low vision, among others. From bench to bedside, the UAB DOVS is at the forefront of reducing the impact of blinding diseases. In 2023, the Department was awarded more than \$10 million in total research funding. Additionally, UAB has a highly respected community of vision scientists in additional departments around campus including the School of Optometry, Neurobiology Department, and Engineering, among others.

## THE ROLES

Reporting to the Chair of DOVS, these endowed chairs will work in a robust research environment with top investigators to conduct visual science research committed to helping reverse and prevent blinding diseases. The Heersink School of Medicine leadership has expressed strong support for DOVS (for more on UAB, UAB Health, and HSOM, please see the appendix). Thus, endowed chairs in the department are expected to display high standards of academic excellence, scholarly achievement, and exemplary service. Holders of these positions are expected to have sustained contributions of research excellence, facilitated high-quality recruitment, and reflected a high degree of professionalism and collegiality. Candidates must bring insight and judgment to identify the most important and tractable basic and translational questions in ophthalmology and visual sciences, whose answers will propel the field forward. They must also value scientific breadth and intellectual curiosity, and bring an appreciation for the range of approaches, methodologies, and disciplines that can inform the work of the Department, HSOM, and UAB Medicine.

The role of Vice Chair of Research for DOVS could be extended to an applicant who has significant research leadership experience. The Vice Chair for Research will be responsible for the full spectrum of research activities within the Department including health services research, clinical trials, translational research, discovery and innovation, and research administration. They will partner with the Chair and other senior investigators to create a vision for research initiatives, implement plans to increase research funding and extramural grants, and promote research initiatives to university and hospital leaders. Further opportunities exist to provide guidance and research mentorship to faculty, research staff, students, and research trainees and encourage collaboration and coordination between research teams. Overall, they will enhance the eminence of ophthalmic and vision research at HSOM and UAB Medicine by catalyzing ambitious research at the forefront of the field and supporting investigators' scholarship.

Applications will be considered for candidates who hold a PhD, MD, DO, OD or combined OD/PhD, DO/PhD or MD/PhD degrees. The department welcomes applicants with an established track record and significant research accomplishments in vision research that complement and/or expand the department's research interests. Successful applicants are expected to run an internationally recognized, externally funded research program, and have demonstrated leadership skills with the ability to develop a strong multidisciplinary and collaborative research environment.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF OPHTHALMOLOGY AND VISUAL SCIENCES AT THE UAB HEERSINK SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

The [Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences](#) (DOVS) is committed to preserving global eye health through high-quality patient care, innovative basic science and clinical research, and comprehensive education. DOVS aims to become a renowned leader in the treatment and cure of the world's blinding diseases. It aims to obtain this recognition by excelling in the core areas of patient care, research, and education, with the ultimate aspiration to universally improve health through the alleviation of blinding diseases.

The DOVS is housed in the Callahan Eye Hospital, the only dedicated facility in Alabama specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of the eye, and one of the few facilities in the world entirely dedicated to advancements in Ophthalmology. In 2011 the UAB Callahan Eye Hospital was designated as a Level One Ocular Trauma Center — one of only two in the nation — and the only freestanding one in the country. The Department is home to a comprehensive eye research program and the state's only accredited ophthalmology training program. Historically, its faculty members have developed new techniques and specialized tools for eye trauma surgery, and faculty members have also founded major organizations representing the ocular trauma field. For more detailed about the Department, please visit the [annual reports](#).

### Research

UAB Ophthalmology's research laboratories are dedicated to discovering the mechanisms of eye diseases and developing new technologies to treat blinding diseases. The department boasts a range of strengths in basic, translational, and clinical research including cell replacement and gene therapies, retinal imaging, retinal structure/function, stem cell biology, angiogenesis, cell signaling, biomechanics, improving the outcomes of eye care. Additionally, they are nearby and have access to one of the largest eye banks in the United States. Research areas include age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, health disparities and services research, neuro-ophthalmology, ocular trauma, pediatrics, uveitis, vision and eye movements, vision impairment and low vision.

The DOVS currently holds an NIH P30 Center Core Grant that provides support for the Vision Science Research Center (VSRC), facilitating scientific collaboration and productivity by providing research support cores for its members. These cores have been continuously supported through the NIH/NEI since 1979. The VSRC's five support cores are: 1) Molecular & Cellular Analysis, 2) Machine shop, 3) Research Programming & Computational Analysis, 4) Ocular Phenotyping, and 5) Administrative. These support cores provide centralized locations where members can receive administrative support; obtain, design and repair electronic equipment; prepare, analyze and photograph their histological material; analyze their data and prepare publication-quality figures. In addition, the VSRC provides community outreach for all aspects of vision through its education outreach modules.

In 2024, faculty submitted 33 grants (an increase of 57% over FY23) and were awarded a total of \$9,302,507 in extramural research funding. This includes approximately \$6 million in federal funding and another \$3.3 million in institutional funding. Through innovation, cutting-edge technology and collaboration, DOVS research faculty demonstrated exceptional contributions to the field of ophthalmic research through their authorship of 94 publications last year across 50 distinguished, peer-reviewed journals. Two outstanding ongoing research projects are the NIH-funded [Alabama Study on Early Age-Related Macular Degeneration 2 \(ALSTAR2\)](#) and the NIH Common Fund's [Bridge to Artificial Intelligence Program](#) (Bridge2AI). The impressive body of work in the DOVS underscores the commitment to advancing ophthalmic knowledge and an impactful role in diverse scientific discussions. Their collective efforts further solidify the department's reputation as a leader in vision research and innovation.

Research faculty in the Department continue to be recognized for their achievements in the field. As recently as January 31, Maria Grant, MD, Professor and Eivor and Alston Callahan, MD, Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology, received the esteemed [Research to Prevent Blindness \(RPB\) David F. Weeks Award](#) for Outstanding Vision Research. Grant was honored at the recent [Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology](#) annual meeting. In May, Cynthia Owsley, PhD, and Christine Curcio, PhD, will be recognized with the [Proctor Medal](#) at the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology annual meeting.

The DOVS offers research opportunities for UAB medical students and graduate students, as well as its own residents and fellows, in both basic and clinical research.

## Education

The DOVS [residency program](#) is a four-year program that includes an integrated internship year and three years of ophthalmology training. It accepts five residents per year. Residents train in UAB Callahan Eye's high-volume clinical and surgical practice. In addition to practicing comprehensive ophthalmology, residents often choose to pursue additional fellowship training. Designed to provide a holistic foundation, the internship curriculum incorporates common areas of medicine outside the realm of ophthalmology, strategically targeting fields that routinely intersect with eye care.

The DOVS and its community partners have historically had [fellowship programs](#) in glaucoma, retina, oculoplastic surgery, and low vision. In a significant expansion of its educational programs, the UAB Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences introduced a cornea fellowship for the 2023-2024 academic year. This one-year fellowship joins existing programs at UAB and in Birmingham in glaucoma, low vision, neuro-ophthalmology, retina and oculoplastic surgery, enriching the department's offerings to aspiring ophthalmologists.

## APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-alabama-birmingham-heersink-school-medicine/endowed-chairs>. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

Randi Herrick, Partner  
Jane McInerney, Senior Associate  
Maya Bennett, Senior Search Coordinator  
Isaacson, Miller

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*Physicians and other clinical faculty candidates who will be employed by the University of Alabama Ophthalmology Services Foundation (OSF) or other UAB Medicine entities, must successfully complete a pre-employment drug and nicotine screen to be hired.*

## APPENDIX

### The University of Alabama at Birmingham

[UAB](#) is the heartbeat of Birmingham and an integral medical leader in the Southeast. The main campus spans more than 100 city blocks and is within walking distance of some of the best parks, entertainment, and dining in the region. Based on its exceptional academic research portfolio and overall global and regional reputation, UAB is ranked in the top third of national universities by U.S. News & World Report 2025 [Best Colleges rankings](#). UAB ranks among the top one percent of U.S. institutions for National Institutes of Health research funding and among the top four percent of U.S. universities based on all federal research and development expenditures, based on FY 2023 figures.

Driven by an intensely collaborative and entrepreneurial mission, UAB is one of the leading economic engines of the State, with a nearly \$4 billion budget and a statewide economic impact exceeding \$12.1 billion annually. UAB is Alabama's largest employer with more than 35,000 employees, and one in every 20 jobs within the state of Alabama is either held directly by a UAB employee or is supported as a result of UAB's presence. With 259 endowed chairs and professorships, total research expenditures at UAB exceeded \$780 million in 2024 with all six UAB health-related schools among the top 20 public universities in NIH funding.

### University of Alabama Birmingham Medicine

[UAB Medicine](#) is on the move as a rising star among academic health systems. UAB Medicine prides itself as being the premier medical facility in the state and region and a dominant Academic Medical Center in the Southeast. UAB Medicine comprises three unique entities that work together to improve the health of the citizens of Alabama and beyond: the UAB Health System, the UA Health Services Foundation, and the HSOM, which bridges the medical campus to the University. Combined revenues exceed \$3 billion annually. UAB Medicine recently acquired five hospitals and 19 ambulatory clinic sites from the Ascension medical group – St. Vincent's in the Birmingham metropolitan area to become UAB St. Vincent's.

The UAB Health System (UABHS) includes the University Hospital in Birmingham, Baptist Health in Montgomery, and a health insurance company. UAB Hospital is the centerpiece of the UABHS and one of the largest academic medical centers in the nation with over 1,200 licensed beds and clinical trials reached 129M in 2023. As the only major academic medical center between Atlanta and Dallas, UAB Hospital is both the referral hospital and the safety net hospital for a large, demographically diverse population of more than six million people.

UA Health Services Foundation (HSF) is the 501(c)(3) practice plan for the faculty of the HSOM. HSF provides care to over one million people each year and has annual revenues of more than \$600 million.

HSF also has an endowment with a market value of approximately \$120 million that generates \$5 million annually to support innovative work by faculty.

## University of Alabama Birmingham Heersink School of Medicine

[UAB Heersink School of Medicine](#) (HSOM) is a multi-campus medical school with its main campus in Birmingham and three regional campuses in Huntsville, Montgomery, and Tuscaloosa, which expand its academic reach and responsibilities in addition to educating physicians in rural and underserved areas of the state. HSOM has nearly 900 students, 1,200 residents and fellows, and more than 1,800 faculty whose [research](#) attracts more than \$270 million in NIH funding through 27 academic departments. Since 2013, HSOM has more than doubled its NIH funding as well as its total extramural funding. Eight of UAB's specialties ranked among the nation's top 50 programs of their kind in U.S. News & World Report's 2022-2023 Best Hospitals report. The annual operating budget for HSOM, excluding grants, is approximately \$429 million.

UAB received a \$100 million philanthropic gift in total from Dr. Marnix E Heersink, and the school has been named the Marnix E. Heersink School of Medicine in honor of the main donor. The gift provided support with both endowed and outright funds for key initiatives of the School of Medicine.

## Birmingham, Alabama

[Birmingham](#) is a friendly, diverse, and welcoming urban center nestled at the base of the Appalachian Mountains. The area has undergone a cultural revolution and community invigoration and is brimming with entertainment, arts, nightlife, outdoor recreation, sports, and world-class cuisine. Birmingham has an airport with daily direct connections to 26 airports and 23 cities. Located in the heart of the Southeast, Birmingham is easily accessible to Atlanta, Nashville, Chattanooga, New Orleans, Memphis, and lovely beach communities along the Gulf Coast. With its picturesque surroundings, Birmingham has been recognized as an "All American City," one of the top ten American cities to live and work in, and one of the top 10 entrepreneurial and job growth hot spots in America. The combination of pleasant weather, geography, diverse culture, activities, and lifestyle make this city a wonderful place to live, raise a family, and pursue a career in academic research and medicine.