

In This Issue:

- 1 News from the NORC Director
- 2 Across the NORC Network
- 3 Training & Enrichment Updates
- 4 Outreach Updates
- 5 Save the Dates

News from the NORC Director

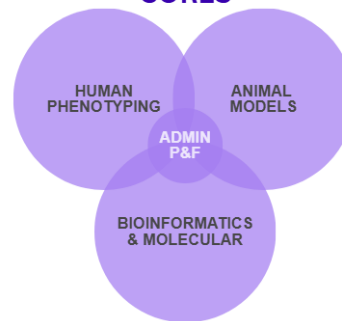


Eric Ravussin, PhD
*Douglas L. Gordon Chair in
Diabetes and Metabolism
Boyd Professor
Pennington Biomedical Research
Center*

It is with mixed feelings that I write this short column about the recent progress of our Pennington - Louisiana NORC. After a smooth two-year transition from my leadership to Dr. Leanne Redman, who became the Principal Investigator of this Center Grant, Leanne has left our institution for a position she could not refuse: the Academic Director of the Charles Perkins Centre at the University of Sydney in Australia. Leanne not only led our NORC by example, but she also put together an outstanding renewal application for our 5th round of 5 years, leading us from 2026 to 2031. This application was

reviewed this past January and obtained a fundable score of 16. A lot of credit goes to Leanne and her Executive Committee for this successful renewal.

CORES



With her departure for Australia, I will again serve as the Director of the NORC, assisted by Dr. Christopher Morrison, who will serve as the Associate Director. The rest of the

team remains the same with Drs. Corby Martin and Ursula White for the Human Phenotyping Core, Drs. Sujoy Ghosh and David Burk for the Bioinformatics & Molecular Mechanisms Core and Dr. Robert Kesterson for the Animal Models Core.

As you are probably aware, we recently issued a call for the next round of Pilot and Feasibility studies and received 14 Letters of Intent, with approximately 9 moving forward to full applications. The Pilot and Feasibility program is one of the highlights of Center Grants, as it allows early-stage investigators to generate the necessary preliminary data often requested by NIH grant applications.

In summary, I want to give a personal shout-out to Leanne Redman and wish her the best of luck in her future academic endeavors in Australia. I also thank the Executive Committee, who rallied to produce our renewal application, and for the constant support of our External Advisory Board.

Shoutouts Across the NORC Network

LSU Health New Orleans Research Earns APSSelect Highlight in *Function*



Dr. Eden Gallegos

LSU Health New Orleans PhD student, Eden Gallengos, MD, was recently recognized for her research published in *Function*, which was selected as the APSSelect highlighted article of the month for February. Under the mentorship of Dr. Liz Simon, Dr. Gallegos

developed a novel 3D hepatocyte spheroid model of metabolic dysfunction-associated alcohol-related liver disease (MetALD). Using this human hepatocyte-like system, she examined the combined effects of ethanol, high-sugar, and high-fat exposure on lipid accumulation, oxidative stress, and mitochondrial ATP production. This innovative approach complements ongoing preclinical and clinical studies aimed at understanding synergistic risk factors driving alcohol-associated liver disease.

LSU Health New Orleans Study Uncovers Role of Calcium Signaling in Brown Fat

Trayambak Pathak, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Department of



Interdisciplinary Oncology at LSU Health New Orleans, is leading innovative research that sheds new light on the biological regulation of obesity.

Supported by an NIH K99/R00 award, Dr. Pathak's work examines how store-operated calcium entry (SOCE) channels function in brown adipose tissue and sympathetic neurons to regulate metabolic homeostasis. His findings demonstrate that SOCE-driven calcium signaling in brown adipocytes controls transcriptional programs governing UCP1 expression and mitochondrial uncoupling—key mechanisms underlying non-shivering thermogenesis. Importantly, impaired SOCE disrupts neuro-adipose communication, dampening thermogenic capacity and promoting obesity. Dr. Pathak's work positions the SOCE–metabolism axis as a promising therapeutic target with potential relevance to obesity-associated cancer risk.

Pennington Expands Imaging Capabilities with Installation of Leica STELLARIS Confocal

The Cell Biology and Bioimaging Core (CBBC), part of the Pennington–Louisiana NORC's Bioinformatics and Molecular Mechanisms Core (BMMC), has recently installed Leica Microsystems' newest confocal imaging system, the STELLARIS STED 3X FALCON. With instrumental support from the Pennington Foundation in securing external funding, Pennington Biomedical researchers now have access to state-of-the-art optical imaging capabilities.

The STELLARIS platform integrates multiple advanced technologies into a single system, enabling imaging across spatial scales—from centimeters to nanometers. Leica's NAVIGATOR software streamlines imaging of large specimens and supports automated acquisition in chambered slides and multi-well plates. For properly labeled samples, STED (stimulated emission depletion) microscopy dramatically improves resolution from ~200 nm to 40–70 nm.

In addition, the integrated FALCON (FAST Lifetime CONTRAST) module provides real-time fluorescence lifetime imaging (FLIM), supporting applications such as protein–protein interaction analysis, assessment of membrane tension, pH and ion concentrations, and label-free tissue characterization based on autofluorescence lifetimes. The system's tunable white light laser (440–790 nm) further expands imaging flexibility, including excitation of far-red fluorophores such as Alexa 750 and Alexa 790.



Training for new users is expected to begin in early April. **NORC investigators interested in learning more about the Leica STELLARIS system are encouraged to contact CBBC Director Dr. David Burk at david.burk@pbrc.edu.**

Training and Enrichment Updates

Expanding National Reach Through NIDDK-Sponsored Clinical Methods Training

Building on the success of the previous two offerings, the NIDDK Clinical Methods for Nutrition and Obesity Research Course continued to strengthen its national impact by hosting a third session at Pennington Biomedical Research Center in February. The most recent training brought together 23 early-career investigators and advanced graduate students from 18 institutions, reflecting sustained demand for immersive, hands-on training in clinical research methods relevant to nutrition, metabolism, and obesity.

Across the past year, the three course offerings have engaged more than 80 early-career researchers representing 37 institutions nationwide, underscoring the program's expanding reach and visibility. The February session included six investigators affiliated with NORC programs, five of whom represented the Pennington–Louisiana NORC—including participants from Pennington, LSU Health New Orleans, LSU Health Shreveport, and Tulane University—alongside one external NORC participant from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.



February 2026 Cohort

Central to the course's impact is the dedicated engagement of renowned faculty instructors, many of whom are investigators within the Pennington–Louisiana NORC. Trainees benefited from direct mentorship and instruction from Drs. Eric Ravussin, Stephen Heymsfield, Jennifer Rood, Corby Martin, Ursula White, Jacob Mey, Neil Johannsen, Emily Flanagan, and Paula Brantley. Supported by the NIH through the R25 mechanism, the course continues to serve as a national platform for skill development, collaboration, and workforce development, reinforcing Pennington Biomedical's leadership in advancing clinical nutrition and obesity research.

The next offering is currently being planned with a target date of late 2026 or early 2027.

Sustaining Excellence in Obesity Research Training: 22 Years of NIDDK T32 Support

Pennington Biomedical is wrapping up its 22nd consecutive year of NIDDK funding for the T32 Training Program in Obesity Research and will enter Year 23 in June 2026, marking more than two decades of sustained investment in developing future leaders in metabolic and obesity science. The program's current trainees exemplify its long-standing commitment to rigorous, multidisciplinary research training.

In May 2026, two trainees will complete the program. Dr. Hannah Cabre will transition to an Assistant Professor position at Pennington as she continues a pathway toward research independence. Dr. Catherine Prater has secured a competitive two-year American Heart Association fellowship, which includes more than \$150,000 in research support to study markers of weight gain, and will continue her postdoctoral training under Dr. Ursula White. In addition, the program welcomed one new trainee in 2026, who is highlighted below.



Sam Kennedy received her Ph.D. from Louisiana State University. Dr. Kennedy began training in the T32 program in March 2026 under the mentorship of Peter Katzmarzyk, PhD.

Pennington is currently fielding applications for open postdoctoral positions on the T32 in Obesity Research. **Interested candidates are encouraged to apply at pbrc.edu/human-resources/careers.**

Hansel Visiting Scientist Seminars- Spring 2026

Each semester, the Hansel Visiting Scientist Seminar Series brings distinguished scientists from leading national and international universities, as well as governmental and industrial laboratories, to engage with the local research community. Open to all NORC members, the series provides a valuable forum for intellectual exchange, collaboration, and

exposure to cutting-edge research across the spectrum of nutrition, metabolism, and obesity research.

The Spring 2026 lineup features an exceptional group of invited speakers. Notably, three seminars are sponsored by the Pennington–Louisiana NORC, including presentations by C. Ronald Kahn, MD, PhD (February 5); David Nathan, MD (April 9); and John Speakman, PhD, DSc (May 21). All NORC members interested in attending are encouraged to contact Pennington’s Division of Scientific Education at SciEd@pbrc.edu.

Date:	Speaker:	Topic:
Feb. 5 NORC Sponsored	C. Ronald Kahn, MD, PhD Harvard Medical School	miRNAs and Metabolites: New Instruments in the Orchestra of Cellular Communication
April 9 NORC Sponsored	David Nathan, MD Harvard Medical School	The Evolution of Large-Scale, NIH-sponsored Clinical Trials: A personal odyssey (are they in jeopardy?)
April 16	Julie Hughes, PhD US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine	Challenging Long-Held Dogma in Bone Exercise Science to Prevent Bone Stress Injuries in Soldiers and Civilians
April 30	Hussein Yassine, MD Center for Personalized Brain Health, Keck School of Medicine of USC	DHA Supplementation, Lipid Metabolism, and Brain Health: From Biology to Clinical Trials
May 21 NORC Sponsored	John Speakman, PhD DSc University of Aberdeen King’s College	Models Of Body Weight Regulation in Animals and Humans

Outreach Updates

Pennington Hosts 26th Annual Wellness Day for Women

The 26th Annual Irene W. Pennington Wellness Day for Women continued its long-standing commitment to advancing prevention, early detection, and community health. The 2026 event welcomed more than 530 attendees and offered a



Participants started the day with chair yoga

wide range of free health services, educational resources, and wellness experiences, such as chair yoga classes and hands-on CPR demonstrations.



Health screenings provided by Our Lady of the Lake

Participants received 824 total health screenings, including glucose, cholesterol, blood pressure, and stroke risk assessments, with 206 individuals screened through Our Lady of the

Lake. Additional services included mammograms, vaccinations, colorectal cancer screening kits provided by Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center, with 250 total screenings conducted through that partnership. The event also hosted 14 premium exhibitors and 14 nonprofit exhibitors, creating opportunities for education and connection. Women’s Wellness Day remains a cornerstone of Pennington’s mission to promote lifelong health and well-being in the community.

Save the Date!

The following are Enrichment Core events for 2026, partially sponsored by our NORC.

Spring Visiting Scientist Seminars

- **April 9:** David Nathan, MD, Harvard Medical School
- **April 16:** Julie Hughes, PhD, US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine
- **April 30:** Hussein Yassine, MD, Keck School of Medicine of USC
- **May 21:** John Speakman, PhD, DSc, University of Aberdeen, King’s College

April 11, 2026- Fifth Annual Senior Black American Health Fair

Pennington will host the **5th Annual Senior Black American Health Fair** on Saturday, April 11, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Pennington Biomedical Conference Center. This is a free community event offering health screenings, educational programming,

interactive activities, and resources focused on promoting healthy aging within Black and African American communities.

Registration is encouraged. Learn more and sign up at pbrc.edu/training-and-education/community-outreach-and-events/events/sbahf/.

announcement and registration information with the entire NORC community.

April 27-28, 2026- Scientific Symposium

PBRC's Spring Scientific Symposium, ***Ultra-Processed Foods and Health: From Mechanisms to Action***, is right around the corner on April 27 and 28! Dr. Eric Ravussin of Pennington Biomedical and Dr. Boyd Swinburn of the University of Auckland will co-chair the symposium. This meeting will examine ultra-processed foods (UPFs) as a rapidly evolving frontier in nutrition science, moving beyond definitions to explore how industrial processing, additives, packaging, and food system dynamics influence health across biological and population levels. Featuring leading international experts, the symposium will also address mechanisms of harm, policy responses, and communication challenges, with the goal of fostering cross-disciplinary dialogue and informing future research and action.

August 22, 2026- Men's Health Summit



The annual Men's Health Summit will be held on Saturday, August 22, 2026, from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the C.B.

Pennington Jr. Conference Center. The event will feature health screenings, educational sessions, and interactive activities focused on promoting men's health and wellness. More details and registration information to come.

NORC Day 2026

Planning is underway for NORC Day 2026, which will take place in the Fall and will feature a hybrid format. NORC Day remains a key annual Enrichment Core activity, bringing together investigators from partner institutions across Louisiana for scientific exchange, program updates, and discussion of collaborative opportunities. We encourage all NORC members to keep an eye out for additional details. Once the date is finalized, we will share a formal