



Request for **Scholar Applications** from the University of Florida Claude D. Pepper Older American's Independence Center (OAIC)  
**Research Education Core**

***Understanding the Multi-Complexity of Mobility Loss with Aging***

**Release Date: August 30, 2024**

**Letter of Intent Deadline: November 1, 2024**

**Full Application Due: Friday, January 10, 2025**

The University of Florida Claude D. Pepper Older American's Independence Center (OAIC) is seeking applications for its Pepper Scholar Program from early-stage investigators conducting research related to the OAIC theme of "**Understanding the Multi-complexity of Mobility Loss with Aging**". Examples may include interventions to improve mobility function, observational studies that evaluate novel risk factors for mobility loss, understanding mobility loss in under-represented groups and age-related biological and/or physiological pathways that preserve or rescue mobility function. Investigators are required to utilize the OAIC Cores that possess expertise for enhancing the innovation and measurement capabilities of their project (see below).

**RFA information workshop**

**Tuesday, September 17, 2024 from 8 – 9 AM  
or Monday, October 21, 2024 from 12 – 1 PM**

**Clinical Translational Research Building (CTRB) Room 2144 or  
via zoom <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/91221268899>**

**[Link to Info Session Registration](#)**

**UF OAIC Cores**

Scholars **MUST** utilize select OAIC Cores as a research resource described below in "Research Component". A brief description of each core follows.

**The Research Education Core** led by Christiaan Leeuwenburgh, PhD ([cleeuwen@ufl.edu](mailto:cleeuwen@ufl.edu)) and Roger Fillingim, PhD ([RFillingim@dental.ufl.edu](mailto:RFillingim@dental.ufl.edu)) which recruits and supports talented early stage investigators and provides mentored research and personalized training, including a common core of activities that increase the aptitude for translational science.

**The Clinical Research Core**, led by Stephen Anton, Ph.D. ([santon@ufl.edu](mailto:santon@ufl.edu)) provides expertise for conducting and translating clinical research across the spectrum of investigation of both behavioral and pharmaceutical clinical trials. It also engages with observational studies of risk and outcomes related to mobility and prevention of disability.

**The Metabolism and Translational Science Core**, led by Christiaan Leeuwenburgh PhD ([cleeuwen@ufl.edu](mailto:cleeuwen@ufl.edu)), research asserts that healthy aging depends upon knowledge of specific protein, RNA, and DNA biomarkers, as well as measurements of metabolism in isolated mitochondria and white blood cells.

**The Systems Physiology and Multi–Omics Core** led by Karyn Esser, PhD ([kaesser@ufl.edu](mailto:kaesser@ufl.edu)) provides expertise in systemic measures of mouse activity, circadian rhythms and bioinformatics expertise for genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics and metabolomics datasets metabolism and feeding.

**The Biostatistics Core**, led by Peihua Qiu, PhD ([pqiu@ufl.edu](mailto:pqiu@ufl.edu)), creates operational definitions for outcome variables and other covariates to be measured, analyzes pilot/exploratory studies to obtain data useful for planning future studies, provides pre-study and pre-proposal study design guidance: performs power analyses, calculates appropriate sample size for testing intervention effects and develops statistical analysis plans.

**The Digital Health and Artificial Intelligence Core**, led by Todd Manini, PhD ([tmanini@ufl.edu](mailto:tmanini@ufl.edu)) and Sanjay Ranka, PhD ([ranka@cise.ufl.edu](mailto:ranka@cise.ufl.edu)), provides a central hub of expertise in computer science, biomedical engineering, biomedical informatics, data science, applied technology, epidemiology, and content expertise in the assessment of mobility.

For more information on the UF OAIC visit <https://com-hop-pepper.sites.medinfo.ufl.edu/>

## **Who should apply? What are the evaluation criteria?**

Basic science and clinical researchers who are early stage faculty or post-doctoral associates are encouraged to apply. Applicants may originate from any Colleges within the University of Florida or the VA Medical Center, and can include collaborations with other institutions, particularly those with OAIC's.

### **Primary Qualifications:**

1. Faculty appointment at the Assistant Professor, Post-Doctoral Associate, or equivalent level
2. A proposed research project relevant to “**Understanding the Multi-complexity of Mobility Loss with Aging**” through interdisciplinary approaches to promote mobility and independence
3. Commitment to a research career with an aging focus
4. Not having received as PI an NIH R01 or similar grant awards, or K award or other career development awards
5. Sufficient protected time (min 50%) to accomplish the research career development plan
6. Explicit support of Department Chair / Division Chief
7. US citizenship not required, foreign nationals are eligible to apply

### **Selection Process:**

1. Peer review committee evaluates applicants
2. Appointment by the Pepper Center Executive Committee
3. Endorsement by External Advisory Committee
4. Approval from the National Institute on Aging Program Officer

## **Research Component**

Basic science projects and secondary data analyses projects are allowed up to \$25,000 per year and clinical research projects which involve human subjects are allowed up to \$50,000 per year in direct costs for the 2-year funding period. Each project should be for no more than 2 years (project end date 3/31/2027) and it is the expectation that all funds will be expended within each award year: no carryover of funds and no indirect costs are allowed. The research component is evaluated upon:

1. Significance, innovation, methodological approach, and investigator
2. Relevance to the RFA theme: “**Understanding the Multi-complexity of Mobility Loss with Aging**”
3. Potential to result in subsequent larger NIH funded projects. A paragraph is required to describe the aims of the subsequent project and to outline how the research will provide data that are needed for

the major grant.

4. Quality and Commitment of Primary Mentor and Mentoring Team
5. Multidisciplinary Investigative Team
6. Environment and use of Pepper Center Cores
7. Budget and timeline appropriateness
8. Early stage investigator qualifications (publications, impact of research, previous training, etc.)

### Salary Support and Training

1. In addition to funding for the research component, salary support of 50% effort, up to \$60,000/year is allowable by the OAIC contingent upon support of a minimum of 50% protected research time from the applicant's department chair and mentor
2. One or two highly qualified primary mentors actively participating in their mentoring and research education components
3. Access to a formal mentoring team (3-5 members total including primary mentor(s)) with whom the applicant meets at least every six months to monitor progress
4. Priority access to OAIC research cores
5. Applicants must clearly lay out their career development plan including attendance of all OAIC seminars, CTSI seminars for early stage faculty, didactic scientific education through their research project and formal coursework
6. Awards levels are contingent upon the type of project proposed, availability of funds and approval by the OAIC External Advisory Board and the National Institute on Aging

### ALLOWABLE COSTS

1. Only direct costs that support the advancement of the research proposal are allowed. No indirect costs will be awarded.
2. Awardees must comply with the broad policies governing Cost Accounting Standards.

### PROVISIONS APPLICABLE TO DIRECT COSTS

1. Domestic travel is permitted for project-related scientific meetings to discuss or present research. Foreign travel is not allowed.
2. Scientific equipment (not to exceed \$5000) is allowed if specifically budgeted for and awarded. Upon completion of the project, any equipment purchased utilizing REC funds will remain under the title of the UF Pepper Center.
3. General purpose office equipment is not allowed.
4. Costs of publications and open access fees are allowable.
5. Food is not allowed, except for research purposes for research study participants.
6. Principal Investigator and key personnel (Co-Investigators) salaries are not permitted (except the Research Education Scholar salary as outlined above), but supporting scientist and staff salaries are allowed.

### RFA information workshops

Tuesday, September 17, 2024 from 8-9 am or Monday, October 21, 2024 from 12 - 1pm

Info sessions will be held in person in Clinical Translational Research Building Room 2144 or by Zoom

### When will applicants receive notification of award?

Notification of award is projected after **April 2025**. Funds will be distributed sometime after **July 2025**. The distribution of awards is contingent upon approval of the project from the local Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) as appropriate. **Applicants must include the IRB/IACUC submission process in their timeline.**

## What is the application process?

### LETTER OF INTENT (LOI)

A letter of intent to submit an application is due by **November 1, 2024**. The following information should be included in the submission.

1. Your name, title, email, department and college, other demographic information.
2. Relevance to the OAIC theme as described in this RFA
3. Core(s) you plan to utilize for your project
4. Short summary, specific aims and research plan

LOIs can be submitted at <https://redcap.link/xko43kow> and are due by **5PM on November 1, 2024**. You will receive application instructions if your letter of intent is accepted for this RFA.

### PUBLICATIONS

All publications need to follow the NIHMS guidelines. If funded, investigators will be asked to acknowledge that **“Support was provided by the University of Florida Claude D. Pepper Older Americans Independence Center P30AG028740”** and must be in PMCID compliance.

For additional information or clarification please contact Christiaan Leeuwenburgh ([cleeuwen@ufl.edu](mailto:cleeuwen@ufl.edu)), Roger Fillingim ([rfilling@ufl.edu](mailto:rfilling@ufl.edu)), or Rui Xiao ([rxiao@ufl.edu](mailto:rxiao@ufl.edu)) for questions regarding this RFA and guidance in developing relevant research proposals. Please attend the informational workshop if you are interested in applying.

# University of Florida OAIC Pepper Center Research Education Core (REC): Opportunities & Expectations

The REC promotes the development of independent investigators in interdisciplinary research on aging relevant to the independence of older Americans. This core emphasizes the development of leadership skills for translating basic findings into clinical research and clinical findings into basic research.

The REC supports the research training of OAIC Early Stage Investigator Scholars. The Scholars span the spectrum from no funding, to external career development awards or equivalent, to advanced trainees that have obtained grants that provide substantial salary support.

Under the direction of the REC Core leader, each Scholar will assemble a mentoring committee with one primary mentor and 2-4 secondary mentors. The trainees and mentors meet regularly to discuss and strategically plan the research agenda, training and development activities and trajectory for independent funding.

The OAIC takes pride in promoting careers in the areas of Aging with the theme of “**Understanding the Multi-complexity of Mobility Loss with Aging**”. Our goal is to maximize success to promote visibility of the candidates. We wish you continuing success with your career, and with this pilot project.

## **A. What can the Pepper Center do for Scholars?**

The University of Florida REC aims are to foster the development of research and leadership skills of promising scientists. We support the research training of OAIC Scholars that span the spectrum of scientific investigation and career levels. These include early trainees who are not yet funded independently, to advanced trainees who already have competed successfully for career development or grants that provide substantial salary support. The OAIC provides the following infrastructure and research supports for Scholars:

1. Travel, tuition/training, based on the annual budget (generally up to \$1500 annually per Scholar)
2. Statistical consulting and data management assistance
3. Other resources from the OAIC Cores, for example assistance with recruitment of research participants, access to biomedical laboratory expertise and services
4. Support of grant development, and the opportunity to have grants reviewed internally and externally
5. Networking for aging research collaborations and mentoring at UF and nationally
6. Access to competitive pilot grant funds
7. Opportunity to present project results at UF and national research forums

## **B. Expectations of Pepper Center Scholars.**

The following provides a list of expectations for OAIC Scholars. Individualized expectations are part of formal plans and reports of each Scholar and their Mentoring Committee, partly as a function of the percentage of effort with the OAIC. All supported Scholars participate in formal mentoring groups and submit six-month progress reports from their bi-annual meetings. Appointment as a REC Scholar includes a summary of fiscal sources of support and expectations.

1. Complete progress reports & meet with the mentoring committee every six months.
2. Attend at least 50% of the OAIC Seminar Series.
3. Attend a one-hour bi-annual Round Table research meeting (Fall-Spring) where we will discuss bi-annual progress reports, funding expenditures and your next grant specific aims.
4. Present a one-hour presentation at the OAIC Seminar Series.
5. Attend at least 50% of the monthly OAIC Science Meetings.
6. Present a one 5-minute presentation at the OAIC Pepper Executive Committee on their study.
7. Provide OAIC with an updated CV annually.
8. Attend/present at the National Pepper Center Annual meeting.
9. Potentially present at the monthly National Pepper Center Leadership meeting/call.
10. Participate in other UF research events as appropriate (e.g., College of Medicine Celebration of Research).
11. Initiate new collaborations & research funding proposals aligned to the UF OAIC theme as recommended by the Mentor Committee.
12. Demonstrate scholarly productivity as set by the Mentoring Committee, generally at the rate of 1-2 first or senior peer-reviewed publications per year & collaborative publications.
13. Submit collaborative publications acknowledging UF OAIC support (Support was provided by the University of Florida Claude D. Pepper Older Americans Independence Center P30AG028740).
14. Peer-reviewed publications must be in PMCID compliance.