On April 18, 2022, the University of Costa Rica and the University of Maryland, Baltimore deepened their existing partnership by signing a memorandum of understanding and launched the Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research through the generosity of Dr. Marco Chacón. This collaboration was designed to address mutual academic needs and promote research growth. The initiative facilitates exchanges between postgraduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and faculty members from both institutions.

The Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research demonstrates the UMB Graduate School’s commitment to advancing research, practice, and teaching in the fields of gerontology and aging. Developed in collaboration with the InterAmerican Center for Global Health (CISG), the Initiative provides a platform for UMB and UCR students, faculty, and other scholars to study and learn collaboratively. By offering fellowships, collaborative learning opportunities, symposia, seed funding, and other financial support options, this program creates an environment that promotes academic growth and international cooperation. This program consists of two primary elements: the Alicia and Yaya Fellows program and the Alicia and Yaya Aging Seed Research Grants.

Debbie and Marco Chacón, renowned for their dedication to bridging academic research and drug development in the biopharmaceutical sector, made this initiative a reality with their generous donation by focusing on enhancing life
THE UMB DELEGATION

Funding from the Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research allowed 10 UMB researchers to travel to Costa Rica from July 19-23. They made invaluable connections with UCR faculty, paving the way for continued collaboration in aging research. Participants included:

Carlos A. Faerron Guzmán, MD, MSc  
UMB Graduate School  
Associate Professor of Global Health  
Co-Director, Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research

Amanda Lehning, PhD, MSW  
UM School of Social Work  
Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Associate Professor

Tamela McClam, MD  
School of Medicine  
Assistant Professor, Division of Geriatric Psychiatry, Department of Psychiatry

Denise Orwig, PhD  
School of Medicine  
Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health  
Co-Director, Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research  
2023 Alicia and Yaya Initiative Faculty Fellow

Elizabeth Parker, PhD, RD  
UM School of Medicine  
Assistant Professor, Physician Therapy and Rehabilitation Science
Alice Ryan, PhD  
School of Medicine  
Associate Director for Translational Sciences, Center for Research on Aging

Danya Qato, PhD, PharmD, MPH  
School of Pharmacy  
Associate Professor of Practice, Sciences, and Health Outcomes Research  
Director, Pharmaceutical Health Services Research Graduate Program

Carolina Santamaría, PhD  
Universidad de Costa Rica's Health Research Institute  
Full Professor and Researcher  
2023 Alicia and Yaya Initiative Faculty Fellow

Elias Snyder, PhD, FNP-C, ACHPN  
UM School of Nursing  
Director, Office of Global Global Health  
Program Director, Global Health Certificate

Zafar Zafari, PhD, MSc  
School of Pharmacy  
Assistant Professor of Practice, Sciences, and Health Outcomes Research
**VIII INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF GERONTOLOGY**

As part of the visit, the UMB delegation attended the VIII International Conference of Gerontology, organized by the University of Costa Rica, from July 20-21 in San José. UMB contributed significantly to the academic discourse and collaboration in the field of gerontology, and actively participated in the event.

At the conference, each researcher presented their research findings on topics including:

- **Aging in Place in Changing Neighborhood Contexts** – Dr. Amanda Lehning

- **Elucidating the Unintended Impact of National Policies on Use of High-Risk Medications in Older Adults** – Dr. Danya Qato

- **Reclaiming Ancestral Wisdom: Decolonizing Approaches to Global Palliative Care** – Dr. Eli Snyder

- **La fragilidad como predictor de la mortalidad entre adultos mayores no institucionalizados: una comparación entre Costa Rica y Estados Unidos** – Dr. Carolina Santamaría-Ulloa, Dr. Amanda Lehning, Licda. Mónica V. Cortés-Ortiz, and M.Sc. Ericka Méndez-Chacón

- **Aging Well with Exercise: Research in Obesity and Disability** – Dr. Alice Ryan

- **Nutrition for Healthy Aging** – Dr. Elizabeth Parker

- **Assessing Memory Loss: Normal Aging Versus Dementia: A Geriatric Psychiatrist’s Perspective** – Dr. Tamela D. McClam

- **Health and Economic Burden of COPD in Older Adults** – Dr. Zafar Zafari
VIII INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF GERONTOLOGY

Dr. Faerron Guzmán highlighted the significance of the partnership and the shared vision of both institutions. "The collaboration between UMB and UCR is a clear demonstration that neither language, nor borders, nor distance are real barriers to the construction of joint projects," he said. He further stressed the importance of this joint effort in promoting internationalization, academic interculturality, and scientific dialogue.

Dr. Orwig took center stage on July 20, presenting "Changes Across Multiple Domains of Recovery Post Hip Fracture and Key Sex Differences: Findings from the Baltimore Hip Studies." Her expertise and dedication to the field have been instrumental in the development and success of this collaborative initiative between UCR and UMB. Additionally, Dr. Orwig also contributed to the "Roundtable: Contributions of Gerontological Training to Society," further emphasizing her commitment to advancing the understanding of aging and its societal implications.

At the second day of the conference, the UMB delegation made significant contributions to their respective area of expertise and fostered new partnerships. An important part of this event was a networking dinner organized in partnership with the Office of International Affairs and Foreign Cooperation (OAICE) at UCR and provided a chance for researchers and academics to discuss possible collaborations and share insights.
IS AGING INEVITABLE? HOW DOES SCIENCE SEEK ETERNAL YOUTH?

As part of the event on July 20, UMB hosted an academic event at the Radisson Hotel in downtown San José. Dr. Faerron Guzmán opened the event, which included a speech by Dr. Fernando Morales, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at UCR and Dr. Marco Chacón, who spoke about the significance of these collaborations.

Dr. Morales stands as a cornerstone in the collaborative endeavors between UCR and UMB. His dedication and insights have been instrumental in fostering and strengthening ties between the two institutions. In October 2022, Dr. Morales further solidified this partnership by visiting UMB, emphasizing the mutual commitment to academic exchange and collaborative research. His active involvement underscores the importance of continuous dialogue and shared vision in international academic collaborations.

The event concluded with an outstanding presentation by Dr. Salvador Macip i Maresma, a professor at the University of Leicester. Dr. Macip is a distinguished personality in the field of medicine and molecular genetics and has devoted his career to exploring the molecular underpinnings of cancer and aging. Dr. Macip has written multiple books that tackle current health challenges, including the possibility to slowing down the aging process and increasing the health span.

The event was attended by deans, researchers, and a diverse array of international professionals specializing in aging research and health sciences. The gathering showcased the global interest and commitment to understanding the complexities of aging and the pursuit of scientific advancements in the field.
After the main gerontology conference, the UMB delegation engaged in various activities to enhance understanding of the region and its unique attributes related to aging. Visits were organized to various parts of the Guanacaste province, specifically to the Nicoya Peninsula, one of only five "Blue Zones" in the world, along with locations in Greece, Italy, Japan, and the United States. These zones are known for the remarkable longevity of their inhabitants, with many living beyond 100 years of age. Site visits were guided by Jorge Vindas, who is the President of the Asociación Península de Nicoya Zona Azul, which works tirelessly to improve the quality of life for the elderly in the Nicoya Blue Zone.

The group had the privilege of interacting with several centenarians from Nicoya, gaining invaluable insights into their life experiences and perspectives on aging. The visit included a stop at the elderly care home in Hojancha, Nicoya where the group learned about various community-based approaches towards aging and elderly populations.
NICOYA PENINSULA BLUE ZONE

To finish the trip, the UMB delegation visited the University of Costa Rica's campus in Liberia on July 26. The visit emphasized UCR's research initiatives in gerontology and dedication to tackling the issues related to this demographic change. The interactions during this visit have laid the groundwork for forthcoming collaborations and sparked discussions for the 2024 seed grants under the Alicia and Yaya Initiative in Global Aging Research. The occasion created a platform to promote unity, collaboration, and a common vision among the attendees. The unwavering support from UCR and its Provost played a vital role in the success of this event, signaling a bright future for advancements in gerontology research.

The events held in Costa Rica, in partnership with the University of Costa Rica, highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to global aging research. By assembling experts with varied fields and backgrounds, the initiative has promoted a productive conversation, shared knowledge, and established enduring collaborations that will enhance the frontiers of gerontological studies. The perspectives derived from the Nicoya Blue Zone will shape future investigations and interventions.

The initiative thanks Dr. Marco Chacón for his unwavering support and vision that enabled this initiative. We also appreciate the pivotal role played by Dr. Carlos Faerron Guzmán in facilitating these collaborations, Dr. Denise Orwig for her leadership and expertise, and Dr. Salvador Macip for his enlightening contributions to the field of aging research.

We acknowledge the InterAmerican Center for Global Health and the University of Costa Rica for their partnership and commitment to advancing global health and aging research. These collaborations testify to the power of collective effort and its potential to improve aging populations worldwide.