



# McKNIGHT BRAIN RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Preserving memory, enhancing life

October 30, 2024

Mr. Tom Brannan  
Vice President for Advancement and Strategic Initiatives  
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

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*Established by  
Evelyn F. McKnight  
to Alleviate Memory Loss  
in the Aging*

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Dr. Ronald M. Lazar  
Professor of Neurology and Neurobiology  
Evelyn F. McKnight Endowed Chair for Learning and Memory in Aging  
Director, UAB Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute | Director, Division of Neuropsychology

Dear Mr. Brannan and Dr. Lazar,

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aschlanger@mcknightbrain.org

www.mcknightbrain.org

At the February 20, 2024, meeting of the McKnight Brain Research Foundation (MBRF), the trustees reviewed the 2023 annual report submitted by the Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute (EMBI) of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). The report is a comprehensive overview of the productivity, collaborations, and impressive scientific accomplishments of the EMBI in 2023.

The trustees were pleased to learn that enrollment in the Brain Health Advocacy Mission (BHAM) met the initial pilot project goal and that the BHAM team is conducting an impressive amount of community outreach as part of the project. Additionally, Dr. Lazar's work on the McCance Brain Care Score, Dr. Visscher's work on Macular Degeneration and neuroplasticity, Dr. Buford's work on socioeconomic stress and temporal lobe thickness, and Dr. Lucas' work on gender differences and hippocampal aging were all commended for their high-quality research and focus on cognitive aging, demonstrating strong alignment with the mission of the EMBI. Congratulations are also extended to Dr. Lubin upon her promotion to full professor.

The recruitment efforts that resulted in 13 new faculty members in 2024 are reassuring, and their backgrounds impressive.

The report outlined several productive partnerships with investigators from other MBIs, including Dr. Visscher's continued leadership of the McKnight Brain Aging Research (MBAR) project, and Dr. Hernandez's and Dr. Lubin's respective collaborations with faculty from the University of Florida MBI, both of which are exploring the impact of the ketogenic diet on reducing the occurrence of age-related cognitive decline. Overall, the extent of collaboration with other institutions both nationally and internationally is remarkable, including UAB's hosting of the annual MBRF Inter-Institutional meeting.

As a follow-up to this letter, the trustees request some information, including an updated organizational chart of the administrative and governance structure of the EMBI within the institution and the functional relationship to the Department of Neurobiology. In the future, please include reports from the occupants of the Geropsychiatry Research Chair and the Kinney Endowed chair in Geriatric Psychiatry. Additionally, the trustees seek more information concerning the training program for graduate students and post-docs, including the areas of focus and structure. Finally, please share an update on the advisory committee for the EMBI.

The trustees send their collective appreciation to you for your leadership and the tremendous efforts in continuing to advance the research initiatives of the MBRF leading to the understanding and alleviation of age-related cognitive decline and memory loss.

Sincerely,

*Angelika Schlanger*

Angelika Schlanger | Executive Director | MBRF

CC: Dr. Ray L. Watt; Dr. Kristina Visscher; Dr. David G. Standaert; Melanie A. Armstrong; MBRF Trustees

*Please address all postal correspondence to:*

Melanie Cianciotto ♦ Trust ♦ Post Office Box 620005 ♦ Orlando, Florida 32862 ♦ 407--237-4485

April 9, 2024

Angelika Schlanger, PhD  
Executive Director  
The McKnight Brain Research Foundation

Dear Dr. Schlanger:

Thank you for your letter of March 7, 2024, summarizing the review by the McKnight Brain Research Foundation (MBRF) trustees of the 2023 Annual Report of the Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute (EMBI) of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB).

We are gratified that the trustees were pleased by the progress of our Brain Health Advocacy Mission (BHAM), and with our collaboration with Mass General Brigham and Yale that resulted in the validation of the McCance Brain Care Score that appeared as a publication in *Frontiers in Neurology*. We agree with the trustees about the important work being conducted by Drs. Visscher, Buford, and Lucas that focuses on cognitive aging, and there is much pride regarding Dr. Lubin's promotion.

We appreciate the acknowledgement of our recruitment efforts during the 2023 reporting period, with the highest number of new faculty members (13) since Dr. Lazar became director in 2017. We specifically sought investigators whose focus was on pre-clinical or human models that lent themselves to intra-institutional collaboration and with the other EMBI sites. These cooperative endeavors were evident in the presentations at the annual MBRF Inter-Institutional Meeting held at UAB this past year, as well as in the reinvigoration of the Intervention Core at our institution and participation in the McKnight Brain Aging Research (MBAR) project.

We address point-by-point below the request for additional information:

- *An updated organizational chart of the administrative and governance of the EMBI within the institution and functional relationship to the Department of Neurobiology.*

We have attached an updated organizational chart. Please note that the primary departmental affiliation of Dr. Visscher, Associate Director of the UAB EMBI, is in the Department of Neurobiology. As a result, she serves as the liaison between the EMBI and other members of the EMBI based in Neurobiology, including those involved in the animal behavior core.

- *In the future, please include reports from the occupants of the Geropsychiatry Research Chair and the Kinney Endowed Chair in Geriatric Psychiatry.*

We will do so.

- *The trustees seek more information concerning the training program for graduate students and post-docs, including the areas of focus and structure.*

We would like to highlight the following training programs and announcements related to our UAB EMBI members:

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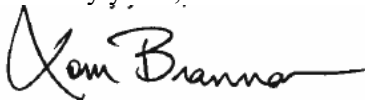
Ronald M. Lazar, PhD  
Evelyn F McKnight Endowed Chair/Professor of Neurology & Neurobiology  
Department of Neurology / Division of Neuropsychology  
Callahan Eye Hospital | Suite 500 | 700 18<sup>th</sup> Street South | BIRMINGHAM AL 35233  
phone: 205.934.2334 | [www.uab.edu/medicine/neurology](http://www.uab.edu/medicine/neurology)

- The UAB Neuroscience Roadmap Scholars (RMS) Program (NINDS R25), directed by Dr. Lubin, provides underrepresented graduate students with professional opportunities and training that will prepare them to navigate a successful career in neuroscience. The “Roadmap” for trainees includes activities that enhance and guide their graduate school experience, such as travel awards, RMS courses and workshops, faculty mentorship, and mock study sections for fellowship applications. Dr. Allendorfer and Dr. Gray are the RMS Associate Director for Academic Development and RMS Associate Director for Professional Development, respectively. Many of our members participate as RMS career coaches and research mentors.
  - Dr. Lubin is also director of the T32 Training Program in Cognition & Cognitive Disorders (NINDS T32). This program is housed in the Department of Neurobiology and engages students (entering their third or fourth year of training) to conduct basic, translational, or clinical cognition-related neuroscience research.
  - Drs. Ball and Wheeler were recipients of the 2023 UAB Minority Health & Health Equity Research Center (MHERC) Excellence in Mentoring Award.
  - The UAB EMBI had a strong representation at the 2023 McKnight Brain Research Foundation Poster Reception, in conjunction with the Society for Neuroscience (SfN), on November 12, 2023 at the Annual SfN meeting. Over twenty posters were presented by trainees of UAB members.
  - Areas of trainee focus, supported by mentor or institutional grant support (e.g., T32) include the effects of exercise on brain health; management of hypertension and diet as modifiable risk factors for cognitive decline; the application of non-invasive brain stimulation to improve cognitive function; participation in the analysis of the MBAR dataset; the study of HIV and schizophrenia as models of premature cognitive aging in the absence of traditional risk factors; the adverse effects of neuroinflammation on brain health; and primary prevention of cognitive decline and stroke in the primary-care setting.
- *Please share an update on the advisory committee for the EMBI.*

The annual meeting of our advisory committee is scheduled for May 9, 2024.

We thank the trustees for their ongoing support of our efforts to address cognitive aging, mitigation of age-related memory loss, and primary prevention of cognitive decline.

Sincerely yours,



Tom Brannan  
Vice President for Advancement and Strategic Initiatives  
The University of Alabama at Birmingham



Ronald M. Lazar, PhD, FAHA, FAAN  
Evelyn F. McKnight Endowed Chair for Learning and Memory in Aging  
Professor of Neurology and Neurobiology  
Director, UAB McKnight Brain Institute  
Director, Division of Neuropsychology (Neurology)

cc. Dr. Ray L. Watts, Dr. Kristina Visscher, Dr. David Standaert, Dr. Tasha Smith, MBRF Trustees

# The Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute at UAB

## Organizational Chart

April 1, 2024

