

# TTU Obesity Research Institute | Strategic Plan 2019-2025



## Committee Members:

- **Naima Moustaid-Moussa, Ph.D., FTOS, FAHA**, Professor, Nutritional Sciences & Director, Obesity Research Institute (ORI)
- **Jannette Dufour, Ph.D.**, Professor, Cell Biology & Biochemistry, School of Medicine TTUHSC & Associate Director, ORI
- **Kayla Tindle, Ph.D.**, Managing Director, Office of Research Development & Communications (ORDC)
- **Oak-Hee Park, Ph.D.**, Research Assistant Professor, College of Human Sciences
- **Mary Murimi, Ph.D.**, Professor, Nutritional Sciences
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Director: Dr. Naima Moustaid-Moussa

Associate Director: Dr. Jannette Dufour



Obesity has reached global epidemic proportions and must be addressed comprehensively through synergized translational and transdisciplinary efforts.

The goal of the ORI is to conduct interdisciplinary research to address the complexity of obesity as a disease, and address related disorders from biological, behavioral, environmental and societal aspects. This centralized research infrastructure will promote and foster translational, basic, clinical, and community research to understand the etiology and complications associated with obesity and to develop individualized effective prevention and treatment strategies. The ultimate goal is to take an active role in improving quality of life, locally and globally, with emphases on the rural/underserved, remote communities in West Texas.

## Vision Statement

Establish national and international leadership in interdisciplinary Obesity research and education.

## Mission Statement

Develop interdisciplinary basic, clinical and community need-based, translational research to prevent, monitor and treat Obesity along with its related complications, using innovative tools through collaborations and strategic partnerships.

## Values

Integrity & Trust

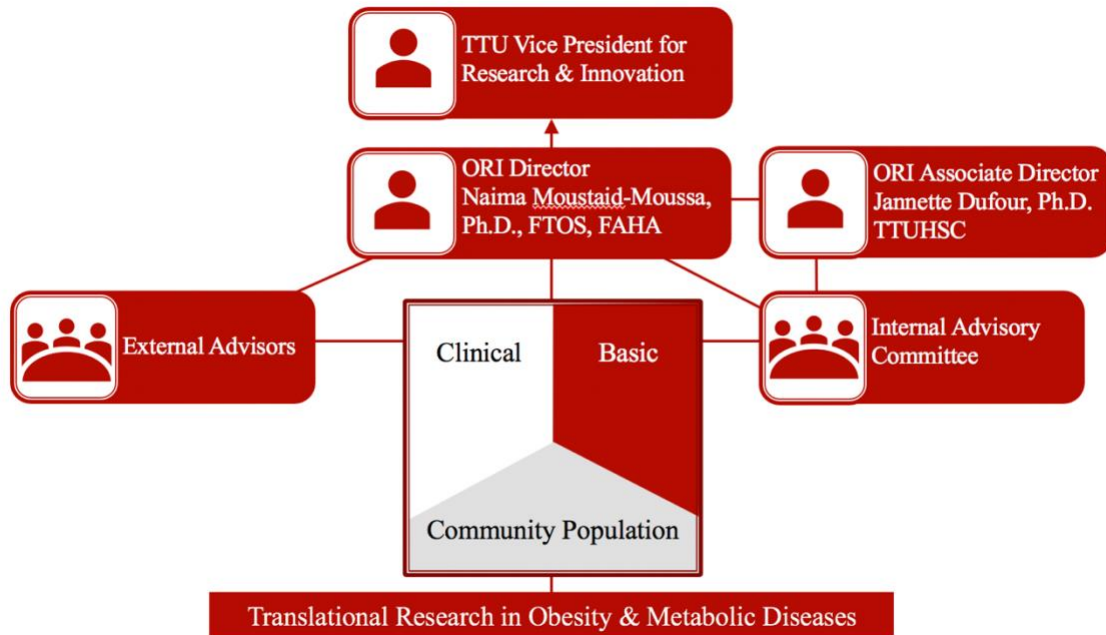
Respect for Interdisciplinary Teamwork & Diversity

Mentoring & Training

Compassion & Dedication

Multidisciplinary & Dynamic Knowledge Development and Dissemination

## ORI Organizational Chart



The Obesity Research Institute (ORI) was established per OP 74-14 and approved at the February 2019 Board of Regents meeting. ORI directly reports progress towards accomplishing proposed goals and objectives annually to the Office of Research & Innovation.

ORI recruited an Associate Director, Dr. Jannette Dufour from TTUHSC, nominated by the Director and approved by the ORI Internal Advisory Committee. The Associate Director, Dr. Jannette Dufour, will assist with strategic initiatives, planning and directions for ORI, with emphasis on those that strengthen collaborations between TTU and TTUHSC. The Internal Advisory Committee will be selected to represent those areas of research and units represented and actively engaged in ORI. As funding allows, ORI will recruit External Advisory members formed of national/international experts in obesity and related diseases to provide insight, progress review and input into ORI strategic initiatives and directions. These will come primarily from scientists who successfully established and/or directed externally funded Obesity Centers, such as NIH Nutrition Obesity Research Centers (NORCs) or AHA Strategically Focused Research Network (SFRN) Centers, or USDA Sustainable Agricultural System Programs or Center of Excellence.

## ORI Strategic Priority 1: Expand and Enhance Research and Creative Scholarship

Aligned with TTUS Priority III – Expand and Enhance Research and Creative Scholarship

ORI members should be (established investigators) or aspire to be (new investigators) recognized in their research field and have at least one (likely multiple) major individual investigator grants. This will provide strong research base for collaborations and for competing for large center grants. The ORI will work to expand funding for research and creative scholarship to increase our research base. Output of funded research projects and peer-reviewed publications will increase both the research visibility and reputation of the TTU, TTUHSC and participating campuses, the ORI, and individual faculty. Scholarship will particularly focus on large, multidisciplinary projects that impact the human condition by preventing and/or treating obesity-related diseases based on individualized approach and precision medicine.

### Key strategies:

- The initial task for the director, associate director, executive committee and advisory committee members is to create an effective and innovative platform for idea generation and award submissions for novel funding mechanisms, in line with funding agencies' strategic planning.
- Actively identify and recruit new ORI members and facilitate collaborations across other campuses through organized workshops, meetings, webinars and the ORI website.
- Identify strategic research themes representing expertise and strengths of the participating campuses. Building on the strengths of each TTUS campus, ORI will foster and enhance cross campus collaborations and multidisciplinary research focused on the biological, behavioral, and environmental bases for nutrition, physical activity and obesity-related diseases. Target and opportunity areas include childhood obesity and community research, health disparities and at risk populations, “omics” applications, the link between obesity and cancer, and obesity and risk for diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.
- In addition to developing applications for internal funding (such as President Collaborative Research Initiative, PCRI), research teams will be expected to develop proposals for external funding. These activities will help establish the track record of publications and collaborations that will generate increased research expenditures for the benefit of system universities, as well as their faculty and students. Each campus already has local research collaborations and partners. Thus, this network will be further expanded through ORI and offer a strong basis for developing competitive interdisciplinary federal proposals.
- Other activities will include ORI Nutrition & Obesity seminar series, to provide opportunities for TTU students and faculty to interact with experts in obesity. Similarly, invited speakers within the system and external experts (pending availability of funding) will learn more about what TTU campuses collectively have to offer. Together these will increase visibility of the TTU system.

## ORI Strategic Priority 2: Enhance Academic Environment through Faculty, Postdoc and Student Success and Diversity

Aligned with TTUS Priority II - Strengthen Academic Quality and Reputation

As appropriate, the ORI will support recruitment and retention of the best faculty in the country and attract high quality graduate students, postdocs and other trainees to obesity-related academic programs. Consistent with the TTUS mission, ORI will contribute to the growth and diversity of its population by providing a supportive training environment that emphasizes integrity, diversity, and cross-disciplinary collaborations, to assist them in reaching their goals. In particular, there will be an emphasis on growing undergraduate, graduate and postdoc involvement in obesity-related research. This strategic priority will propel the ORI toward becoming a nationally recognized institute.

### Key strategies:

- Expand ORI with an emphasis on research with active and collaborative members through regular communications, recruiting and retaining research-active ORI members.
- Provide platforms and opportunities for collaborations, such as annual meetings and electronic communications.
  - Establish research prizes for outstanding contributions in obesity by students, postdocs, and faculty.
  - Promote and support strategic hiring in obesity-related research and assist TTUS with target hires in this area.
  - Improve and increase the training and education in basic, clinical and community nutrition and obesity prevention, treatment, and management. ORI will continue to look for opportunities to increase the critical mass in obesity research (students, postdocs, and faculty).
  - Identify specific undergraduate and graduate programs for obesity research training.
  - Enhance funding to support student and postdoc recruitment, research, and travel support, including undergraduate research and mentoring.
  - Develop cross-campus obesity seminars and courses with an emphasis on multi-disciplinary aspects and support faculty efforts to increase obesity-related content in health science courses within professional curricula.

## ORI Strategic Priority 3: Further Outreach and Multidisciplinary Collaborations

Aligned with TTUS Priority IV - Further Outreach and Engagement

The goal is to increase collaborations between ORI members and across the TTU System and other partners. Internally, ORI will encourage resource sharing and support of core facilities. ORI will initiate and support opportunities for international collaborations in this area, and work to expand the number of collaborations and strengthen the existing efforts in multi-institutional research and training, with agencies and communities locally, statewide, and internationally.

Presence of a structure, such as ORI, will centralize obesity-related expertise and resources within TTUS and will identify ORI as a central point of contact for obesity-related information for TTUS and externally.

### Key strategies:

- Collaborate with current core facilities within TTUS to submit instrument grants (such as NSF MRI grants) and facilitate access to resources for obesity researchers (e.g. CBG, TTU Imaging facility, and TTUHSC core facilities).
- Develop and continue updating the ORI website and assist faculty with identifying obesity-related resources, opportunities, and grants in obesity-related areas.
- Work across programs to submit training grants.
- Utilize TTUS faculty expertise for partnering with agencies and the community locally, nationally and internationally.
- Continue active involvement (ORI Director and/or advisory committee members) and ORI/TTUS representation at the state level (such as the Live Smart Texas Steering Committee, and the Southern Obesity Summit).
- Participate in improving the quality of nutrition, physical activity and obesity information provided to the public, and translate TTUS basic and clinical research into programs that improve health and wellness and reduce obesity in the community, as an important outreach component.
- Develop relationships with TTUS institutes and centers, such as the Institute for Integrative Health, the Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health, F. Marie Hall Institute Rural & Community Health and the Garrison Institute on Aging, the Center of Emphasis in Diabetes & Obesity at TTUHSC El Paso.
- Expand communications and outreach to inform others of our work and increase the scope of our community research by partnering with others; for example, USDA Sustainable Agriculture programs & Diet and Chronic Disease programs that requires partnership with

the community and USDA Cooperative Extension Programs, such as Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

- ORI engagement in international collaborations.
- Encourage and promote collaborative research efforts with professional societies, such as, The Obesity Society, the American Society for Nutrition, Academy for Nutrition and Dietetics, Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior, The American Heart Association, and others.
  - ◇ As the Institute expands, include ORI news in social media: Facebook, twitter accounts and others, and when relevant, connect to relevant professional societies and organizations.