

# Wang's behind-the-scenes work key to UAB researchers

UAB's Department of Nutrition Sciences has been involved in a collaborative research project with investigators in the Department of Biostatistics/Section of Statistical Genetics for more than a year.

In these studies, researchers are categorizing the differences in the patterns of gene expression in skeletal muscle in patients with diabetes. Their goal? To refine the molecular defects in muscle that lead to insulin resistance in muscle — the process that causes Type 2 diabetes.

**W. Timothy Garvey**, M.D., professor and chair of Nutrition Sciences, is happy to report that his department has identified some targets for developing new drugs to help patients. But without **Jelai Wang**, systems programmer lead in the Department of Biostatistics, Garvey says finding those targets would not have happened.

“Jelai has been instrumental in data analyses and computer programming to support this project,” says Garvey. “I want to emphasize that these aren't routine analyses or programming, but activities that required creativity to solve new problems that had not been encountered previously.”

Whether it's nutrition sciences, nutritional genomics, biostatistics, mathematics or statistics, Wang is someone investigators rely on to give them the tools to conduct their research. For his efforts and unfailingly positive attitude toward his job, Wang has been selected as September's Employee of the Month.

**David Allison**, Ph.D., professor and head of the Section on Statistical Genetics (SSG), says Wang has developed vital computing software for UAB, jointly serving the SSG and the Enabling Technology Lab in Mechanical Engineering.

Wang designed the novel microarray Power Atlas, which enables investigators to determine optimal sample sizes for



MIKE STRAWN

Jelai Wang, systems programmer lead in the department of Biostatistics, is September's Employee of the Month. Know someone who should be Employee of the Month? Send correspondence to Richard Helling at [helling@uab.edu](mailto:helling@uab.edu) or via campus mail to AB-360. You can also nominate through the new Employee of the Month Web site at [www.uab.edu/eotm](http://www.uab.edu/eotm).

experiments as well as other cutting-edge software for the university.

“Jelai Wang is a technical genius,” Allison says. “He has been instrumental in our securing numerous grants, both by helping to write grant applications and by developing a cutting-edge computing lab that gives UAB an advantage over other grant applicants.”

Wang takes all of credit bestowed upon him in stride and with a touch of humor. After all, “I'd rather be employee of the month than not,” he says.

But Wang also goes out of his way to

thank his colleagues for their support in nominating him for the award and his co-workers for their tireless effort. “That's the only reason I look good, because of their dedication,” Wang says. “I can't say enough about our team. **Vinodh Srinivasasainagendra, Amit Patki, Tapan Mehta, Mikako Kawai and Ramprasad Venkataraman** are absolutely top notch. We've got a good team and a great leader in Dr. Allison. It's a killer combination.”

Others on campus who rely on Wang for his expertise agree.

“Not being a computer person myself, I am continuously amazed at the beauti-

ful and accurate work he produces,” says **Nancy Bell**, financial associate in the Clinical Nutrition Research Center.

Wang says he is flattered to know his peers think so highly of him and the work he does. And Garvey wants to make sure everyone knows exactly how important Wang's work is to UAB.

“To the extent that UAB is recognized for its scientific contributions and is recognized in our community for the economic benefits of our research, we have people like Mr. Wang to thank for this,” Garvey says. “Our investigators get plenty of credit, but they could not have done this without Mr. Wang.”