Changes taking place as a result of climate survey

When the overall results of UAB’s first Faculty and Staff Climate Survey came in at the end of 2010, they showed that UAB exceeded the higher education norm in 20 out of the 24 items for which a norm is available.

UAB faculty and staff gave a 90 percent ranking to the question, “I find my work interesting,” compared to the national norm of 82 percent and the higher education norm of 81 percent. Employees also posted positive scores on two questions regarding overall satisfaction, ranking “I am satisfied with my job” at 76 percent compared to the national norm of 74 percent and higher education norm of 72 percent. Faculty and staff also gave a 76 percent ranking to “I would proudly recommend UAB as a good place to work,” compared to the national norm of 72 percent and the higher education norm of 63 percent.

The survey, administered Sept. 21-Oct. 4, 2010, by HR Solutions Inc., also revealed that UAB has the opportunity to improve with regard to providing more opportunities to faculty and staff for development, growth and reward, said Chief Human Resources Officer Alesia Jones. More than 3,450 faculty and staff participated.

As detailed results at the school and administrative unit became available, Human Resources (HR) representatives held meetings with deans and vice presidents to discuss their unit-level results, interpret their meanings and begin developing plans to further make improvements.

“We have had very positive meetings with every dean and vice president about the survey results,” says Jones. “They’ve all been pleased with the areas they rated high, and they are enthusiastic about focusing on opportunities for changes taking place as a result of climate survey

M3 Camp aims to stimulate interest in computer science among underserved

Felicia Monroe checks one last box on the computer screen before she turns around and asks the question: “Are you ready to see this?”

She pushes the space bar and her movie begins playing. There is an Old West backdrop, with what looks like a bank as the primary building. In front are skeletons, ghouls and ghosts. The sounds of Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” then begin to pierce through the speakers, and Monroe’s collection of ghastly characters begins to dance.

Monroe has written and programmed the video herself. Each move on the screen—from the fog rolling through to the movement of every arm and leg—she choreographed herself through the JAVA-based computer programming software.

“I like to work with computers, but I’ve never really had an opportunity to work with things like this,” says Monroe, a rising eighth grader at Phillips Academy. “It’s fun to be able to make this on my own. I like that I can make it do what I want it to do.”

Monroe is one of more than 60 sixth- and seventh-grade students from Phillips Academy and Washington Elementary who recently spent two weeks taking part in the M3 Camp, a National Science Foundation-funded project administered by UAB’s Community Outreach and Development Program (CORD). The camp affords students from underserved communities the opportunity to learn high-level computing to better prepare them for future educational and employment opportunities.
Single tickets for ASC events now on sale

Single tickets for the 15th anniversary season presented by UAB’s Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center are now on sale; current and new season subscribers can purchase tickets now. For a brochure or to purchase tickets, call 975-2787 or go to www.Alys Stephens.org.

This season the Alys Stephens Center will celebrate its 15th anniversary with a season of arts performances that challenge traditional ideas of art and performance.

UAB Football Fan Day — a full day of fun

UAB Blazer fans can look forward to a day of fun Saturday, Aug. 27 during the annual Football Fan Day and the Blazer Boosters Auction. The fun starts in the Riverchase Galleria’s food court area from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The Eighth Annual Blazer Boosters Auction will be held at the UAB National Alumni Society House at 6 p.m. Tickets to auction are $100. For more information on the auction, contact Mandi Alexander in the Blazer Boosters Office at 996-9996.

Bidez receives System Safety honor

Martha Warren Bidez, Ph.D., professor and director of the Advanced Safety Engineering and Management graduate track in the UAB School of Engineering, has been named System Safety Society’s Educator of the Year for 2011.

“Dr. Bidez is being honored for her outstanding achievements in safety education,” says Anthony Burns, operational vice president, System Safety Society. “I am honored to award Dr. Bidez for her development and implementation of the Advanced Safety Engineering and Management graduate program within the University of Alabama at Birmingham.”

ASC promotes new independent film series

UAB’s Alys Stephens Center and the Sidewalk Film Festival have partnered this season to present a series of independent films designed to get audiences up close and personal with the country’s hottest new directors. The series is through Southern Circuit, which brings films from around the country and the world to communities in the South. See the film, then meet the filmmakers and discuss the work. The series transforms the experience of watching independent films from a solitary to shared experience, and enables the audience to get into the mind of the film’s creators.

The six-film series will feature Thursday-evening screenings of individual films throughout the season. All movies begin at 7 p.m. in the Alys Stephens Center, 1200 10th Ave. South. Tickets are $10 and $8 for students. Call 975-2787 or visit www.Alys Stephens.org.

Mentors needed for Family Court program

The Jefferson County Family Court Adolescent Mentoring Program (AMP) is seeking volunteer mentors, ages 21 and older, to provide positive, one-on-one experiences for high-risk youth offenders that may enable each of them to develop their full potential and learn to make informed, responsible decisions. The program is a partnership between UAB TASC and Jefferson County Family Court. There is a special need for African-American male mentors. To learn more about becoming a mentor email kaj@uab.edu or call 264-8161.

Learn to manage grief at Aug. 24 seminar

Grief doesn’t take a break when we go to work. What is normal grieving? How do you help a grieving colleague or friend?

Learn the answer to these and other questions at a lunchtime seminar Aug. 24 from noon to 1 p.m. in suite 104 of the John N. Whutaker Building. Steve Sweatt and Carol MacMillan of Community Grief Support Service will present the class, offered by the UAB Resource Center Employee Assistance Program. The class is open to all UAB and UAB Health System employees and their families, but space is limited. Call 934-2281 to register.

The UAB Resource Center Employee Assistance Program provides counseling, supervisor consultation, and a variety of educational programs designed to support your quest for health in all areas of life. For more information about these programs or other Resource Center services, be sure to visit The Resource Center online at www.uab.edu/rap.

Windows to the World event set for Aug. 27

The UAB World Student Association along with United Nations Association-USA Greater Birmingham Chapter is organizing an international, cultural fundraising event Aug. 27 from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. in the UAB Bell Theatre. The minimum donation for adults is $10; students with ID and children under 12 will be admitted for $5.

Proceeds will support student enrichment programs in schools and colleges in Birmingham. Complimentary refreshments will be provided. Direct questions to meganpre@gmail.com.

BRIEFS

UAB employees pledged a record $1,860,212 to the Benevolent Fund this year, enabling the campaign to surpass its $1.85 million goal. Lisa Higginbotham, program manager, announced the results of the campaign at the Benevolent Fund Campaign Luncheon, held in July. “We were able to make our goal because of the generosity of UAB employees,” Higginbotham says. “Special recognition also is deserved for all of the coordinators in the hospital, schools and the Health System for all of their hard work.” The Benevolent Fund is UAB’s own system for supporting charitable health and human service agencies by providing a mechanism for employees to help those in need in the Birmingham area. More than 100 non-profit organizations in the Birmingham metro area, including United Way, American Cancer Society, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Childcare Resources, Alabama Kidney Foundation, the American Heart Association and more.

BrieFs
Birmingham Museum of Art to host Discussion Book event

The heart of the annual UAB Discussion Book concept has always been that the most common way to explore an issue is to read as much about the topic as possible and then discuss it so one can learn about different perspectives.

This year’s book — Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism — explores the complex developmental disorder through the eyes of the author, Temple Grandin, Ph.D., a professor of animal science and one of the most successful and famous adults with autism in the world.

Marilyn Kurata, Ph.D., director of Core Curriculum Enhancement, says Thinking in Pictures provides a perfect opportunity to engage in dialogue about autism, a developmental disorder characterized by impaired social interaction and communication.

“Dr. Grandin’s book has elicited wide-spread interest from the campus and the community,” Kurata says. “UAB faculty across camps are engaged in research, scholarship and outreach related to autism. Many faculty, staff and students know someone who has been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. Thinking in Pictures is an especially relevant campus Discussion Book. It helps matters comprehend that people perceive, understand and learn in a variety of ways.”

Grandin’s life was most recently highlighted in an HBO biopic, which starred Claire Danes as Grandin. The movie was honored with a record 15 Emmy nominations, of which it won seven. Grandin has been featured on National Public Radio, major television programs in Europe and the United States, and has been written about in many national publications, including Time, People, Forbes, U.S. News and World Report and the New York Times.

Most recently, Grandin was honored as one of Time magazine’s “100 Most Influential People in the World.”

The UAB Discussion Book is selected each year on literary merit and relevance to learning outcomes central to UAB’s goals for undergraduate education. It raises complex ethical questions, engages contemporary social issues and broadens the reader’s understanding of diversity in a meaningful way.

Ongoing dialogue

This is the seventh year for a campus Discussion Book and the sixth year the Birmingham Museum of Art has been a community partner. All UAB faculty, staff and students — not just freshmen — are invited to attend UAB College Night at the Birmingham Museum of Art Tuesday, Aug. 30, from 6 to 8 p.m. Each year the evening introduces the UAB community and their families to a valuable cultural and research resource through free food and giveaways, fun art activities and scavenger hunt and docent-led or individual museum tours.

“At College Night at the Museum reminds the whole campus of this world-class cultural gem in our own neighborhood,” Kurata says.

Informative dialogue about autism continues throughout the academic year with the Discussion Book Dialogues series, which meets the third Thursday monthly from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in Heritage Hall Room 548. Presentations are free and open to the public.

This academic year’s schedule:

• Sept. 15, Latamia Green-White, M.D., clinic director, Civitan-Sparks Autism Clinic, UAB Department of Pediatrics, “Civitan Sparks: Clinics-Serving Children and Adults with Developmental Disabilities”
• Oct. 20, Karen Bowen Daley, Ph.D., associate professor, UAB Department of Curriculum and Instruction, “Personal Stories of a Successful Individual with Autism”
• Nov. 17, Rajesh Kana, Ph.D., assistant professor, UAB Department of Psychology, and director UAB Autism Brain Imaging Research Laboratory, “Autism as a Distributed Neural Systems Disorder”
• Jan. 19, 2012, TBA
• Feb. 16, 2012, Michele Forman and Rosie O’Heane, co-directors of Digital Film Studies with students from ethnographic filmmaking courses, “Under One Roof” film about Mitchell’s Place and “Let Everything Flow” about Studio by the Tracks’ adult autistic art program
• March 15, 2012, Dorrie Fuichs, assistant director, Special Equestrians Inc., “Special Equestrians, Special People”
• April 19, 2012, Etta Hardin, Teaching Artist, VSA Alabama, “A Different Point of View: Exploring Autism Through the Arts”

Copies of Thinking in Pictures can be purchased at the Barnes & Noble UAB Bookstore.

M3 CAMPS

CONTINUED from page 1

In an effort to increase their numbers in the computer science field, says CORD Director Michael Wyss, Ph.D.

“Minority populations and girls are vastly underrepresented in the industry, and we think it’s important for them to gain those skills in computing, because they’re going to be necessary in almost any job they take,” Wyss says.

Wyss points to the Mercedes plant in Vance as a prime example. Most of the new plant employees have to be computer literate beyond understanding basic Microsoft Word and Excel applications.

“They have to understand computers at a much higher level just to get the regular line jobs at the Mercedes plant, because everything out there is operated by robotic arms,” Wyss says.

“If these students are going to be competitive for the workforce and if we’re going to have a viable workforce in Alabama for industry, we have to get them better educated in computing,” Wyss says.

Johnson knows minority women are demographically similar to them teaching them — especially at this stage of their life — I think it’s a lot easier for them to see this is a career opportunity for them.”

Assessing the program

The first two weeks of the four-week program were held in July at Washington Elementary, which is located in one of the most economically depressed parts of Birmingham. Forty students — all sixth- and seventh-graders — participated. Wyss was excited to see that when the students presented on the final two days of camp, almost 20 parents came to watch and see what their children had learned.

“That’s very unusual,” Wyss says. “Quite often these parents tend not to be very engaged in their children’s education, but they really got engaged in this. Hopefully they will support them as they move forward.”

Phillips Academy, where the final two weeks of the camp were held, is considered the magnet middle school for the city. Wyss says his group is tracking how the program worked in the two schools to see how to better shape it in the future.

“We’re doing a formative assessment and trying to understand best practices for conveying this kind of information and engaging kids in wanting to learn computer sciences beyond just games,” Wyss says.

This year’s UAB Discussion Book, Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism, explores the complex developmental disorder through the eyes of the author Temple Grandin, who came to campus to speak this month. 

photo: UAB/Becky M. Lomax
Unplug from mobile devices to cross the street safely

We were taught to look left, right, left again — to safely cross the street. But what if you’re texting or using Bluetooth earpieces while driving? There is a growing number of people who are taking their eyes off the road and paying attention to their phones. This behavior has been shown to increase the risk of accidents and fatalities on the road.

The solution is simple: Turn the devices off or put them away while driving. However, legislation against distracted driving has been slow to pass. There are no laws against drunk driving or texting and driving, which makes it difficult for law enforcement to enforce the laws.

Schwebel offers three potential solutions: put devices away, build pedestrian bridges or enact legislation. He also argues against the latter two. He says legislation is unlikely: “There are no laws against drunk walking, so I can’t see a law against distracted walking being passed easily.” And bridges are too expensive to place on every corner.

We live in a complex world where technology gets more complicated every day. The solution is simple: Turn the devices off when you cross the street. "We are going to continue to see distracted pedestrians and distracted drivers, and it is going to influence our safety on the roads. And it is not going to be in a good way," Schwebel says.
Richard Bennett has a multifaceted role in the School of Public Health’s Office of the Dean. He coordinates student events, oversees the Public Health Student Association, recruits students into the graduate program, leads community outreach endeavors and coordinates the development of public health education program at a local inner city high school.

And Bennett will do whatever it takes to heighten interest in public health endeavors — even if it means dressing up as a pig in a suit. “Swine flu,” he explains. “It was for public health week earlier this year. I’ve kind of gotten razzed about that. One of my other colleagues, Ada Hudson, dressed up as a cow for one of them. It weren’t the diseases that nobody wants.”

Swine attire notwithstanding, Bennett is an employee everyone appreciates and respects. His commitment to public health, UAB students, promoting unity between faculty, staff and students and community outreach endeavors has earned him the respect of his colleagues and made him the recipient of August’s Employee of the Month honor.

Cherie Hunt, a 17-year School of Public Health (SOPH) employee, has known and worked with Bennett for the past 14 years in his roles as coordinator of student activities and recruiter coordinator in the dean’s office. Hunt says Bennett has excelled in both roles.

“He is excellent with students and has mentored many future professional students,” Hunt says. “His office is open to students at any time, and they often seek him out for mentoring. And his love of the SOPH is shown in his recruiting efforts. He seeks out opportunities to showcase the school here and statewide.

“Richard is an inspiring leader and is always helpful to faculty, staff and students.”

Bennett says the two jobs — working with the Public Health Student Association (PHSA) and recruiting potential students — are demanding. He’s often on the road during the fall to visit graduate school fairs and admits he sometimes feels guilty that he’s not here with his PHSA students. But he says both jobs are so rewarding, he doesn’t want to give one of them up.

“I love working with our students, and I enjoy selling UAB and our master’s program to potential students,” Bennett says. “I try to match students’ interests with this program. A lot of students don’t know what they want to do. Many have the dream of going to medical school, but students need to have other options. I try to sell them on public health and show them that they can still use the skill sets they’ve learned as an undergraduate and apply it in a different way. And in the end, they can still help people who are sick and work in a health field.”

Making time, showing respect

PHSA students say Bennett is an outstanding adviser and that he always makes time for them and their ever-changing needs.

“We appreciate the respect and support that Richard shows each of us on a daily basis,” says Emily Capilouto, PHSA president.

“He brings candor, honesty and above all professionalism to this position and our organization,” says Matthew Loop, biostatistics senator with the PHSA. “He treats everyone with respect and sincerely listens to others’ opinions. From his example, these qualities are imprinted upon PHSA members.”

Bennett coordinates the group’s outreach efforts, which have included aiding in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf oil spill, the Japan earthquakes and April’s devastating tornadoes.

“It’s not just me involved in those endeavors,” Bennett says. “I pull the students right along with me. I think of the tornadoes, which hit us all hard. We had students going to Tuscaloosa the first four weeks helping in clean up or sorting clothing. We had a couple of truckloads of supplies that left from the SOPH to Tuscaloosa with water, food, canned goods, clothing and other items they needed. The SOPH stepped up — faculty, staff and students. It was humbling to see how giving they were.”

Bennett also works in the Birmingham community in other endeavors, including community education of public health.

He does that every spring at Carver High School, as part of UAB’s Community Outreach and Development (CORD) program.

Bennett talks to the students about public health issues and careers in public health. Jason Avery, program manager in Epidemiology, has worked with Bennett each of the past three years on the project.

“The level of professionalism and organization displayed by Richard is unsurpassed by none,” Avery says. “He has become sort of a public hero to many of the kids and faculty at the high school for this outreach effort.”

Bennett makes a point to say his accolades are a reflection of those that he works with — students, faculty and staff.

He says their enthusiasm inspires him to do more.

“I’m very fortunate to work with a group of dedicated professionals that really care about what they’re doing,” Bennett says. “Our students are a reflection of that. They work with — students, faculty and staff. They make time for them and their ever-changing needs.”

UAB Reporter 5

CONTINUED from page 1

improvement.”

UAB President Carol Garrison says the decision to conduct the survey, and the work since then, are important in the context of a shared commitment to the strategic goal of making UAB a place where all faculty and staff can excel.

“We wanted to know how faculty and staff felt about working at UAB, and we wanted to identify areas in which we could improve, so we asked,” Garrison says.

“This type of survey is considered a best practice by many of our peer academic medical centers and research universities, and it’s been gratifying to see it lead to positive results here.”

In the coming months, the UAB Reporter will share some of the results of the survey and highlight areas where improvements and changes are under way.
WORKING A full-time job and going to school is never easy. Just ask Victoria Anderson and Adam Grinfeld, both of whom have been working as patient care technicians and attending nursing school at the same time. “It’s a challenge,” Anderson says. “But you make sacrifices to get things you want out of life.”

Anderson, a PCT in the Spain Rehabilitation Center, and Grinfeld, a PCT in Neurology ICU, want to be registered nurses. Anderson wants to be a wound care nurse and eventually open her own adult day care. Grinfeld wants to become a nurse practitioner in neurology.

Their drive, desire and accomplishments were enough to grab the attention of the UAB Hospital Auxiliary, which recently awarded its first two $2,500 scholarships to the two of them to assist them in continuing to pursue their career ambitions. The UAB Hospital Auxiliary Scholarship Program was established this past fall to address the challenges of work, home and school faced by many UAB Hospital and Health System employees when they choose to further their education and work at the same time. Often, this choice creates financial hardships that might seem overwhelming.

“Employee CommuteSmart Program was established this past fall to address the challenges of work, home and school faced by many UAB Hospital and Health System employees when they choose to further their education and work at the same time. Often, this choice creates financial hardships that might seem overwhelming. It was essentially taking up two hours of my day,” he says. “I had to find a way to get some of that time back.”

Someone suggested Windsor look into the CommuteSmart program as a possible solution.

Windsor did just that and soon connected with Darlene Calfee, a registered nurse at The Veteran’s Administration Hospital. She offered him an opportunity to ride with her vanpool from Calera the last week of May to see if it was something that would fit his needs. Windsor was happy with the experience and now is part of the UAB Employee CommuteSmart Program.

“It’s given me back those two hours I was missing,” he says. “I can do work, read, nap — whatever. It’s also a lot less stressful. I find when I get home that I feel much better. And because we get home a little earlier in the evening, and I get to spend more time with my wife and kids.”

CommuteSmart works with companies, organizations and institutions to develop tailored commute options programs that mutually benefit. UAB also provides incentives for those who sign up to participate in the program.

More than 50 applications were sent out, says Susan Frantz, past president of the Auxiliary and member of the Scholarship Committee. Thirteen were submitted by the June 3 deadline; six finalists were chosen to interview.

The UAB Hospital Auxiliary was established in 1949 to address the needs of patients, visitors and staff at the then-named Hillman Hospital. Since that time, the Auxiliary has contributed thousands of volunteer hours and made significant monetary contributions to the hospital, including this new scholarship opportunity.

The scholarship is open to all full-time or part-time UAB Health System employees if they have completed a minimum of one year of service and are in good standing. Recipients are required to maintain their employment at UAB while pursuing their degree. Recipients also are asked to commit to continuing their employment at UAB Hospital or in the Health System for one year following graduation.

Two scholarships will be awarded again next summer.

To read the story in its entirety, visit www.uab.edu/reporter.
Yao’s research may lead to early diagnoses of eye disease

UAB’s designation by the Carnegie Foundation as an institution with “very high research activity” has accustomed faculty, staff and students to hearing its world-renowned teacher-scholars have received competitive grants and other awards to support their endeavors. Even so, it is still impressive that some of our youngest and brightest scientists have been thrust into the spotlight in the past seven months, with three professors winning National Science Foundation Career Awards—a prize that the foundation describes among its most prestigious.

Xincheng Yao, Ph.D., assistant professor in biomedical engineering, David Hilton, Ph.D., assistant professor in physics, and Ho-Wook Jun, Ph.D., assistant professor of biomedical engineering, each won the influential award to support the early career-development activities of professors who most effectively integrate research and education within the context of the mission of their organization. The UAB Reporter featured Jun’s work in the March 7 edition and Hilton’s research in the April 4 edition.

This summer we looked at Yao’s work and its promise. Yao received his $400,000 NSF Career Award for research into the development of an optical coherence tomography instrument that provides subcellular- and sub-millisecond-resolution imaging of the human retina.

The technology promises a high-resolution method for non-invasive evaluation of retinal neural function and dynamics, which could significantly advance the study and early diagnosis of major eye diseases, such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy (DR) and age-related macular degeneration.

Q. What is the unique aspect of your research, especially as it compares to other similar types of research?

A. We are pursuing simultaneous imaging investigations of stimulus-evoked fast intrinsic optical signals (IOSs) over the whole thickness of the retina. Simultaneous monitoring of fast IOSs correlated with photoreceptor and postphotoreceptor neurons will provide insight into the neural sources and interaction mechanisms of fast IOSs in the complex retinal neural network.

Q. Why is high-resolution imaging of the human retina important in early diagnosis of glaucoma and macular degeneration?

A. The retina is a very delicate neural network that consists of many types of cells. It is well established that different eye diseases, such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy (DR) and age-related macular degeneration (AMD) can target different retinal cells. Therefore, high-resolution functional imaging of the human retina is important for better study and early diagnosis of eye diseases.

For the whole article, visit www.uab.edu/reports.

UAB Crime REU program provides hands-on research

One of the first things Kent Kerley, Ph.D., expressed to his UAB Crime Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) Summer Research Program students this summer was how fortunate they were to have an opportunity to conduct real-life, hands-on research.

“I told them my story — that I spent my summers as an undergraduate working at Subway,” says Kerley, associate professor of Justice Sciences and the UAB Crime REU program director. “Making sandwiches for minimum wage doesn’t really prepare you for graduate school. This REU program is a fantastic opportunity, and they realize that.”

UAB’s Crime REU is an eight-week National Science Foundation (NSF) program designed for undergraduate students to conduct hands-on research; it’s for those interested in pursuing postgraduate degrees in the computer sciences, forensic sciences, and social sciences. The NSF funded UAB’s program for a three-year period at a total of $333,000. The interdisciplinary program, which consists of faculty from the Department of Justice Sciences and the Department of Computer & Information Sciences, is divided into three tracks: Gary Warner and Chengui Zhang, Ph.D., are mentors of the Computer Forensics track; Heath Copes, Ph.D., Kathryn Morgan, Ph.D., and Kerley are mentors of the Criminal Justice Track; and Elizabeth Gardner, Ph.D., and Jason Liaville, Ph.D., are mentors of the Forensic Science track. The seven REU faculty members are nationally recognized for their expertise in working with large data sets, data mining and manipulation, quantitative and qualitative data analysis, and DNA analysis.

The students involved in the prestigious program apply and are awarded an opportunity to study at an institution of very high research activity like UAB, with benefits including a stipend, free housing, free food and access to the Campus Rec Center and on-campus libraries. Only 12 students are selected to be a part of the program, which is in its second year. More than 70 students applied for the 12 spots in 2010. More than 160 applied this year, which shows the growth in popularity of the program after just one year.

This year’s students make up a diverse group: Majors represented include biology, chemistry, criminal justice, computer information systems, computer science, engineering, psychology and sociology. The program originally was intended to target students from the Southeast, but this year’s class also has six students from outside the South.

Steyn takes lead in global effort against drug-resistant TB

When Andries Steyn, Ph.D., moved to the United States from South Africa in 1994 to finish his doctorate, he thought he was here to stay. “I became a citizen, and I thought I’d never go back,” Steyn says. But a collaboration between the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa is bringing the Cape Town native back home. Steyn, associate professor in the UAB Department of Microbiology, is the first investigator recruited to work in the new KwaZulu-Natal Research Institute for Tuberculosis and HIV (K-RITH) in South Africa. HHMI is the largest non-federal supporter of biomedical research and has committed $60 million to the initiative. Construction is under way on a state-of-the-art TB clinical and research facility in Durban, which is ground zero for where the first extensively drug-resistant case of tuberculosis was found a few years ago.

“This facility will be like no other in the eye diseases,” Steyn says. “It will create unparalleled opportunities for investigators here at UAB that are interested in infectious disease, in particular TB, HIV and other pulmonary diseases.”

Steyn will retain his faculty position and lab at UAB, an affiliation that will foster the educational and research goals of both UAB and K-RITH. One possibility is an educational exchange for students, postdoctoral research fellows and other faculty between K-RITH and UAB.

“For Adire as an individual and UAB as an institution, to be the lead person and lead institution in setting up this program is quite unique and very exciting,” says Robert Kimberly, M.D., professor and senior associate dean for research in the School of Medicine. “Adire is a very distinguished investigator, and HHMI has confidence that he has an enormous amount of potential to help move our understanding of TB forward and to combat it.”

Worldwide, somebody dies every 10 seconds from TB. No one is isolated from the disease; one-third of the world’s population is infected with TB, according to the World Health Organization. Drug-resistant cases were reported to be on the rise in many areas of Europe this past spring, with some rates reporting in 73 cases per 100,000 people. But the statistics are much worse in South Africa, Steyn says, where the TB incidence rate in some regions reaches as high as 1,100 per 100,000 people — many of whom are also HIV-positive.

FROM THE SUMMER

Aug. 22, 2011 UAB Reporter 7
Join the UAB National Alumni Society on Friday, April 29th at Pepper Place (29th Street South & 2nd Avenue South) for the UAB NAS Scholarship 5K/10K Run to raise money for UAB student scholarships!

Registration begins at 4:00 p.m.
Race starts at 6:00 p.m.

Registration fees:
- $30 after March 31st
- $35 day of race

To register, visit www.active.com or www.alumni.uab.edu.

For more information, contact the UAB Alumni Affairs Office at 205.934.3555 or uabalumni@uab.edu.