

Thank you, President Adams for that kind introduction.

Early in my reporting career, I realized that scientists and writers are engaged in the same fundamental pursuit: asking questions about how life works.

Both of us learn more if we ask the “right” questions, and experience teaches that these are easier to identify with advice from people whose expertise is different from our own. That’s why many of today’s best biomedical questions are being asked by interdisciplinary teams.

How do seemingly tiny errors in genetic expression give rise to profound, heartbreaking birth defects? What makes a person’s immune system savage her own pancreatic cells and cause diabetes?

These are just two of many questions being pursued inside the Coverdell Center. In the developmental biology group, cell biologists, mathematicians, and geneticists who collaborate on problems such as these were previously housed in three different departments and four different buildings.

Coverdell not only brings groups together, but also gives them access to state-of-the-art resources. For example, a new functional MRI machine takes detailed pictures of the brain – or other living tissue – with no harm to the person being studied. This versatile tool can be used to probe the mysteries of everything from obesity and spinal cord injury to heart function and Alzheimer’s disease.

On the third floor, infectious disease experts are forging weapons against parasites, viruses and bacteria that bring misery to hundreds of millions of people worldwide: stunting growth, destroying intellect, and shortening lives. UGA scientists aim to lift this burden with better diagnostic tests, medical treatments and preventive vaccines.

Other Coverdell tenants focus more on Americus than Africa. Thousands of Georgians die early from heart disease and cancer, even though doctors have known for decades how to cut risks by quitting smoking, exercising, and eating sensible. Health communications researchers on the first floor are investigating how communication can reduce health disparities that divide rich and poor in the South.

College of Public Health faculty also ask big questions, such as why the world’s wealthiest nation can’t provide health care for all its people. And they are acting locally, setting up cancer information kiosks in Athens pharmacies so that residents can find help selecting a surgeon, understanding drug side effects, even locating a wig shop.

There are a million other exciting things going on at Coverdell, and as you walk around you will meet scientists whose heart’s desire is to make the world a better place. Not just a better place for the privileged, but for people who have been left behind, people whose talents and energy are needed to ensure that future generations live in a healthier, more equitable world. Thank you.

