Recruitment & Retention Plan to Enhance Diversity

The Division of Biology and Medicine at Brown University is fully committed to fostering, achieving, and maintaining a training environment that allows trainees from groups underrepresented in the biological and public health sciences to succeed. Increasing the diversity of our trainees not only enriches the educational experiences for all involved in their scholarship, but feeds a much needed pipeline of talent for future faculty and workforce recruitment. Within the Division, Directors of our graduate programs; the Associate Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; and the Dean of Biology and Medicine are all partners in this enterprise. Additional commitment and resources supporting diversity extends to the University administration through the Associate Provost & Director of Institutional Diversity (http://www.brown.edu/Administration/diversity/index.html), the Dean of the Graduate School, Assistant Dean for Recruiting and Professional Development of the Graduate School and the President of Brown University. In 2003, President Ruth J. Simmons created the Office of Institutional Diversity (OID) to provide leadership for the formulation and oversight of policies related to pluralism and equity, and initiate programs and practices that promote diversity, inclusion and fair treatment of all members of the community. The associate provost and director of institutional diversity leads the work in OID.

Recruitment and retention of a diverse trainee group includes individuals with disabilities. Brown University’s Graduate School and the Division of Biology and Medicine are fully committed to fostering, achieving, and maintaining a training environment that allows trainees with disabilities to succeed. To that end, the Division’s Diversity webpage (http://biomed.brown.edu/grad-postdoc/diversity.htm) has links from all prospective postdocs/prospective grad students pages, and includes the following statement: “The Division of Biology and Medicine at Brown University … encourages members of underrepresented minority groups and individuals with disabilities to apply for admission to its graduate programs and postdoctoral positions.” The Division recognizes that its website will be also a key source of information for prospective trainees, and makes every effort to ensure that the content of this site accessible to every visitor. Feedback on enhancing accessibility is welcome and can be directed to the webmaster. All Brown graduate students and postdocs also get free transportation on RIPTA buses, which now offer expanded service for individuals with disabilities. (http://www.ripta.com/ripta-bus-accessibility) New recruitment brochures are in preparation to also make sure that those considering Brown for graduate and postdoctoral training are cognizant of disability services and Brown’s commitment to inclusiveness. Recruitment materials are distributed via faculty visits to undergraduate campuses, regional and national scientific meetings and in response to individual and group inquiries.

In addition, both pre- and postdoctoral trainees at the university are informed via orientation materials and website postings that they should register with the Student and Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS) (http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Office_of_Student_Life/dss/) if they are in any need of accommodation for physical, mental, or psychological disabilities. The registration process involves providing documentation verifying the disability; all university reporting of disability-related information goes through this office to insure the privacy concerns of the individual have been addressed. SEAS coordinates accommodations with offices and departments throughout the university, provides updates with regards to access conditions, offers a wide array of assistive technologies, and offers Workforce Recruitment Program Interviews with businesses actively committed to increasing the diversity of their workforce to help those trainees who have completed work at Brown find the best possible placement. Links and information about SEAS are prominently displayed on the Office of BioMed Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies website which serves as the primary information portal for potential applicants.

Recruitment, retention, and outcomes for underrepresented minorities.

The doctoral training programs within the Division currently matriculate approximately 50 students per year. As of September 2011, nineteen percent of our pre-doctoral students are from underrepresented minority (URM) groups. Several strategies are in place to actively recruit URM applicants to our PhD programs, to encourage URM applicants receiving offers of admission to come to Brown, to retain these individuals once matriculated, and to track their positions after Brown. These are described below.

Summer Research - Early Identification Program (SR-EIP): Talented underrepresented minority students from across the country engage in an intensive nine-week program of research with Brown faculty. These students have excelled academically and self-identify as intending to go on to graduate school. Placement with faculty mentors is arranged via the Leadership Alliance consortium (http://www.theleadershipalliance.org/) headquarterad at Brown and led by interim Executive Director Medeva Ghee, PhD. A substantial portion of
support for students working with Division of Biology and Medicine mentors at Brown is provided by an NIH R25 grant (PI, Sharon Rounds, MD) that has been active for over 15 years. These students often apply to Brown graduate programs and are accepted, generating a functional pipeline to the doctorate.

Leadership Alliance Summer Research Conference: This national conference where SR-EIP students from all research sites of the Leadership Alliance institutions present their research is regularly attended by faculty from Brown and represents an excellent opportunity for soliciting applications to our PhD programs. Program directors maintain contact with students whose research interests and backgrounds mesh well with training opportunities at Brown.

Networking and recruitment visits to minority-serving and partner institutions: Brown University has longstanding ties to a number of minority-serving undergraduate institutions through its membership in Leadership Alliance. In addition, since 1964, a longstanding institutional partnership exists with Tougaloo College (Jackson, Mississippi). Three of our current biomedical graduate students are graduates of Tougaloo (two of these are MD/PhD students).

Brown faculty, graduate student and administrator attendance at national research conferences attended by underrepresented minority scientists and trainees including SACNAS and ABRCMS: Brown University Graduate School and Brown Division of Biology and Medicine are exhibitors at these national meetings where underrepresented minority students present research prior to applying to graduate school. Students are provided with recruitment materials and the opportunity to talk with Brown representatives. We ask for contact information in order to follow-up on interests.

IMSD program and associated initiatives: The Division of Biology and Medicine has had an R25 grant through the NIGMS entitled “Initiative to Maximize Student Development” since 2008 (PIs Andrew Campbell, PhD and Elizabeth O. Harrington, PhD). The goal of this program, ‘Advancing the Culture of PhD Learning and Scholarship in Biology and Health Science’, is to double the number of URM pre-doctoral students within the Division of Biology and Medicine during the grant award and to enhance the retention and success of URM students. Associated with this initiative are intensive skill-based professional development training modules designed to supplement curriculum in the sciences and compensate for uneven or missed opportunities. A goal is to expand the diversity of all our graduate programs and to increase the production of PhDs from URM backgrounds. Important components of this program are the institutional partnerships with York College, North Carolina A & T State University, and St. John’s University. These partnerships have promoted faculty exchanges, mentoring and curriculum development.

Several other specialized recruitment strategies have been implemented to encourage qualified underrepresented minority applicants. We have subscribed to the Graduate Record Exam Service’s database service and set up search parameters for all students self-identifying as URM, reporting a grade average of B or better and interest in attending graduate school in fields represented by our PhD programs. E-mails were sent to such students inviting them to apply to Brown. For URM students who receive offers of admission to our graduate programs, these students receive an invitation from the Assistant Dean for Recruiting and Professional Development of the Graduate School, Jabbar Bennett, PhD for a second expense-paid visit to campus. This “Super Monday” event takes place late in March and is intended to encourage these students to accept Brown’s offer. By visiting with those receiving offers from all graduate programs, the students meet potential colleagues, current students, faculty mentors and get a sense of the community of scholars across campus and the resources available to them.

Retention of URM students is a high priority. Brown was part of the National PhD Completion Project which identified best practices in retention and success of students including students from URM backgrounds. Within Biology and Medicine, retention rates for URM students do not differ from the entire cohort of admitted students. We credit these relatively high retention rates to effective matching of abilities and programs during the admission process and a strong advising system for students who have matriculated. Graduating students are tracked for their next career position via their graduate programs and a centralized Division database.