



THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Search for the Director, Diabetes Research Center
School of Health Professions
Birmingham, Alabama

THE SEARCH

The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB or University) seeks an exceptional leader and scientist to serve as its next Director of the Diabetes Research Center (DRC or Center). UAB is an exciting place to be for a health science and research leader. The University has one of the nation's largest academic health science centers – comprising the schools of medicine, dentistry, optometry, nursing, health professions, and public health, as well as the [UAB Health System](#) – the country's third largest public hospital system. The University's R1 status speaks to the institution's commitment to high-impact research and innovation. UAB received more than \$774 million in research grants and extramural awards in FY2023, keeping UAB in the top one percent of all NIH-funded institutions, including private, public, and international organizations. UAB aims to continue its research success, charting a path to [\\$1 billion in research expenditures](#).

The Center was established in 2008 by Dr. W. Timothy Garvey as the University of Alabama Diabetes Research and Training Center and evolved into the DRC in 2013. The DRC is housed within the School of Health Professions (SHP or School) and is a multidisciplinary operation with over 150 investigators from UAB's schools of health profession, medicine, and public health. The Center operates in collaboration with the [UAB Comprehensive Diabetes Center](#) to promote excellence in diabetes research and patient care. Situated at the epicenter of the 'Diabetes Belt' and marked by the highest rates of diabetes in the United States, the UAB DRC is the sole National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)-funded DRC in the southernmost United States. In June 2023, the DRC received news that its competitive grant had been renewed for another five years.

The Director will report to Dr. Barbara Gower, the newly appointed chair of the Department of Nutrition Sciences, and join one of the largest and most well-respected health professions schools in the nation during a period of growth and momentum. The SHP is undergoing a \$10-million renovation to its Webb Nutrition Sciences Building, including the addition of a state-of-the-art metabolic kitchen and indirect calorimetry suite.

In this key role, the Director will be a visible leader on campus, promoting and steering diabetes research initiatives and helping to develop the next generation of researchers focused on diabetes. The successful Director will bring experience leading a robust research portfolio and have a track record of success in securing competitive federal grants, mentorship, and partnership development. The Director must have generosity of spirit in collaborating with and organizing others around the DRC's mission and strategic goals, the ability to strategically steward resources, and a keen eye for innovative research ideas. Minimum qualifications include an MD, MD/PhD, or PhD in a relevant field and established research in a diabetes-related area.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in recruiting the Diabetes Research Center Director. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

The University of Alabama at Birmingham's story is one of remarkable growth in size, quality, reputation, and impact. UAB traces its roots to the 1859 founding of the Medical College of Alabama and the 1936 establishment of the Birmingham Extension Center of the University of Alabama. In 1945, the University's Medical Center was founded in Birmingham, and in November 1966, the Extension Center and the Medical Center were administratively merged to form the "University of Alabama in Birmingham," an organizational component of the University of Alabama (in Tuscaloosa). In 1969, UAB became an independent institution, one of the autonomous universities within the newly created three-campus University of Alabama System.

UAB is the only public, four-year degree-granting university in the state's largest metropolitan area and serves as the biomedical university for Alabama. The UAB schools of medicine, health professions, dentistry, optometry, nursing, and public health are co-located in downtown Birmingham, along with the schools of engineering, business, education, and arts and sciences, which facilitates greater interdisciplinary collaboration. With more than 23,000 employees, UAB and its affiliated health system is the largest single employer in Alabama and generated a \$12.1 billion economic impact on the state in 2022. UAB received \$774.5 million in research grants and extramural awards in FY23, marking a \$247.5 million increase in funding over the past five years and a 73% growth over the past nine years.

The UAB campus is in the heart of downtown Birmingham, a city that has enjoyed revitalization in recent years with the advent of numerous residential, sporting, music, and outdoor entertainment developments. Birmingham is also a foodie town, home to a James Beard Foundation award-winning bar and grill and many other acclaimed restaurants that receive rave reviews and a burgeoning craft brewery scene.

UAB School of Health Professions

The School of Health Professions offers more than 35 programs at the certificate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels designed to meet the needs of the 21st-century healthcare environment. The School is organized into five departments: Clinical and Diagnostic Sciences, Health Services Administration, Nutrition Sciences, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy, and is home to several centers and institutes. The school also offers an honors program for undergraduates along with degree offerings in rehabilitation science through an interdisciplinary partnership with the departments of occupational therapy and physical therapy. The school enjoys an innovative research partnership in rehabilitative science with the Lakeshore Foundation, a Birmingham-based philanthropic foundation focused on rehabilitation healthcare.

Department of Nutrition Sciences

The Director will play an active role in the Department of Nutrition Sciences, which has 25 full-time faculty members and more than 100 staff, students, and postdoctoral fellows involved in basic, animal, physiologic, clinical, and community-based research, patient care, and teaching. The Department has a robust portfolio of extramural research funding, hosts two NIDDK-supported centers (the DRC and the Nutrition Obesity Research Center), and serves as a clinical center for the NIH consortium study, Nutrition for Precision Health.

The Department of Nutrition Sciences research seeks to better understand metabolic, behavioral, and environmental factors that impact health in order to prevent chronic metabolic diseases (obesity, diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, etc.) and promote optimum wellness. Investigators use state-of-the-art techniques for assessing body composition, energy metabolism, and overall metabolic health in humans as well as in animal models.

DIABETES RESEARCH CENTER

The Diabetes Research Center, one of 17 across the country, is engaged in ground-breaking and innovative diabetes-related research and focuses on developing new methods to treat, prevent, and ultimately cure diabetes and its complications. The Center provides extensive resources, including laboratory facilities, personnel, and programmatic support for diabetes-related research. Organized into three core facilities – animal physiology, bio-analytical redox biology, and human physiology – the DRC facilitates a broad translational spectrum.

The DRC is adding a tracer component to promote and facilitate clinical and basic science studies probing vivo metabolism. In collaboration with investigators in the School of Medicine, the human physiology core will offer a complete tracer service, including protocol development, preparation of infusates, analysis of sera for stable isotope enrichment by mass spectrometry, and mathematical derivation of outcomes, such as hepatic glucose production, and flux rate through various metabolic pathways. This service will accelerate novel research probing critical metabolic pathways involved in the etiology and treatment of diabetes.

Additionally, the DRC augments diabetes research through a pilot and feasibility grant program to support the career development of promising junior investigators. In October, a campus-wide request for applications is sent to seek proposals from junior investigators, established investigators in fields other than diabetes research who wish to bring expertise to issues relevant to diabetes for the first time, investigators in diabetes-related research who propose high-impact or high-risk projects to test innovative ideas that depart from ongoing research interests, and multi-disciplinary projects that involve both basic and clinical scientists. The process is meant to mimic the application process for an NIH grant and gives experience to those who have not written NIH proposals.

Since its founding, the Center has hosted a monthly [plenary lecture series](#). These gatherings include a featured speaker and offer an invaluable platform for DRC members to gain insight from leaders in the field, exchange ideas, and discuss cutting-edge research.

The result of establishing the DRC has been significant progress toward training the next generation of research leaders, conducting innovative research, multi-faceted clinical trials, and providing community-based prevention and education programs.

ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR

The Director of the DRC will lead the promotion of diabetes research. This includes directing the Center's enrichment program, recruiting and mentoring investigators, overseeing the Center's collaborative research efforts, and supporting the pilot and feasibility program. As the Center's leader, the Director will be entrusted with administrative and fiscal management, including compliance related to the grant. At UAB, the Director serves as a Council of Center Directors member – a governance body for University-Wide Interdisciplinary Research Centers. The Director also represents the Center and the university at annual strategic planning meetings for all Diabetes Research Center directors.

While no one individual will necessarily embody every quality, the successful Director will bring many of the following professional and personal qualifications:

- Significant and consistent record as a funded investigator, ideally including human endocrinology and metabolism
- Leadership and support of mentorship programs that develop and guide faculty; a natural ability and desire to motivate and facilitate research independence of early-career investigators
- Insight and judgment to identify the most important and pressing basic and translational questions in diabetes research, whose answers will propel the field forward
- Engagement with research centers through active collaboration, direct contribution, or leadership
- Intellectual curiosity and an appreciation for the range of approaches, methodologies, and disciplines that can inform the work of investigators connected with the DRC
- Experience with investigator recruitment and retention

- Collaborative interpersonal and relational skills and the ability to connect research from across fields
- A commitment to the development of a professional environment that supports access and opportunity, respect for individuality, and a commitment to promoting inclusive excellence.
- An MD, MD/PhD, or PhD in a related field; rank will be commensurate with experience

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Build upon research excellence and ensure continued success.

The Director will serve as the Center's scientific director and visionary leader. They will be at the helm of the scientific and research mission of the DRC and will seek opportunities to strengthen and sustain the existing research excellence of the Center. The Director plays a critical role in leading the development and submission of the next P30 grant renewal to secure continued funding from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This will involve crafting a compelling proposal that aligns with the priorities and objectives of the NIH, showcasing the DRC's current achievements and ongoing research, and outlining a forward-looking plan that demonstrates the potential for significant contributions to the field of diabetes research.

Build partnerships and relationships across the DRC, UAB, and beyond.

Fostering successful collaborative partnerships and cultivating relationships are integral components of the DRC Director's role. The Director will spearhead initiatives to build robust connections with faculty within the Center, creating a culture of teamwork and interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as fostering ongoing collaborations with other centers and divisions across UAB. Key partners include Anath Shalev, MD, Director of the [UAB Comprehensive Diabetes Center \(UCDC\)](#), a partnership between UAB, Children's Hospital, and the Birmingham Community, and James O. Hill, PhD, Director of the [Nutrition Obesity Research Center](#).

The successful Director will develop the next generation of research leaders at UAB, providing mentorship to junior investigators and pilot and feasibility grant awardees – offering guidance and nurturing their professional growth. The Director's goal is to not only encourage individual project success but to provide support that contributes to the overall vibrancy of the DRC.

Lead and support DRC faculty and staff.

The Center is supported by diverse, talented, and committed faculty and staff. The Director is the convening force for this group and, as such, will communicate with stakeholders regularly and transparently. A deep personal and professional commitment to inclusion and the creation of a collegial environment where everyone is heard and valued is vital to their success.

The Director will provide robust support to the Center's core directors, acknowledging their pivotal contributions to its success and working collaboratively to identify their specific needs and challenges. The Director will work with this group to strategize, seek resources, and sustain the vital roles these cores play across campus. The successful Director will foster an environment that recognizes and values their expertise, empowering them to effectively lead their respective teams and facilitating open communication channels to encourage knowledge-sharing.

Contribute positively to the advancement of diabetes research and addressing health disparities.

UAB leadership remains steadfastly committed to addressing health disparities and funding groundbreaking research that increases and advances scientific knowledge. UAB's DRC is the only center in the southernmost United States in a community grappling with the highest rates of diabetes in the nation. The Director should seek to address the distinct challenges prevalent in the region and advance the Center as the hub for pioneering and transformative diabetes research. By spearheading strategic initiatives, fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, and supporting innovative projects, the Director will actively contribute to the progression of research that leads to better prevention and treatment options and, ultimately, a cure for diabetes and its complications.

ABOUT BIRMINGHAM

The campus is centrally situated in downtown Birmingham. Located in the heart of the Southeast, Birmingham is a metropolitan city of one million people and a thriving nexus of medicine, banking, research, and development. It is a short drive from Atlanta, Nashville, New Orleans, Memphis, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and the Gulf Coast beaches. Birmingham has been recognized as an "All-America City" by the National Civic League as one of the top 10 American cities to live and work and one of the top 10 entrepreneurial and job growth hot spots in America.

Birmingham, with 99 diverse neighborhoods, has more green space per capita than any other major city in the nation. It has been designated Tree City USA by the Arbor Day Foundation for nearly 30 years in a row. It is home to Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve with 14 miles of trails, 1,000+ acres of biodiverse urban forest, and 150 species of birds. It is also home to Red Mountain Park, with 15 miles of trails, and Alabama's largest dog park – named one of the "10 Great Southern Dog Parks" by *Southern Living Magazine*.

Downtown Birmingham has enjoyed a revitalization in recent years, with the development of nearby [Railroad Park](#) — a national award-winning urban park — and its adjacent Regions Field — a national award-winning stadium, home to the minor league [Birmingham Barons](#). Two professional and minor league sports teams put down roots in the city in the past decade, including the [Birmingham Stallions](#) of the United States Football League and the [Birmingham Squadron](#), an American professional basketball team based in Birmingham. The team is the NBA G League affiliate of the National Basketball Association (NBA)'s

New Orleans Pelicans. These projects and teams have kickstarted major growth in surrounding districts, including craft breweries, boutique shops, restaurants, loft and apartment buildings, innovative workspaces, and hotels.

Birmingham is also a renowned culinary destination, named America's "Next Hot Food City" by *Zagat's* and Top 10 "Unexpected US Cities with a Surprisingly Good Food Scene" by *Fodor's*. The Magic City is also home to seven James Beard Award-winning chefs and restaurants.

There are a host of attractions only a short walk from UAB's campus, including the Birmingham Civil Rights District National Monument. This area encompasses the historic sites that played significant roles in the Civil Rights Movement – places such as the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Kelly Ingram Park, and the [Birmingham Civil Rights Institute](#)—a major destination for visitors from around the world.

Birmingham's cultural scene is thriving with museums, galleries, theatres, and live music venues. Birmingham is home to multiple music, art, and film festivals, including the Sidewalk Film Festival, which *USA Today* named one of "Ten Great Places for a Fabulous Film Festival." In addition, Birmingham has a professional ballet company, a professional opera company, the Alabama Symphony Orchestra (based at UAB's Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center), a [School of Fine Arts](#), the [Jazz Hall of Fame](#), and the restoration of the historic [Lyric Theatre](#) and [Alabama Theatre](#).

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Confidential nominations, inquiries, and applications (including a CV and cover letter) should be sent to:

Amy Segal, Partner
Annah Wells, Associate
Olivia McVicker, Managing Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-alabama-birmingham-school-health-professions/diabetes-research-center>

Unless explicitly stated in the job posting, it is UAB's expectation that all employees will reside in the State of Alabama as of the date the employment begins.

UAB is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer committed to fostering a diverse, equitable, and family-friendly environment in which all faculty and staff can excel and achieve work-life balance irrespective of, race, national origin, age, genetic or family medical history, gender, faith, gender identity and expression as well as sexual orientation. UAB also encourages applications from individuals with disabilities and veterans. A pre-employment background check investigation is performed on candidates selected for employment.