

FIRST BENJAMIN-CARVER SCIENTISTS

Through a multi-year NIH Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation (FIRST) Cohort program grant, **The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)/Tuskegee University (TU) Benjamin-Carver FIRST Scientists Program** was established **to create systemic and sustainable culture change to further support inclusive excellence in research at both institutions**. Both institutions are committed to building a self-reinforcing community of scientists committed to inclusive excellence. Diverse faculty will be hired in clusters of 3-4 annually. The cluster hiring approach hiring fosters the formation of faculty peer groups who receive both individual and group-based institutional support including mentoring, career advocacy, and guidance within the campus research enterprise.

These new faculty will be designated as Benjamin-Carver Scientists in honor of two barrier-breaking leaders – Regina Benjamin, MD (an Alabama native and UAB graduate who focused her biomedical career on health disparities by serving first in rural Alabama and later as US Surgeon General) and George Washington Carver (a scientist and inventor who developed hundreds of products while at TU).

Through this joint program, UAB and TU will **recruit a diverse cohort of 12 early-career faculty into tenure-track research faculty positions, with primary appointments at either UAB or TU and joint appointments at both institutions**. In particular, UAB and TU are seeking candidates: a) who have a strong health disparities focus to their research, b) who are responsive to needs/opportunities and program requirements, c) who are well-qualified, d) who have a strong record of promoting diversity and inclusive excellence, and e) whose research interests align with the proposed research areas.

Successful applicants will have demonstrated evidence of a promising research career in one of the following research areas: Cancer, Obesity & Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease, and Neuroscience. We are interested in candidates who also have demonstrated **interest in understanding and addressing health disparities** as well as **strong commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion**. Candidates will be hired in 3-4 clusters across these research areas. **We anticipate hiring the first two clusters (6-8 positions) in 2022-2023 and the final two clusters in 2023-2024.**

The FIRST Cohort program aims to transform culture at two types of NIH-funded extramural institutions by building a self-reinforcing community of scientists committed to inclusive excellence, **through recruitment of a diverse group of individuals who:**

- are competitive for an advertised research tenure-track or equivalent faculty position (positions must be at the Assistant Professor (or equivalent) level,
- meet the criteria for NIH-defined **Early Stage Investigators**, and
- have demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting diversity and inclusive excellence.

New faculty hires resulting from this program will be surrounded by a comprehensive support infrastructure including sponsors, mentors, career coaches, institutional research navigators, and professional development opportunities to help them mitigate the difficulties often experienced by early career faculty and accelerate the development of their research careers.

THE FOCUS

This strategic initiative is aimed at recruiting researchers interested in the following research fields as they relate to Health Disparities:

- Cancer
- Obesity & Diabetes
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Neuroscience

The overall research theme of Health Disparities is an important area of research in the southeastern region of the U.S. and represents a broad area of significant and substantial research strength and opportunity for both UAB and TU. Racial/ethnic minorities in the U.S., especially African Americans, experience higher incidence rates of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer and have a higher mortality rate from these diseases than the rest of the population; this is particularly true in the Southeast, where a large percentage of African Americans reside. Chronic diseases are among the most prevalent, costly, and preventable health problems. Influenced by social and economic factors, too many people engage in behaviors – such as tobacco use, poor diet, physical inactivity, lack of participation in screening, and alcohol abuse – that lead to poor health and contribute to chronic disease.

Abundant evidence supports a significant difference in risk according to race and ethnicity. African Americans have a high prevalence of hypertension, diabetes, and obesity as well as other risk factors for stroke, while Hispanic Americans have a high prevalence of metabolic syndrome and diabetes compared to whites and African Americans. There is a great need for health disparities researchers, especially those of similarly diverse backgrounds, to address the disparities in minority populations. Focusing on health disparities not only allows us to diversify our research workforce on this important topic, but it will also aid in attracting qualified candidates to a region where health disparities research is much needed. This theme of Health Disparities is also a particular strength of our partner institutions, represented in the UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) and the UAB Center for Clinical and Translational Sciences (CCTS).

THE INSTITUTIONS

UAB and TU bring a decades-long history of strong collaboration and dedicated effort to the elimination of health disparities in our region. UAB and TU also bring complementary strengths to this partnership.

UAB, located in Birmingham, Alabama, is a world-renowned comprehensive teaching and research-intensive university with an exceptional academic medical center and health system. With over 1,200 externally funded investigators, UAB's FY2020 research awards totaled \$638 million. Over the past five years, growth in clinical trial expenditures has increased by 107% – from \$36.2 million to \$75 million. Most of UAB's research occurs within its six health science schools (Medicine, Dentistry, Health Professions, Nursing, Optometry, and Public Health) and the College of Arts and Sciences, which houses many of UAB's basic science programs. UAB's research infrastructure is strengthened by its network of University-Wide Interdisciplinary Research Centers (UWIRCs), which are supported by an institutional investment of nearly \$5 million per year to bring investigators from diverse departments together to work on joint projects focused on virtually all major disease research areas. UAB has been recognized as a 2020 Diversity Champion and received a Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award by INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine.

As of the fall of 2019, UAB students, faculty and staff represented over 100 countries and 42.5% of UAB students were from underrepresented groups. UAB is committed to creating an environment of inclusion, fairness, civility, and mutual respect. It has both a university-wide strategic plan, as well as a strategic diversity plan through its Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI), with a specific goal to “Increase recruitment, hiring, retention and promotion of faculty and staff from underrepresented populations.” This goal includes action to “Proactively attract, recruit, support and retain a diverse faculty and staff population who have a voice and agency in helping to shape an institutional culture of inclusive excellence.” UAB's leadership recognizes that meaningful change is needed.

TU, located in Tuskegee, Alabama, is a historically black university and an independent institution with distinctive strengths structured on solid foundations in the liberal arts. With over 3,000 students in its five colleges (Agriculture, Environment and Nutrition Sciences; Arts and Sciences; Business and Information Science; Engineering; and Veterinary Medicine) and three schools (Architecture and Construction Science; Education; and Nursing and Allied Health), TU offers over 50 degrees and receives approximately \$42 million in annual funding. It also houses the Tuskegee National Center for Bioethics in Research and Health Care, established in 1997. It is the nation's first bioethics center devoted to engaging the sciences, humanities, law, and religious faiths in the exploration of the core moral issues that underlie research and medical treatment of African Americans and other underserved people.

TU has established various outreach programs and has developed effective relationships with its surrounding communities. TU has a majority of its faculty who are African American (82%) and an almost even divide between male and female faculty members (50.4% and 49.6%, respectively). TU's mission has been to nurture intellectual growth and prepare students for careers, and its leadership has become increasingly aware that expanding emphasis on research will add value for many of their students. TU has successfully established the Center for Biomedical Research (U54 MD007585) as part of the NIH Research Centers in Minority Institutions (RCMI) program, and has worked to improve its research infrastructure. Since 1996, the Division of Research and Sponsored Programs increased its annual funding for research and

other sponsored activities. The university concluded fiscal year 2019-2020 with total annual funding of \$41.6 million, which represents an increase of 12% over the previous year. TU's Board of Trustees places research at the top of its goals and recognizes the importance of external research support and its impact on the development of students, faculty, and society. Its annual report indicates that TU's centers of excellence, academic colleges, schools, and other institutional units that participate in research are critical for addressing today's global needs. In addition, its current strategic planning process has identified increasing "intentional" research as one of its primary goals, because much of TU's existing research portfolio has been initiated by motivated faculty, rather than intentional recruitment and hiring of faculty to expressly conduct research.

To Apply

The UAB Heersink SOM welcomes inquiries, nominations, and applications. To receive full consideration, interested individuals should electronically submit a Curriculum Vitae, a letter of interest, and a brief 1-2 page research plan via the application portal:

<https://uab.peopleadmin.com/postings/11436>.

The letter of interest is a brief cover letter detailing your experience and key achievements related to this position and your thoughts on how you see yourself contributing to the programs and responsibilities described in this position specification. Please keep research plans brief.

Letters should be addressed to the UAB CFRC Search Committee and submitted electronically. For those interested in UAB and/or TU, email Dawn Fizer, Director for the FIRST Benjamin-Carver Scientists Program. dfizer@uabmc.edu

For those interested solely in a position at Tuskegee University, email employment@tuskegee.edu for further information.

Review of applications will continue until all positions are filled.

SUBMIT APPLICATION MATERIALS

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 veterans and individuals with disabilities.

A pre-employment background investigation is performed on candidates selected for employment. In addition, physicians and other clinical faculty candidates who will be employed by the University of Alabama Health Services Foundation (UAHSF) or other UAB Medicine entities must successfully complete a pre-employment drug and nicotine screen to be hired.

