The Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research is a University of Maryland Graduate School program of research, service, and teaching in the fields of gerontology and aging. Leveraging collaborations with the University of Costa Rica (UCR) and the InterAmerican Center for Global Health (CISG), the Initiative provides support to UMB Graduate School and UCR students and scholars to study and learn together through fellowships, collaborative learning opportunities, symposia, seed funding, and other means of financial support.

The UMB Graduate School is part of the University of Maryland Baltimore campus – home to the Center for Research in Aging and vast resources in aging and related topics across seven graduate and professional schools in Baltimore. Costa Rica is internationally renowned for its safety net and universal health care system and home to one of five “Blue Zones” where a high percentage of centenarians live. In this setting, UCR is a leader in innovative multi-disciplinary aging research through multiple centers including the interdisciplinary international UCREA (El Espacio Universitario de Estudios Avanzados).

The goal of the Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research is to support international, comparative, and bidirectional approaches to aging research with an emphasis on developing scholars who will take aging research into the future. With generous support from Dr. and Mrs. Marco Chacón, the Initiative was launched in 2023.
Alicia and Yaya Fellows are graduate and professional students, as well as pre-doctoral and post-doctoral researchers selected to study at UMB or UCR in individualized programs that include courses, mentoring, and participation in research. Fellows selected for the program receive financial support to cover airfare, housing, and tuition. In the case of UCR participants, Fellows are hired as Research Fellows by UMB and receive a stipend and health insurance.

2023 University of Costa Rica Alicia and Yaya Fellows

Ericka Méndez-Chacón, MSc.
Full Professor and Researcher, UCR Statistics Department.
Will compare determinants of health inequalities in elderly populations of Costa Rica and the United States.

Mónica Cortés-Ortiz
Former Research Trainee, UCR Health Research Institute
Will investigate interplay between dietary, genetic, and environmental factors in relation to aging and different complex diseases in older adults.

2023 University of Maryland Baltimore Alicia and Yaya Fellows

Hima Konduru (SOM)  
Nicholas Leahy (SOM)  
Lillianna Pedersen (SOM)  
Melissa Rallo (SOM)  
Alexis Vetack Shania (SOM)  
Christine Wan (SOM)

**Project Name: Healthy Aging and Demographic Transition in Coto Brus, Costa Rica**

Costa Rica is experiencing a rapid aging process due to increased life expectancy and declining birth rates. Coto Brus, a rural municipality in the country, is no exception. This project aims to understand the aging and demographic transition process in Coto Brus and identify opportunities for future interventions.

www.graduate.umaryland.edu/AliciaYaYa
Faculty Exchange Program Fellows are UCR and UMB faculty members with an established record of research in aging or a related field who will conduct research at the partner institution as part of a joint research team or using shared data and resources. Fellows are provided with stipends to support airfare, lodging, and living expenses for up to a year. Participation in a workshop or conference at the partner site can qualify.

2023 University of Costa Rica Faculty Exchange Fellow

Carolina Santamaria Ulloa, PhD
Full Professor and Researcher
Universidad de Costa Rica, Health Research Institute

During her Fellowship, Dr. Santamaria-Ulloa will be working with Dr. Amanda Lehning, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Associate Professor at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. Together they will compare the determinants of health inequalities in the elderly populations of Costa Rica and the United States.

2023 University of Maryland Baltimore Faculty Exchange Fellow

Denise Orwig, PhD
Professor, Epidemiology & Public Health
UM School of Medicine

Will be a keynote speaker at the VIII International Congress in Gerontology at the University of Costa Rica's San José campus in July 2023, where she will speak about her research in biobehavioral aspects of aging, particularly in the areas of hip fracture recovery and developing interventions to maximize recovery, and translating interventions into the community.
UCR GERONTOLOGY CONGRESS PARTICIPATION

The Faculty Exchange program is supporting up to eight UMB faculty researchers to travel to Costa Rica in July 2023 to take part in the VIII International Congress in Gerontology at UCR and visit sites in the Nicoya Peninsula region of Costa Rica, where UCR has a regional campus in one of the “Blue Zones.”

This visit will create ties across UCR and UMB faculty members who engage in aging research. UMB participants will share their research accomplishments and interests in a panel discussion. They will build connections with UCR researchers and learn about aging research priorities in Costa Rica. Upon return, team members will take the lead at UMB to stimulate interest in the Seed Funding program and foster collaborative research partnerships.

AGING IMPACT RESEARCH (AIR) GRANTS

Managed by the Center for Global Engagement, the Aging Impact Research (AIR) grants provide initial support for transformative research collaborations between UCR and UMB researchers. Funding is secured by a competitive application process and must include faculty members from both institutions. The goal of the program is to provide early funding for promising new collaborations to position them for future external funding. Launching Fall 2023.
INITIATIVE LEADERSHIP

Faculty Co-Directors
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Program Manager
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Global Program Manager
UMB Center for Global Engagement
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OTHER UMB INITIATIVES IN COSTA RICA

UMB/Costa Rica Faculty Development Institute

In January 2023, 11 faculty members from five UMB schools (Dentistry, Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, and the Graduate School) engaged in a series of interactive workshops on topics such as learning design and assessment, strategies to globalize curricula, ethical global engagement, incorporating active learning, inclusive classroom practice, and other topics. Participants proposed a global course, module, track, clinical elective, or international program that they will design in collaboration with skilled trainers during the workshop.

The Institute was supported by the generous support of Dr. Leslie Glickman, retired professor of the UM SOM Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science program.