Next Generation Research

Innovative research institutions push for inclusion in the future of medicine and increase diversity through the science of mentorship.

Also in this issue:
- Supporting individuals with invisible disabilities
- Graduate students fight for reform
AS IT TURNED OUT, THE FIRST STEPS JASON BROOKS TOOK ON THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY CAMPUS WERE A RELIABLE PREDICTOR OF HOW HE HAS APPROACHED LEADING THE MARTIN LUTHER KING CENTER – BY LISTENING.

HOURS BEFORE THE INITIAL INTERVIEW FOR THE MLK CENTER DIRECTOR’S POSITION, BROOKS TOOK AN ANONYMOUS WALK ACROSS CAMPUS. HE TALKED TO STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF HE ENCOUNTERED ALONG THE WAY.

HIS PRIMARY QUESTION: WHAT IS UK REALLY LIKE?

advocate

“ONE OF MY GREATEST EXPERIENCES HERE AT UK IS THE AMOUNT OF SUPPORT AND DEDICATION TOWARDS DIVERSITY INITIATIVES,” BROOKS SAID.

“The MLK Center is one of the most important units within our campus community that helps to prepare students to become global citizens, irrespective of their identity,” said Vice President for Institutional Diversity Sonja Feist-Price. “The MLK Center Director is an advocate for students and plays an important role helping to achieve the University’s goals.”

Brooks said he is most proud of the fact that he has overheard students call his center “the living room of campus,” making it “the most utilized and frequently used area of a home,” he said.

“It’s not just a safe space, but a brave space for our students to be their unapologetic selves.”

University of Kentucky

The University of Kentucky is proud to be nationally recognized as a 2018 Diversity Champion.

An Equal Opportunity University
Institutions Hope to Increase Diversity through the Science of Mentorship
By Jen Roberts

Free Speech Executive Order Challenges Academic Freedom at Research Institutions
By Mariah Stewart

Personalized Medicine Is the Future of Healthcare, but People of Color Have Been Left Out of the Picture
By Kelsey Landis

ON THE COVER: At the largest zebrafish facility in the country, Kevin Bishop, National Human Genome Research Institute Zebrafish Core staff member, holds up a tank of zebrafish to observe their behavior and physiology. Using molecular techniques, researchers alter the zebrafish’s genome to mimic what is seen in human patients in the clinic. (Credit: Ernesto del Aguila III, NHGRI, NIH)
COMMIT TO
A BETTER WORLD

Recognizing and appreciating the value of diversity and cross-cultural understanding is critical to the University of Georgia’s mission. For five consecutive years, we have been recognized for providing an inclusive, welcoming environment for all students.

*It’s our commitment.*

[Image of students walking on a path]

diversity.uga.edu

[Institution logos and badges]

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**Dozens of Institutions Partner in Sexual Harassment Prevention Collaborative**

More than 40 institutions have partnered with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) to launch a collaborative on preventing sexual harassment in higher education.

The collaborative’s goal is to research and develop evidence-based policies and practices for preventing sexual harassment. NASEM found that up to half of all female students and more than half of all female faculty experience sexual harassment in academic settings.

The four main goals of the collaborative include the following:

- Raise awareness about sexual harassment and how it occurs, the consequences of sexual harassment, and the organizational characteristics and recommended approaches that can prevent it.

- Share and elevate evidence-based institutional policies and strategies to reduce and prevent sexual harassment.

- Contribute to setting the research agenda, and gather and apply research results across institutions.

- Develop a standard for measuring progress toward reducing and preventing sexual harassment in higher education.

For more information, visit nationalacademies.org/sexualharassmentcollaborative.

— Kelsey Landis

**COMPREHENSIVE REPORT REVEALS NEW INSIGHTS ABOUT DIVERSITY IN HIGHER ED**

The American Council on Education (ACE) recently released a report on race and ethnicity in higher education in the United States. According to ACE, the research provides “a data-informed foundation for those working closely to close persistent equity gaps by providing a glimpse into the educational pathways of today’s college students and the educators who serve them.”

Among the report’s conclusions were the following:

- The gender gap in enrollment for Black students remained the widest of any group. In 2016, 62.2 percent of Black undergraduates and 70.2 percent of Black graduate students were women.

- Among dependent 2015-2016 bachelor’s recipients, 57.3 percent of upper-income students borrowed an average amount of $27,515, while 74.1 percent of low-income students borrowed an average amount of $24,836.

- As a group, Hispanic undergraduates were among the most likely to pursue and complete an associate degree. However, they were the least likely to complete their degree in healthcare fields.

To view the full report, visit equityinhighered.org/resources/report-downloads/

— Kelsey Landis

---

**Figure 3: Educational Attainment of Adults Ages 25 and Older, by Race and Ethnicity: 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Less than high school</th>
<th>High school graduate</th>
<th>Some college, no degree</th>
<th>Associate degree</th>
<th>Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>Master’s degree</th>
<th>Professional degree</th>
<th>Doctoral degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All races and ethnic groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td></td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander</td>
<td></td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one race</td>
<td></td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2017. “Less than a bachelor’s degree includes less than a bachelor’s degree but includes some college.”

---

**Table 1: Cumulative Debt for Graduate Study: Doctoral Degree Recipients, by Sector and Race and Ethnicity: 2015–16**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Public Four-Year</th>
<th>Private Nonprofit Four-Year</th>
<th>For-Profit</th>
<th>% Who Borrowed</th>
<th>Average Amount Borrowed per Borrower</th>
<th>Median Amount Borrowed per Borrower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All races and ethnic groups</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>$31,538</td>
<td>$54,490</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>$14,550</td>
<td>$15,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
<td>$118,488</td>
<td>$103,922</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
<td>$113,671</td>
<td>$86,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>$37,244</td>
<td>$57,548</td>
<td>70.1%</td>
<td>$37,548</td>
<td>$34,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
<td>$37,224</td>
<td>$57,948</td>
<td>70.1%</td>
<td>$37,548</td>
<td>$34,217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics. 2015. For all groups, percent of those who borrowed or borrowed per borrower are calculated on a subset of the total student loan borrowers who had be a full-time degree-seeking student at the end of the academic year and for whom principal and interest on the student loan was reported in the Spring 2017 follow-up.

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CALIFORNIA
Carol L. Folt, PhD, has been named the president of University of Southern California. Folt previously served as the chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Minou D. Spradley, PhD, was appointed vice president for academic affairs at Southwestern Community College. She formerly served as acting vice president of instruction at San Diego City College.

COLORADO
Joyce McConnell, JD, was selected as Colorado State University’s president, the first woman to take the position. She previously served as provost and vice president for academic affairs at West Virginia University.

OHIO
Michelle Mattson, PhD, was named provost at Wittenberg University. Mattson formerly served as associate vice president of academic affairs for institutional effectiveness at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tenn.

OKLAHOMA
Patti Neuhold, PhD, was appointed president of New University of Central Oklahoma. Neuhold previously served as vice president for finance and chief financial officer for the University of Central Oklahoma.

ILLINOIS
Avis Proctor, PhD, has been named president of Harper College. She formerly served as president of Broward College’s North Campus.

INDIANA
Susan Elrod, PhD, has been named chancellor of the Indiana University South Bend. Elrod formerly served as the provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

IOWA
Jennifer K. Ward, PhD, was appointed president of Luther College. She previously served as provost and dean of Centenary College of Louisiana.

NEW YORK
Joyce Jacobsen, PhD, has been appointed president of Hobart and William Smith Colleges. She previously served as provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Wesleyan University.

Jermaine Williams, EdD, has been named president of Nassau Community College. He formerly served as vice president for student affairs at North Shore Community College.

Geoffrey E. Eaton, was appointed the director of community affairs and diversity at Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine and Touro College of Pharmacy in Harlem. He previously served as the inaugural vice president of the New York State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, PhD, has been named chancellor of City University of New York, the first Latino to hold this position. He formerly served as president of Queens College.

Kevin G. McDonald was appointed vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion at the University of Virginia. He previously served as vice chancellor for inclusion, diversity, and equity at the University of Missouri-Columbia and the chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer for the University of Missouri system.

Maryanne Reed has been named provost and vice president for academic affairs of West Virginia University. Reed formerly served as the dean of Reed College of Media at the institution.

Has your campus recently hired a new administrator? INSIGHT Into Diversity would like to publish your news. Please email editor@insightintodiversity.com.
MSU Denver serves 5,469 Latino students – more than any other higher-education institution in Colorado. We’re proud to have earned federal designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. This unlocks access to new grant opportunities and is an example of our commitment to reflect and serve Colorado.

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Angela Marquez, Ph.D.
Special Assistant to the President, Hispanic-Serving Institution
Sethuraman “Panch” Panchanathan, PhD, is executive vice president of the Arizona State University (ASU) Knowledge Enterprise, which advances the university’s efforts toward research, strategic partnerships, and international development. Panchanathan has served as the founding director of the School of Computing and Informatics and as the chair of the Computer Science and Engineering Department. He also founded the Center for Cognitive Ubiquitous Computing. Panchanathan was the former chair of the committee on strategy for the United States National Science Board and has served on the National Advisory Council on Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

Spiros Dimolitsas, PhD, is senior vice president for research and chief technology officer at Georgetown University (GU). In this role, he oversees GU’s partnerships with industry, universities, and domestic and international laboratories to conduct research in areas such as health and sustainability. Dimolitsas previously served as GU’s senior vice president and chief administrative officer. Prior to joining Georgetown, he was the senior executive for engineering and associate director of the Lawrence Livermore National Lab, an applied-science national security organization. There, he oversaw a team of 2,500 employees and led the design of the world’s largest laser nuclear fusion facility, the National Ignition Facility.

Reene Reijo Pera, PhD, is the vice president of research and economic development at Montana State University (MSU). Prior to this position, she served as the director of Stanford University’s Center for Human Pluripotent Stem Cell Research and Education and the Center for Reproductive and Stem Cell Biology. She was also the director of Stanford’s doctoral program in stem cell biology and regenerative medicine. Reijo Pera has received more than $28 million in research awards and numerous recognitions for her contributions to science research. In 2010, Time magazine designated her work in imaging algorithms as one of 10 biomedical breakthroughs, and in 2006, Newsweek magazine named her one of 20 Influential Women in America.

Stephen Hsu, PhD, is senior vice president of research and innovation at Michigan State University (MSU). He also serves as a scientific adviser to BGI, formerly Beijing Genomics Institute. Before joining MSU, he was a professor of physics and the director of the Institute for Theoretical Science at the University of Oregon. Hsu’s research encompasses a wide range of topics, including applications of quantum field theory, contributions in genomics and bioinformatics, as well as the study of encryption and information security. In addition, he is the founder of two companies in Silicon Valley — SafeWeb, which specializes in securing private online networks, and Robot Genius Inc., which develops anti-malware technologies.

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Gloria S. Waters, PhD, is vice president and associate provost for research at Boston University (BU). She previously served as dean of BU’s College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences: Sargent College, where she significantly improved the college’s undergraduate and graduate programs by increasing their enrollment and doubling the volume of their research funding. Since 1997, she has served as a professor of speech, language, and hearing science at BU. Waters has conducted extensive research in the areas of language and memory processes, receiving numerous funding awards from organizations such as the U.S. Department of Education, the National Institutes of Health, and the Alzheimer’s Association of America, among others.

Renee Reijo Pera, PhD, is the vice president of research and economic development at Montana State University (MSU). Prior to this position, she served as the director of Stanford University’s Center for Human Pluripotent Stem Cell Research and Education and the Center for Reproductive and Stem Cell Biology. She was also the director of Stanford’s doctoral program in stem cell biology and regenerative medicine. Reijo Pera has received more than $28 million in research awards and numerous recognitions for her contributions to science research. In 2010, Time magazine designated her work in imaging algorithms as one of 10 biomedical breakthroughs, and in 2006, Newsweek magazine named her one of 20 Influential Women in America.

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What’s the Big Deal with Pronouns?

By Christopher Hinesley, Ed.D & Taj Smith, Ed.D

Two Rochester Institute of Technology professionals share their conversation on why pronouns are important, especially when creating a welcoming environment for trans and queer students on college campuses. A LGBTQ+ educator, Dr. Christopher Hinesley is the Assistant Director for Campus Life with a focus on leading The Q Center. A cisgender ally, Dr. Taj Smith serves as the Director of Diversity Education.

Chris: A few years ago, I began receiving questions about how to better support transgender students who work on campus.

Taj: A few years ago, I was unaware of their experiences.

Chris: I remember one student who worked at the cash register in the dining hall. He was constantly being mis-gendered. People would call him “ma’am” or use the pronoun “she.” It made him so uncomfortable.

Taj: I would have walked past that same student on a daily basis thinking he was a she.

Chris: After bringing it up with his supervisor, I facilitated a departmental Safe Zone training. But that didn’t seem like enough. We decided that a new nametag with the student’s name and pronouns was our next step.

Taj: That’s so important. It reminds me when I first added my pronouns to my email signature. I had a cisgender colleague sarcastically give me kudos for being so inclusive.

Chris: The point of using them is to avoid mis-gendering, and to decrease the stigma when only the transgender people are publicly naming their pronouns.

Taj: That makes sense. While not my daily experience, I started to imagine all the micro-aggressive comments that trans folx must deal with.

Chris: Exactly, and here are some things to know: first, someone might or might not fit into the gender binary in their appearance and/or gender identity. Others may make incorrect assumptions or be confused as to what pronouns are appropriate. When faced with this confusion and discomfort people tend to respond by avoiding the use of pronouns. They might ask awkward questions like, “What are you?” or “Are you a man or a woman?”

Taj: Right. I’ve definitely used those exact remarks before. Our understanding is always framed in a heterosexual and gender binary understanding of the world. As a cis heterosexual African-American man these kinds of statements are all too familiar. I’ve had people question my existence before. I’ve had people mis-pronounce my “ethnic-sounding” name out of ignorance or fear. I’ve come across books, scientific or religious, that suggest I’m “naturally” inferior.

Chris: Yes! It can make you dread interacting with people and question whether there are allies around you. If only trans and nonbinary folx display their pronouns, they are effectively outing themselves to the world. Their nametag may as well say, “I’m trans!”

Taj: Despite our primary school grammar lessons, we as allies need to reflect on why we want others to conform to our standards. Why do we seek to reject instead of inquire? It’s because of our cisgender privilege.

Chris: That’s so true. I have had the same “a-ha” moments around my whiteness. Keep in mind that some people are not ready to talk about their pronouns. Maybe they’re in the questioning or early coming out phase, or maybe the environment doesn’t feel safe for them. Others might not feel comfortable discussing gender, like the colleague you mentioned, but might come along once the practice is normalized.

Chris and Taj: So, what is your name and what pronouns do you want me to use for you?
LGBTQ students face more financial difficulties than their straight and cisgender peers. Reasons may include lack of familial support, fear of being discriminated against in future employment and thus being unable to repay debt, or anxiety about being denied financial assistance or other services because of gender identity or sexual orientation. Members of the LGBTQ community are more likely to live in poverty than their peers, according to the LGBTQ Poverty Collaborative, which is why scholarships are so important. To celebrate Pride Month, INSIGHT Into Diversity recognizes 10 national higher education scholarships dedicated to students who identify as LGBTQ. For a full list of scholarships available by state, visit hrc.org/scholarship-database.

### APIQWTC Scholarship
The Asian Pacific Islander Queer Women and Transgender Community offers $400 scholarships to Asian Pacific Islander LGBTQ students. apiqwtc.org

### Colin Higgins Youth Courage Awards
The foundation awards $10,000 grants to LGBTQ youth activists. colinhiggins.org/process-timeline

### Queer Foundation High School Essay Contest
The foundation provides $1,000 scholarships to LGBTQ high school seniors planning to study queer theory or a related field at a U.S. college or university. queerfoundation.org

### Gamma Mu Foundation Scholarships
The foundation awards a total of $19,000 annually in individual scholarships to gay undergraduate and graduate men. gammamufoundation.org

### Hampton Roads Pride Scholarship
This nonprofit offers three $1,600 scholarships with a preference for applicants who have done social justice work in LGBTQ communities. hamptonroadspride.org/scholarship

### NOGLSTP Out to Innovate Scholarship
The National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals provides two $5,000 scholarships, one to an undergraduate and another to a graduate student in STEM fields. noglstp.org/programs-projects/scholarships

### Scholarships and Financial Aid Specifically for Graduate Students
GoGrad.org maintains a list of scholarships for LGBTQ graduate students in various fields. gograd.org/financial-aid/scholarships/lgbtq

### Traub-Dicker Rainbow Scholarship
Administered by the Stonewall Community Foundation, this scholarship offers $1,500 to $3,000 to lesbians in high school or those already attending a higher education institution. stonewallfoundation.org/scholarships

### Women in Medicine Leadership Scholarship
Women in Medicine presents two $5,000 scholarships to LGBTQ female students enrolled in their first, second, or third year of medical school. womeninmedicine.org/leadership-scholarships
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Students care about religious diversity. In fact, 85 percent say it’s important for their campuses to provide a welcoming environment for individuals of diverse religious and nonreligious groups, according to a recent survey of more than 20,000 American students by the nonprofit group Interfaith Youth Core.

A majority of those surveyed also reported that it was important or very important to have opportunities to get to know students of diverse religious and nonreligious perspectives and to participate in community service with them.

But students’ good intentions don’t always translate into action. Only 50 percent of those surveyed had worked with people of other religious and nonreligious perspectives on a service project and just 19 percent had participated in interfaith dialogue. Some also saw certain worldviews in a more negative light than others. Only 43 percent of students reported holding highly appreciative attitudes toward Muslims, for instance.

Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) on university campuses across the United States hope to change that dynamic. MSAs work to promote education about Islam and inclusion for Muslim students with a focus on public service. As instances of Islamophobia continue to surface around the world, MSA efforts become increasingly important.

“These groups are necessary to celebrate the individuality that different people and different groups bring to the table, especially with the most recent increases of hate crimes at the national and international level,” says Reem Subei, board member at Islamic Networks Group (ING) Midwest.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations reports that hate crimes against Muslims rose by 15 percent from 2016 to 2017. Advocates for Muslim awareness attribute this increase to the election of President Donald Trump and the attempted implementation of his anti-immigration policies that sought to ban travelers from predominantly Muslim countries. But the marginalization of Muslims in America has always been there, Subei says.

Western Michigan University
Candy S. McCorkle, vice president of diversity and inclusion at Western Michigan University (WMU), says culturally focused student groups such as her institution’s Muslim Student Association (MSA) help educate people on campus and in surrounding communities about different religions.

“Although our world is shrinking in regard to how much we are integrated with one another as a result of technology,” she says, “we are still ignorant of cultures in which we do not hold membership.”

Talal Arshad, president of the WMU MSA, says his organization breaks barriers and eradicates stereotypes. These efforts make the campus a [paragraph continues]
friendlier environment for everyone. The organization isn't just for Muslims, Arshad says. While the MSA is strongly connected to Islam, people of any background who are interested in learning something new, meeting people, or helping those in need are welcome to join. McCorkle says education is also key to awareness.

“The Muslim Student Association, as well as other culturally focused student groups, are important because they often serve as a mechanism to educate the campus and surrounding communities about the Islamic faith and Muslim people,” McCorkle says. “The [organization] can provide a connection between students and the Muslim community in the area so that the students have social and spiritual support.”

The group's overall mission includes the following principles: Facilitate tolerance and understanding by maintaining relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, promote discussion through programming and special events, enhance education of students and prepare them to live in a globalized world, and serve as a spiritual beacon for Muslim students.

“It's important for Muslim students to feel and know that they have a place to go, where they can express the concerns they have and connect and engage with others like them who will come to their support when they are facing problems,” Subei says.

To build this sense of belonging, the MSA hosts a number of different activities ranging from community volunteering to informational speakers to religious events such as a Ramadan Iftar, the meal eaten after sunset during Ramadan fasting. Another recent event included a discussion about stereotypes surrounding Muslim women.

McCorkle says she recently visited the Kalamazoo Islamic Center to hear an Imam speak about the history of Islam and the Qur'an. Attendees observed a prayer service and learned how to do the foot and hand washing required before prayer service. Experiences such as these provide a cultural education students and other community members might miss out on.

The WMU association also makes it easier to advocate for the rights of Muslim students, Arshad says. Because of his concern about food options available on campus for Muslims, he asked the university to include more halal dishes in campus dining areas. The MSA supported his idea and the university made the changes.

For students considering starting similar organizations on other campuses, Arshad says it’s important to ask for help. “Do not worry about the population, the number of people that support you, or the criticism that you encounter,” he says. “Just stick to the path to accomplish your goal. … Ask the faculty and staff at your university, reach out to MSAs of other universities. You would not know how much others are willing to help you until you ask for help.”

Clark University

For Anushka Harlalka, being a member of Clark University’s MSA is about allyship. She sees a lot of racial diversity and inclusion work being done on campus, but not as much around religion. “Our purpose as an MSA,” Harlalka says, “is to provide a voice for students of Muslim identity and as an organization that helps make Clark a
Because she doesn’t identify as Muslim, Harlalka sees facilitation as her role in the MSA. “I cannot decide what is best for the needs of the Muslim community at Clark,” she says, “so I chose to focus on the logistics of how to fulfill those needs.”

During Harlalka’s time with the MSA, the organization has advocated for an interfaith prayer room and halal burgers in the cafeteria. Harlalka says she hopes the club will continue pushing so “Muslim students on campus are able to practice their faith as easily as any other student on campus.”

For institutions to truly be inclusive of Muslim students, they must first have a basic understanding of the Islamic faith, Subei says. Her organization, ING, gives presentations to help schools such as Clark understand how they can better address the needs of Muslim students.

“A lack of knowledge, sometimes willful and sometimes unintentional, leads to an oversight as to the rights of those students,” Subei says. “Merely knowing about others and feeling that others know about you, who you are, and what you stand for provides a sense of belonging to those students and reminds them they can, in fact, practice their religion freely as protected by the law.”

There’s also a social aspect to Clark’s MSA. Members gather for events such as the annual Eid al-Adha dinner, jeopardy, and dialogue sessions. The group provides an important supportive, safe space for Muslim students and their allies, Harlalka says.

After the 2016 presidential election, many Clark University students were shaken, Harlalka says. The MSA president spent their meeting time checking in with members. “I remember her telling us to breathe and asking what we needed. We had a debrief that day about the election, what that meant for us, and what that meant for Clark University students as a whole. I remember that meeting as somber and a place for all of us to lean on each other.”

Harlalka says being a member of the MSA has helped her grow. “It has taught me how to advocate for Muslim-identifying students to make their voices heard when and if their needs aren’t being met,” Harlalka says. “It has taught me how to ‘take space’ and ‘make space’ in a club where that identity is not my own.”

MSAs and allies are all the more important on college campuses where new enrollees who have just left home are already at risk of feeling alienated or marginalized, Subei says. If Muslim students feel supported and included, they will go on to succeed socially and academically.

“Walking into that college and finding a welcoming environment,” Subei says, “enables them to grow and develop in all areas, not just in their spiritual lives. When they have a sense of camaraderie with other students, they can feel more relaxed and comfortable.”

Another main purpose of MSAs, including those at Clark and WMU, is to provide education to non-Muslims and Muslims alike about differing cultural groups.

“You need to meet someone who is different from you in order to recognize that it is important to learn about that group,” Subei says. “If you cannot bring in a diverse group of people in the process of our education, then everyone’s education is stalled and stagnated.”

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Medical University of South Carolina
Don’t Just Try to Eradicate Bias — Build Bridges of Inclusion

BY JOSEPH SANTANA

Learning to accept differences, watching our thoughts, avoiding right and wrong dichotomies, training for unconscious bias awareness — these are all often-recommended steps toward being more open and accepting of others.

Organizations spend billions of dollars on training efforts in the hopes of creating more inclusive environments for their diverse teams. Unfortunately, training is not a complete solution.

The subconscious mind, where all of these behavioral drives come from, is about 17 ½ times faster in processing information than the conscious mind, which attempts to moderate impulses.

If you have a biased response to a particular person, even if you use your training to moderate it, you are still experiencing the bias. Moreover, you’ve likely already conveyed your discomfort or distaste to the other person through a number of different micro-expressions. We’ve all seen the smiling mouth with the blank eyes or stiff shoulders.

But let’s take it one step further and say that you totally succeed in overcoming your negative response to the other group of people. This still does not mean that you are embracing the bias. Moreover, you’ve likely already conveyed your discomfort or distaste to the other person through a number of different micro-expressions. We’ve all seen the smiling mouth with the blank eyes or stiff shoulders.

But let’s take it one step further and say that you totally succeed in overcoming your negative response to the other group of people. This still does not mean that you are embracing the bias. Moreover, you’ve likely already conveyed your discomfort or distaste to the other person through a number of different micro-expressions. We’ve all seen the smiling mouth with the blank eyes or stiff shoulders.

One good example of how affinity can be engineered using a very simple approach is found in the work of Hunter Gehlbach, associate professor and associate dean at the University of California, Santa Barbara Gevirtz Graduate School of Education.

Gehlbach knew from other studies that students who felt an affinity with their teacher tended to perform better in school. Gehlbach wanted to know if this affinity could be intentionally engineered. To test his theory, Gehlbach partnered with the faculty and students of a high school.

At the beginning of the school year, he gave 315 of the incoming ninth-graders and 25 of their teachers a “getting to know you” survey. In the survey, the teachers and students responded to the same questions, which asked about personal preferences such as favorite hobbies, charities they would support, and the characteristics they wanted in friends, among others. The teachers and students who learned about their shared interests perceived each other to be more similar and formed an affinity connection.

Students of color were the biggest beneficiaries of this engineered affinity. Gehlbach believes this effect was due to White educators discovering affinities with students of color. The teachers may not have otherwise sought these commonalities because of assumptions that racial and ethnic differences precluded any other common points of connection.

Can you do this type of high-impact survey in your organization? Of course you can. Will it cost a lot less than providing unconscious bias training for thousands of people? You bet it will.

Another easy way to foster affinity is by adding more structure to some of your existing mentoring efforts. Put your senior executives on a “Green Book” journey with your underrepresented talent.

I personally witnessed this approach...
a few years ago in a structured mentoring program designed to bring people with high potential, often from underrepresented groups, together with executives who were mostly White males. In this program, professionals from underrepresented groups — the mentees — were paired with White, male senior executives in a one- or two-week job-shadowing program.

The mentees attended meetings led by the senior executive and also interviewed and developed relationships with those who reported to the executive during a period of intense interaction.

Many of these professionals were later included in succession plans or were tapped for higher-level positions. It was clear that these engineered encounters had offered senior executives an opportunity to connect with people they might not have known well previously.

I also saw the power of engineered affinity in one of my workshops that is designed to show participants across all demographics how inclusion benefits everyone.

I show participants a video with examples of how people experience marginalization and exclusion. These examples include straight White men as well as people of color, people with hidden disabilities, and people from just about every group you can imagine.

After the video, I ask the participants, “Did you see yourself or someone you love in the video?” All hands go up. Next, we debrief on specific aspects of the video that touched different people in the room. The result is that everyone begins to see how exclusion affects them personally and how it affects others. Thinking about this effect generates a sense of affinity around a common desire not to be excluded and an outpouring of ideas on how to create more inclusion.

Maya Angelou, the American poet, singer, memoirist, and civil rights activist, once said, “We are more alike, my friends, than we are unalike.”

We just need to seek out our commonalities. Becoming aware of what divides us in the form of biases and learning techniques to address these challenges is indeed important, but it’s not enough.

To create inclusion, we need to nurture connection — that is, affinity — among people who see themselves as different. An important piece of this puzzle is found in the words of President Abraham Lincoln, who once wisely said, “I don’t like that man. I must get to know him better.”

Diversity and inclusion leaders would do well to heed those words and work to drive inclusion not just by addressing the obstacles that divide us, but also by intentionally engineering the discovery of the affinities that bind us.

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Joseph Santana is an INSIGHT Into Diversity Editorial Board member. He is also president of Joseph Santana, LLC, a boutique consulting practice.
At just 50 years old, the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) is a young institution with big aspirations. UAB is the largest single employer in Alabama, employing a workforce of more than 23,000 faculty and staff while supporting more than 64,000 jobs statewide. It is the premier research institution in the state and the only public, four-year university in Birmingham. UAB and its world-class academic medical center are a critical source of education, healthcare, community service, and economic development for the diverse populations in its surrounding community and across Alabama.

Diversity and inclusion have been central to UAB since its founding in 1969, just four years after the racial integration of the state’s colleges and universities, says vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion Paulette Patterson Dilworth, PhD. With a student population that is 40 percent from underrepresented ethnic and racial groups and nearly one in five students identifying as African American, UAB continues to be “the engine driving diversity and inclusion in higher education in our state,” she says.

UAB president Ray L. Watts says the university is honored “to be among the select group of colleges and universities named Diversity Champions. Earning this recognition is a testament to UAB’s longtime commitment to keeping our shared value of diversity at the center of our thinking every day, as well as the outstanding work of our Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) and countless others across campus. Diversity
is among the core values that drive our policies, strategic planning, and ongoing success, and UAB is pleased to be recognized as a national model for these efforts.

This intentional, collaborative approach is evident in UAB’s unique Equity Leadership Council. Each academic and administrative unit on campus has its own equity adviser who serves as a liaison between their office or department and ODEI. Together, these individuals make up the council, which advises Dilworth and UAB leaders to “chart the course” for all matters related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, she says.

In addition, ODEI offers extensive diversity education and training opportunities on campus and beyond. More than 8,000 faculty and staff members have completed online training and instructor-led modules on unconscious bias, sexual harassment, Safezone training, and bystander intervention. Events like the Critical Conversations community forum series offer every member of the campus and wider community the opportunity to hear from experts on difficult but necessary topics to advance and promote inclusive excellence. Partnerships between ODEI and local entities — including business and industry, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and historically Black colleges and universities — enable UAB to serve as a diversity and equity leader for the entire surrounding community.

These extensive efforts guide UAB’s strategic goal of educational access and student success. Underrepresented students have numerous opportunities to be mentored by peers, faculty, staff, and alumni. Academic and social support services tailored to the diverse needs of students and employees are abundant. The encouragement and resources necessary to go further in one’s education or career are readily available.

Multicultural Scholars Program

The Multicultural Scholars Program, which provides academic and financial assistance for underrepresented students, is based on the principle of “each one, reach one” because every member is expected to “pay it forward through volunteerism and mentoring others,” says Brandon Wolfe, PhD, assistant vice president for Campus and Community Engagement.

Each year, MSP enrolls 25 high-achieving first-year underrepresented students. Members receive partial scholarships and are connected with upperclassmen, employee, and alumni mentors who share their academic and career interests. Students meet regularly with their individual mentors, who share how to succeed at UAB and provide tips on maintaining a healthy work-life balance and

MSP celebrates its graduating seniors and recognizes the accomplishments of its members as both a cohort and as individuals. The program is based on the principle of “each one, reach one.”
avoiding common college pitfalls.

Many MSP alumni are actively engaged with the program. Connecting current members with alumni gives students a jumpstart on learning “the ins and outs of their field, what steps they need to take to ensure their résumés are competitive, and how to actually transfer their skills to the workforce,” Wolfe says. “When we think about pipeline programs, we often think about getting students into college and graduate school, but MSP is focused on actually getting them through to the workforce.”

Members also maintain strong connections as a cohort. They attend monthly meetings with Wolfe, ODEI staff, and senior MSP students to discuss issues such as identity formation and preparing for graduate school. Furthermore, Wolfe says, the ODEI serves as a constant resource, whether for studying in the office’s Educational Resource Lab or visiting with him directly.

Wolfe emphasizes the team effort between ODEI, the MSP mentors, and the students. “Together, we do anything we can to facilitate MSP students’ overall academic success and career planning because we understand . . . that each has their own unique needs, challenges, and goals,” he says.

**Blazer Male Excellence Network**

Another program, the Blazer Male Excellence Network (BMEN), offers academic, social, and mentorship support tailored to African American male students. The program is open to “as many students as would like to participate,” says Chris Jones, director of Student Multicultural and Diversity Programs (SMDP). Those who join are paired with a junior or senior mentor who shares their major or other characteristics that help them relate to one another.

Mentors assume much of the responsibility for facilitating the program, starting with BMEN’s freshman orientation week before the start of the fall semester. The event includes intensive math and English lessons, sessions on transitioning to campus life, and social activities that help incoming members bond with one another and their mentors. “Our peer leaders spend the entire week with their mentees and plan all of the co-curricular programs,” Jones says. “We advise them on activities, but what they do is really up to them.” Barbershop talks, which include free haircuts from local barbers, and pep rallies for UAB athletics are just some of the unique bonding activities established by BMEN mentors.

The mentors are upper-level students who want to support young men from backgrounds similar to their own. Their training includes a leadership retreat, lessons on social justice and diversity issues, and learning instructions on how to recommend the appropriate resources to mentees. These upperclassmen meet regularly with their mentees, giving guidance on any academic challenges or issues with adjusting to college life. Mentors also report to SMDP so Jones and other staff members can intervene when a first-year student is struggling.

A major focus of BMEN is ensuring members develop a sense of belonging at UAB. Having a connection to high-achieving African American upperclassmen “changes the narrative that so many Black men have already internalized by the time they come to campus,” Jones says. “When you see someone who looks like
you and is president of the student government, who is involved in undergraduate research, who is making the president’s list every semester, it gives you a vote of confidence to know that this is a campus where young Black men are excelling in every way.”

Commission on the Status of Women
Since 2004, the UAB Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has served as “a forum that advocates and examines progress” for female faculty, staff, and students,” says Anita Clemon, commission chair and assistant vice president for Institutional Equity. CSW includes representatives from each of UAB’s 12 colleges and schools. “Representatives are responsible for making themselves known as a resource for female students and employees and are available for conversation,” Clemon says. “The communication that happens between representatives and the women within their units feeds back into the commission as a whole and helps us determine what we should be focusing on.”

In addition to staying attuned to the concerns of employees and students, CSW is proactive in celebrating women’s accomplishments. The annual Outstanding Women Awards ceremony “acknowledges and honors women faculty, staff, students, and even those in the community who work to support other women,” Clemon says. The event takes place during Women’s History Month and is an important tradition for UAB that dates back 26 years, she says.

Among the six award winners in 2019 are a faculty member who helps other female employees advance in their careers, an administrator who encourages and assists junior faculty in securing research funding, and an undergraduate who advocates for sexual assault survivors in the surrounding community.

In keeping with its focus on solidarity, CSW offers a weekly support group focused on topics specific to women and opportunities for empowerment and self-improvement. The commission also recently launched a seminar series on “how women rise,” Clemon says, which is led by female campus leaders who share their experiences in overcoming obstacles to achieve success. “We’re hoping that having these women come talk about their own experiences will help individual attendees understand that these women are exceptional, but they’re human too. Hopefully they will take a nugget from a speaker’s story and be able to apply it to their own lives,” she says.

The success of UAB and CSW’s efforts to create positive learning and work environments for women is evident in the university’s demographics. Women represent 60 percent of the student body and 65 percent of the total workforce at the university and UAB Hospital. UAB has had two female presidents in the last 20 years, and women currently hold a number of leadership positions at the executive and departmental levels.

Mariah Bohanon is the associate editor of INSIGHT Into Diversity. UAB is a 2018 Diversity Champion and a 2016 and 2018 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award winner.
At Texas Christian University, we believe in the old saying that knowledge is power. We also believe that knowledge is most powerful when it’s applied to help others. That’s why our faculty ask big questions and dive deep into topics close to their hearts — like how to make an iPhone work as an affordable hearing aid, how to reduce kidney failure rates in African-American communities, and how urbanization and gender intersect in modern Egypt.

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Creating Safe and Supportive Campus Climates for Individuals with Invisible Disabilities

By Ginger O’Donnell

More than one third of college students and employees with invisible or hidden disabilities do not disclose their diagnoses. But universities are increasing their efforts to include these individuals by embracing neurodiversity and universal design for learning on campus.

“An invisible disability is a physical, mental, or neurological condition that limits a person’s movements, sense, or activities [in a way] that is invisible to the onlooker,” states the website invisible(disabilities.org. The term was originally used to describe symptoms of shell shock among returning soldiers from World War I, according to invisible(disabilityproject.org.
Invisible disabilities, also called “hidden” disabilities, encompass a wide range of health concerns, from mental health disorders to brain injuries to physical conditions. Some examples include chronic pain, multiple sclerosis, hearing and vision impairments, and learning disabilities such as dyslexia.

Julia Méndez, a workforce diversity consultant and member of INSIGHT’s editorial board, says some underrepresented groups experience invisible disabilities at disproportionately high rates. LGBTQ individuals face mental health challenges more than those who are heterosexual, cisgender, or both, she says. In addition, a high percentage of veterans are diagnosed with invisible disabilities.

Invisible disabilities are prevalent on college campuses, affecting students, staff, faculty, and administrators at all levels of an institution. But the notion that campus community members need to keep them “secret” is changing as institutions begin offering more support and as leaders increasingly see neurodiversity and other differences as assets rather than impairments.

Despite the increase in specific programs designed to support learners with invisible disabilities, Adam Lalor, PhD, argues that most faculty and administrators at the postsecondary level are ill-prepared to meet their needs. Lalor is a disability researcher and lead educational specialist at Landmark College in Putney, Vt., a school specifically designed for students with invisible disabilities.

“College preparation programs for faculty and staff don’t deeply explore disability, nor do the prevalent journals on higher education and student affairs. Faculty and staff are really left to their own devices,” he says.

Challenges Associated with Invisible Disabilities
People with invisible disabilities grow up learning to try to “pass as normal,” says Solvegi Shmulsky, director of the Center for Neurodiversity at Landmark College. Higher education leaders must learn to help these individuals overcome the challenges they face.

Hiding a disability causes significant stress and comes with the fear of being outed. Moreover, “passing” can cause individuals to question their right to certain accommodations and the importance of advocating for themselves, and even push them to re-evaluate how their disability fits into their overall identity.

The term “neurodiversity” was first used in the 1990s by social scientist Judy Singer in a scholarly work about autism. Landmark College formed its Center on Neurodiversity in January 2018 after people at different levels of the institution—“from students right up to the president”—began referencing a renewed neurodiversity movement in the press and on social media.

It can also lead to misunderstanding and judgment. When trying to advocate for themselves, those with hidden disabilities commonly face remarks like “You don’t look sick,” or “Just get over it,” Méndez says. Symptoms can manifest in subtle or entirely unseen ways, so these individuals’ ability to receive accommodations when they voice their limitations hinges on the willingness of authority figures to take them at their word.

Another form of discrimination, according to Lalor, is being overlooked for special opportunities or challenges—e.g., being a research assistant for a professor—because of the perception that these individuals are too burdened by their disability to participate.

Providing Support
One of the best ways to cultivate a supportive campus climate for all is to do away with the deficit model of disability and instead promote initiatives “that frame neurodiversity as a form of diversity like any other,” Shmulsky says. Such initiatives could include films, speakers, and discussions about disability awareness.

Focusing on strengths shifts the perception of disability from a negative stereotype to a positive interpretation. Shmulsky says many of her students with ADHD, dyslexia, and autism demonstrate a strong capacity for systematic thinking, attention to detail, perseverance, spontaneity and creativity, and visual spatial abilities, among other traits. Moreover, she points out that all people with disabilities—visible or otherwise—develop a singular ability to persist in the face of challenges and setbacks.

An essential part of emphasizing neurodiversity over
disability is implementing the principles of universal design. “We often think about universal design as being related to physical access to building and structures. But when we’re talking about [this idea] for students with hidden disabilities, we’re referring to what’s called universal design for learning (UDL),” Lalor says.

Instead of teaching to an “average learner” and then modifying instruction for those with disabilities, UDL encourages faculty to think of all students as diverse learners who benefit from a variety of approaches to receiving and expressing information. According to the website DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology), UDL minimizes the need for professors to provide specific accommodations to each individual.

Examples of UDL include offering various modes for demonstrating what they’ve learned, such as the choice to give a presentation rather than compile a portfolio. Other best practices include avoiding jargon and clearly defining all terms, as well as providing an outline of lecture content.

For Méndez, who has several invisible disabilities, universal design in the workplace means being able to take a break when she feels overwhelmed and having a flexible manager who is receptive to her individual needs.

Cultivating empathetic, curious attitudes toward neurodiverse community members is also paramount. “Attitude can sometimes be the biggest barrier that people with disabilities face,” says Bea Awoniyi, PhD, assistant vice president of student affairs at Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Fl., where she oversees the Disabilities Resource Center.

Awoniyi urges professors and higher education leaders to acknowledge neurodiversity in the same way they do race or sexual orientation. It helps to adopt an attitude of curiosity rather than judgment about why students may be behaving a certain way.

Individuals with invisible disabilities benefit from opportunities to connect and socialize with each other. Peer mentoring programs sponsored by disability resource centers are one way for connection to take place. For those who prefer to remain anonymous, the IDA hosts an online support group and discussion community. To learn more, visit inspire.com/groups/invisible-disabilities-association.

Disclosing Invisible Disabilities
Higher education and private sector leaders alike should encourage powerful individuals on campus to disclose their own hidden disabilities, Méndez says.

Profiles of Two People with Invisible Disabilities

KELLIE POKRIFKA
Pokrifka suffered a traumatic brain injury at age 19. She looks exactly the same as before but has faced many insensitive comments from loved ones in her life. For instance, when she goes out to dinner with her friends, they ask her why she isn’t going to school or getting a job when she can go out to a restaurant. She explains that it requires a week of rest, multiple painkillers, and earplugs just to attend dinner. “Outsiders were expecting a quick, linear recovery,” she told invisiblenomore.com. Instead, it is going to be a lifelong journey.

STEVEN VITT
Vitt is a senior at Landmark College majoring in Liberal Studies. He is interested in education as a potential career field, perhaps working in an advocacy role. Vitt has been diagnosed with ADHD, a learning disability, and an anxiety disorder. He encourages other college students with disabilities to disclose their condition to their institution’s office of disability services and be candid with professors about the accommodations they need. “I think those things can be instrumental to a student’s success,” he says.
Méndez recently made the choice to open up about her own while leading a diversity training session. She has generalized anxiety disorder, seasonal affective disorder, and obsessive-compulsive personality disorder.

When she disclosed this information, one person told her she should keep it private. Méndez responded by asking the individual if it would be acceptable to disclose if she had cancer, to which the person replied, “Absolutely.”

“I said, ‘Well, what’s the difference?’” Méndez says. “I used it as an educational moment, and she got it after we talked.”

The process of disclosing was “scary,” Méndez says, but she believes that she is changing the way people think about mental disabilities by proving employees like her can face these challenges and still be successful.

As a result of her willingness to open up, she has recently been invited to her company’s London office to participate in a session about how managers can create more inclusive environments for those with invisible disabilities.

Schmulsky agrees that it helps when high-ranking leaders publicly recognize their disability but argues disclosure should be a personal choice.

“I would like a world where disclosure is more common, just like it is with sexual orientation,” she says. “The reality is there can be blowback. Still, the more power someone has at an institution, the more influence they might have in terms of setting up what’s safe and acceptable.”

While disclosure can be empowering, Steven Vitt, a student at Landmark College and an intern at the Center for Neurodiversity, says invisible disabilities are not “all-encompassing aspects of individuals.”

“I’ve met people here at Landmark who are severely dyslexic. But they have astounding talents in other areas, and they can do things that I could never do,” he says. “When it comes to talking about disabilities, it always needs to be acknowledged that the disability isn’t everything a person is.”

Ginger O’Donnell is a senior staff writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity.
The Fight for Graduate Rights:
A New Student Worker Movement Is Difficult for Universities to Ignore

By Mariah Bohanon

A graduate student assistant in the United States earns on average $18,600 annually, according to the employment website PayScale. Those at the top earn nearly $30,000 per year at most, while the bottom 10 percent earn approximately $12,000.

Many graduate employees say their stipends are simply not enough to live on and amount to exploitation considering the significant amount of labor required of them. At research institutions across the country, a growing number of these workers are hosting sit-ins, rallies, and strikes to demand better compensation and support.

Illinois has become a center for this movement. Graduate student assistants at multiple research institutions there, including University of Chicago, University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Northwestern University, have within the last year held protests for better pay and benefits. Those at Loyola University Chicago (LUC) are embroiled in a lengthy and contentious battle to be recognized by the administration as employees with collective bargaining rights.

“The position of the Loyola administration has for the last two years been that we are not actually workers, just students, and they know they can get away with that because of the current makeup of the NLRB board,” says Abram Capone, a third-year philosophy PhD student.

NLRB, or the National Labor Relations Board, is a federal agency whose members are appointed by the president to oversee employee
unionization. Under President Barack Obama, the NLRB ruled that graduate assistants at private universities are employees and can therefore negotiate for better pay and other employment benefits.

Yet LUC and some other private research universities across the U.S. maintain that teaching and research assistants are classified as students, not employees. Movement supporters say LUC and other private institutions that take this stance know that any legal challenge against them would have to go before an NLRB with members appointed by President Donald Trump.

According to the LUC website, “graduate students who are engaged in teaching and research as part of their academic program are fundamentally students. … [T]hey are not eligible for union representation.” The university did not respond to requests for comment on this story.

If the university recognized LUC’s graduate assistants as employees, their union, which is represented by the Service Employees International Union Local 73, would be able to bargain for increased transparency in the assistantship assignment process, better healthcare benefits, and higher wages, Capone says. “Right now, all we’re asking for is a seat at the table. [The administration] has made it a clear that they value communication, … but we can’t have open dialogue if we can’t even agree on the terms of what we’re asking, which is to stop acting illegally in violation of the NLRB ruling and negotiate with us in good faith as a union,” he says.

Over the last several weeks, graduate workers have intensified pressure on LUC through a variety of protests. On April 16, they and their allies held a sit-in in front of the president’s office. Seven students were arrested. On April 24, they held a mass walkout that included both graduate students and undergraduate student supporters. Members of the clergy, faculty members, and local politicians have joined in solidarity with the workers at multiple rallies.

The Fight for $15 Comes to Campus

Washington University in St. Louis Faces Graduate Worker Struggle

At Washington University in St. Louis (WashU), graduate workers and staff have teamed up in demanding a minimum wage of $15 per hour. On April 15, seven students and one clergy member were arrested for occupying the chancellor’s office in protest of WashU’s refusal to negotiate. In response, protesters have set up a tent city on the lawn outside the office.

Should graduate assistants be considered employees? WashU believes that teaching and research assistantships are part of the educational process for students earning an advanced degree, according to Provost Holden Thorp, PhD. Lacy Murphy, a third-year graduate student, says these positions “require time and expertise,” and their many unofficial duties are unregulated labor.

Why won’t the administration negotiate? Even if graduate student workers were considered employees, the results of a 2017 election to unionize was inconclusive, Thorp says. This result means WashU could not legally negotiate with them in any case. Instead, the university works with a graduate council that recently succeeded in expanding health benefits and summer funding.

What about the demand to pay all workers $15 per hour and subsidize childcare? The struggle to afford basic necessities “is widespread among campus workers, yet the university proposes strategies like [opening] a food bank” instead of raising wages, Murphy says. As the city’s third largest employer, WashU aggravates income and racial disparities in St. Louis, she argues. Offering a campus minimum wage of $12.20, which is well above the legal threshold, sets a precedent for other employers in the region, a WashU spokesperson says. The university is reviewing demands to raise employee wages but not graduate student salaries, and plans to issue a response by July.

What happens now? Murphy says this lengthy review process is further evidence that worker concerns are not a priority. She and other protesters plan to continue occupying campus until WashU agrees to recognize them as employees and increase stipends. Thorp says WashU has made it clear that any negotiations would have to go through the graduate council. “We’ve communicated with them about [this process],” he says. “How they choose to express themselves from here is up to them.”
“[The dean of the graduate school] pointed out recently that if we wanted to benefit ourselves and work towards our futures, then maybe we should stop the activism and start working on our studies,” Capone says. “If the administration actually cared about us finishing our degrees quickly, then I think [they would provide us with] adequate healthcare and a living wage so that we don’t have to work second or third or fourth jobs.”

At many institutions, graduate assistant contracts forbid or strongly discourage outside employment. During summer months, however, many of these workers take on multiple, temporary jobs to get by, Capone says.

Base pay for teaching and research assistants at LUC is $18,000. According to a living wage index developed by MIT, the living wage for a single adult in Chicago is $27,700.

John Hawkins, a fourth-year PhD student in English, says traditional graduate assistantships are designed to support the stereotypical college student: single, healthy, and young. As a married father of a 1-year-old, he and his family struggle to get by under policies that disadvantage nontraditional students. Getting coverage for his wife and child under LUC’s graduate assistant health plan, for instance, costs $6,000 annually. The money is due in a lump sum in the middle of summer, during which time he and most other graduate assistants do not receive a stipend.

Hawkins and Capone both rely on others for assistance. Capone is covered under his parents’ health insurance. Hawkins has family members who lend him money to get through summers. Many students, especially those who come from low-income backgrounds, aren’t so fortunate both men say.

Both say they’ve known graduate students who left their programs because they could not afford to continue or were too burned out from the workload. The average attrition rate for graduate students is nearly 50 percent, according to research.

According to a 2019 NAGPS report, graduate students of color report frequently experiencing instances of racism such as microaggressions and assumptions of inferiority. They are more likely to feel socially and culturally isolated from faculty and peers. Their career paths can be stunted by bias when faculty give graduate students of color poorer evaluations, regardless of performance, compared with their peers.

Black students are especially at a disadvantage when it comes to affording a degree. Half of African American doctoral students and nearly a quarter of Black graduate students overall attend costly for-profit institutions. They are also more likely to pursue fields with lesser earnings potential, such as education. These students are far more likely to take out loans and in larger amounts than their peers. Black doctoral students in 2015-2016 owed an average of $109,000 in cumulative debt, according to ACE. Their White peers owed an average of $51,000.

At public institutions, graduate assistants automatically classify as employees under state collective bargaining rights. At UIC, teaching and research assistants formed a union in 2004 and have successfully negotiated several reforms since that time, says history PhD student Jeff Schuhrke.

Over the last year, however, graduate workers felt that their desire for a more equitable contract, including a living wage, was falling on deaf ears.

“We had [union] members come to the bargaining table [with the administration] and tell their stories of how they were struggling. Some of them were in tears talking about their financial struggles and how it affects mental health,” Schuhrke says. “But it was only when we went on strike that the university realized they had no choice but to listen to us.”

After 13 months of “escalating protests,” the students went on strike on March 18, essentially “shutting down” the university, Schuhrke says. Without graduate teaching assistants, hundreds of classes were canceled over the course of the three-week strike.

In the end, UIC agreed to meet the students’ demands, including implementing new guidelines to make the process of securing an assistantship more transparent. Another major
victory was being able to waive a $2,000 annual fee that “was essentially 10 percent of our pay,” Schuhrke says, and getting fees for international graduate students cut in half.

At some research universities, campus leaders have been proactive in improving the graduate student experience. Georgetown University received widespread praise when it, as a private institution, supported its graduate assistants’ decision to unionize. Emory University in Atlanta gained national recognition last fall when it announced it would raise the graduate assistant stipend by nearly 30 percent over the next three years. And Southern Illinois University Edwardsville recently announced the administration had revised its budget in order to increase teaching and research stipends and will soon begin meeting with its graduate worker union to discuss salary expectations.

Graduate students owe it to themselves to become informed of their rights and “stand up for each other,” says Jonathan Bomar, director of employment concerns at the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS).

“We cannot always be the ones squeezed for cash by increasing fees and cutting our benefits,” says Bomar, who works as a research assistant while he pursues his PhD in biomedical engineering at the University of Maine. “Graduate school is already a very stressful and difficult experience, and universities owe it to their [graduate assistants] to protect their well-being.”

In addition to improving financial support for these workers, Bomar says universities can take other measures to better support graduate students. Providing free mental health counseling and making sure that people are aware of and encouraged to use these services would be “a golden tool” in reducing the chronic stress that many of these individuals contend with, Bomar says.

Transparent guidelines regarding assistantship appointments and work duties are another essential way to support their students, he says. Similarly, universities can encourage and train faculty advisors to “take a more holistic approach to training and teaching their students,” Bomar says.

“I think a lot of problems stem from a lack of communication between students and faculty,” he says. “A student who works 60-plus hours a week for too long could get totally burned out but may be afraid to go to their advisor about this because they feel that’s what is expected of them. That just leads to mental health problems and poor work performance.”

NAGPS has found that when graduate students communicate with their teachers and advisors about the stress they are under, faculty members are extremely receptive. They want to see their student workers succeed but may be unaware of their struggles, Bomar says.

“There’s this lingering culture that if you’re a graduate student, you should be miserable, because that’s part of the experience. If you’re working in a lab, you should be there all day and never go home,” he says. “That’s an old-school culture that serves nobody well.”

Mariah Bohanon is the associate editor of INSIGHT Into Diversity.
Every year, 30,000 young adults age out of foster care, according to KVC Health Systems, a nonprofit child welfare and behavioral health organization. As a result of inadequate support, only about half of these young people graduate from high school, even as 70 percent express the desire to attend college, according to the University of Pennsylvania’s (Penn) Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice, and Research.

National data on college enrollment among foster youth is difficult to calculate for a variety of reasons, says Sarah Wasch, program manager at the Field Center, but the latest peer-reviewed research indicates that a mere 10 percent of youth who grew up in foster care earn a college degree.

These young people face formidable challenges when it comes to higher education. They often lack the money to apply and pay for college, not to mention much-needed adult guidance when it comes to selecting and applying to schools. Moreover, many foster youths have bounced around multiple schools and homes, putting them at a disadvantage academically.

Fortunately, colleges and universities as well as some government advocates are stepping up to offer this population the funding and services they deserve to build a meaningful life for themselves, starting with a college education. A few of the programs include the following:

- Since 2008, Western Michigan University (WMU) has operated the Seita Scholars Program, which offers students with experience in the foster care system integrated support, “a family,” and generous funding. By the end of summer 2019, the program expects to have produced 164 college graduates.

- The state of Virginia initiated the Great Expectations program in 2008, which offers comprehensive services to youth in foster care at 21 out of 23 of the state’s community colleges. Each of the colleges employs a coach who helps students from the foster care system obtain scholarships and financial aid, arrange transportation and childcare, and more. Since 2008, a total of 396 degrees or certificates have been awarded to Great Expectations students.

- Since 2014, the Field Center — an interdisciplinary child welfare center formed in 1999 at Penn — has engaged in advocacy, research, and education supporting foster youth in higher education. Advocates have helped produce legislation, trainings, and programming that benefit college students from foster care across the commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
Such programs and initiatives are especially significant in light of the growing number of children entering foster care as the opioid crisis intensifies. Between 2012 and 2016, the number of children in foster care increased by 10 percent, according to The Hechinger Report. These numbers notwithstanding, every year of education mitigates the chance of foster youth becoming involved in the criminal justice system, developing problems with substance abuse, or having early pregnancies, according to the Field Center.

Seita Scholars
Seita Scholars, named for WMU alumnus and former foster care child John Seita, serves approximately 125 undergraduates each year. The scholars receive $5,000 each fall and spring semester and $1,700 per summer session if they choose to take classes in the summer. They are also eligible for several state scholarships. In addition, they receive a full Pell Grant, which amounts to approximately $6,000 per academic year, according to program director Ronicka Hamilton.

“If our students really budget right, they can and do graduate without any student loan debt,” she says. “This is really our heart’s desire for them.”

Five full-time coaches provide academic, social, and emotional support, training in “soft skills” and other services that help participants graduate. Then the coaches work to prioritize each student’s highest areas of need using a structure adopted from Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. This approach leads to an ongoing “cycle of teaching and learning” in which coaches gather information about what students already know and what they have yet to learn.

Building community and

Two Seita Scholars Share Their Experience

Seita Scholar Liz Burns (above, left) is a third-year student at WMU studying behavioral science and gender and women’s studies with a minor in American Sign Language studies. She serves as a peer mentor for the program. Antwinae McNeil (above, right), who works as a research assistant for the program, is also studying behavioral science and psychology, with a minor in criminal justice. Below, the two young women discuss their experiences with foster care and the Seita Scholars program:

Q: What does it mean to you to be a Seita Scholar?

Burns: When I came to college I was being raised by my aunt and uncle, and I didn’t have a relationship with my biological family. I was really looking for a community that made me feel connected, that made me feel like there were people who cared for me. Because of my experiences with my biological family, I didn’t think that it was possible for people who didn’t know me to care so deeply for me as the Seita Scholars program has. They’re really looking out for us.

McNeil: The Seita Scholars program was my ticket into college. I was my ticket into family, it literally saved my life. I had a plan to commit suicide the day I found out that I received the scholarship. From that day forward the support has been nonstop. ... This is the first time I feel genuinely and authentically cared for and authentically loved. In the program, the storyteller is more important than the story, and that has really been my experience every single day. Just basic human connection that’s truly authentic, you know?

Q: Tell me about what it’s like to be a peer mentor.

Burns: Every relationship between a first-year student and their peer mentor is a little bit different. Some students just want to go out and get coffee and talk about their day and take their mind off homework. Some students might need to attend a study party to get their homework done. It’s really cool for me to get to fill all of those different needs for students. We are constantly learning from our students as I hope they are learning from us. It’s kind of like a two-way street.

Q: How did you find about the Seita Scholars program?

McNeil: I had applied to multiple schools during my senior year. However, I had no real intention of actually going. I was just applying because there were incentives tied to applications, like snacks. I was homeless at the time, so I was taking advantage of all the snacks that I could eat because I never knew when my next meal was coming. When the Western representative came to my high school, my high school scholarship adviser told me I should apply, and immediately I just sat on the computer right then and there and I applied. Here I am two years later, and I’m thriving, literally living my best life, working here, in the honors college, high GPA. ... I’m just so grateful.
cultivating a shared sense of belonging are also key to the program. The Summer Early Transition (SET) week and the first-year seminar class provide these opportunities.

During SET, six peer mentors — current Seita Scholars in good standing — lead activities and discussions with incoming students for four days. The mentors encourage them, answer their questions, and help mitigate any stigma, Hamilton says.

The first-year seminar class is a course requirement for all incoming Seita Scholars, including transfer students. The class meets twice a week during the fall semester and participates in activities and presentations that focus on the foster care experience as well as how to be successful in higher education.

Hamilton says that by the time the scholars graduate, most are eager to walk across the stage in a thick, blue stole that bears the name “Seita Scholars.” “We do a really good job in dismantling stigma,” she says. “Our students are always like, ‘This is my family,’ and ‘You are my family.’ And they ascribe those words [to us] — we don’t. That’s just the level of support they know that they can get from us.”

**Great Expectations**

Great Expectations, established a little more than a decade ago, enrolled 1,372 participants in 2016-2017. The program is primarily funded by philanthropic donors who give at the state level to the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education, says Wendy Smith, a Great Expectations Coach at Blue Ridge Community College in Weyers Cave, Va. Some individual institutions also receive money from private donors.

She and 20 other coaches assist students from the foster care system “with basically anything that would inhibit their access to education,” Smith says. Their efforts encompass housing, transportation, financial planning, academic advising, arranging class schedules, and assistance applying to four-year institutions, among other responsibilities.

A state-sponsored career coach program at Virginia high schools helps foster youth connect with the program. Social workers also play a role in recruiting students. Since the program launched, the number of participants has multiplied 12 times over. Blue Ridge typically serves 30 students per semester, Smith says, and since 2013, the community college has provided services to a total of 158 students.

Dennis Villeda is a second-year Great Expectations student at Blue Ridge studying human services. He plans to continue his education at a four-year institution. Villeda says he is especially grateful for assistance in obtaining scholarships and filling out the FAFSA form.

“It has alleviated a lot of stress because I don’t have any family members or anybody I can go to who has a lot of knowledge about college,” he explains.

Smith seconds these remarks. “Having a dedicated coach to really help students walk through the [higher education] process provides them with a support network that they might not otherwise have,” she says.

**Penn’s Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research**

“Children don’t grow up in silos, and so the issue of child protection should not be solely relegated to one profession. [We] need to work together to protect children who are victims of abuse and neglect,” says Wasch, who leads educational initiatives for foster youth at the center. Two of these initiatives are the Foster Care to College Project (FC2C) and program development at colleges and universities across Pennsylvania.

FC2C is the collective effort by stakeholders and experts in the Philadelphia region. The group includes lawyers, admissions officers, researchers, foster parents, and other community members who have a role to play in the educational outcomes of foster youth.

One of the group’s major achievements was gathering the input of experts across the United States and designing an original curriculum for financial aid officers about how
to effectively assist foster youth in securing government aid as well as grants and scholarships. “In June 2016, we were able to successfully train 100 financial aid officers from various colleges and universities in southeastern Pennsylvania,” Wasch says.

The working group also conducted research on the different tuition waivers offered to these young people by individual states, ultimately proposing a waiver for Pennsylvania called the Fostering Independence Through Education Act. The bill unanimously passed Pennsylvania’s House of Representatives but did not make it through the Senate. As the state’s 2019-2020 legislative session begins, Wasch says she is “optimistic that [the bill] will continue to receive support from stakeholders and legislators alike.”

In terms of program development, “the Field Center has provided training and technical assistance to 17 different colleges and universities across the commonwealth of Pennsylvania,” Wasch says. These schools range from small private liberal arts colleges to large state institutions, and they receive multiple layers of support from the Field Center.

The Center helped develop the PROFS (Providing Resources and Opportunities for Future Standouts) program at Kutztown University and the Promise program at Westchester University. PROFS requires participants to meet weekly with a success coach and awards them a $500 scholarship and free housing each semester. The Promise program gives foster youth access to year-round housing, food, and supplies from the university’s Resource Pantry, priority employment opportunities, scholarship opportunities, mentoring, and more.

To begin establishing resources for foster students, Wasch says, the easiest thing to do “is designate a single point of contact on their campus.” Doing so streamlines communication on a variety of complex issues, including admissions and financial aid. The designated contact person reaches out to local school districts and child welfare agencies as well as helping students navigate financial aid paperwork.

Whatever the approach, “we strongly advocate that any program aimed at improving outcomes for students from the foster care system center youth voices in the process,” she says. “If you don’t center the voice of foster youth in this conversation, you’ll be doing a disservice to the very population you’re trying to serve.”

Ginger O’Donnell is a senior staff writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity.
Stony Brook Faculty Are Transforming the World

**BONITA LONDON**
Associate Professor, Department of Psychology

London explores the psychosocial and institutional mechanisms that underlie social identity threat and its consequences for the well-being of historically marginalized groups. Her research aims to promote institutional change that addresses critical social inequalities in access, education and advancement.

**TOM MacCARTHY**
Associate Professor, Department of Applied Mathematics and Statistics

MacCarthy studies fundamental biological questions using computational modeling. His work in computational immunology and virology has the potential to lead to better vaccines and improve our understanding of how viruses evolve to counteract our immunity.

**JENNIE WILLIAMS**
Associate Professor, Department of Family, Population and Preventive Medicine

Williams focuses on the causes of cancer racial health disparity, a major health concern in this nation. Her research is part of a new discipline to initiate personalized cancer treatment to ethnic minorities.

**KARENA CHAPMAN**
Joseph Lauher and Frank Fowler Endowed Chair, Department of Chemistry

Chapman uses x-rays to view how complex materials work. By seeing how their atoms rearrange when these materials are used for energy storage and catalysis, she can diagnose what limits their performance and determine how to design next-generation materials.

Going further, faster.
Brandon Kowalski, a BLaST trainee at University of Alaska, Fairbanks, is pictured here in April 2016. BLaST is the University of Alaska Fairbank’s Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD) program, which is part of the NIH Common Fund’s Diversity Program Consortium. (Credit: Theresa Vertigan, UAF BLaST Laboratory Research and Teaching Technician)
Institutions Hope to Increase Diversity through the Science of Mentorship

BY JEN ROBERTS

Above: Zahraa Alhabib, an incoming reBUILDetroit trainee, practices her pipetting during the Summer Enrichment Program for incoming students at the University of Detroit Mercy. The reBUILDetroit program is one of the ten Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD) programs in the Diversity Program Consortium, which is funded by the NIH Common Fund. (Photo by John Powell)
A 2012 federal report found a lack of students from underrepresented backgrounds entering undergraduate programs that lead to careers in biomedical research. To address this problem, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) created the Diversity Program Consortium (DPC).

DPC takes a multi-pronged approach in its efforts to train and mentor students, enhance faculty development, and improve institutional research training infrastructure. “The goal of the Diversity Program Consortium is to take a scientific approach to understanding what sort of factors could contribute to successes in enhancing diversity,” says Alison Gammie, PhD, DPC program leader.

There are three interconnected programs that make up DPC: Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD), the National Research Mentoring Network (NRMN), and the Coordination and Evaluation Center (CEC).

BUILD sites work to identify and incorporate innovative methods to prepare students from underrepresented backgrounds for biomedical research careers through increasing their enrollment, providing them with opportunities for research training, and boosting faculty and staff development. The NRMN enhances training and career development through mentoring and networking opportunities, while the CEC supports the other two programs through data coordination and longitudinal evaluations.

Below are some examples of how each of these programs has been implemented.

**ReBUILDetroit**

ReBUILDetroit is a partnership between the University of Detroit Mercy, Marygrove College, Wayne County Community College District, and Wayne State University and is funded by a $21.2 million NIH grant. Collectively, the institutions enroll roughly 47,300 undergraduates. Nearly 52 percent of them come from underrepresented backgrounds and half are economically disadvantaged.

Through experimental programming, the project, in its fifth and final year, aims to change the culture of higher education in urban Detroit and have 75 percent of its scholars graduate with baccalaureate degrees in biomedical sciences.

By introducing them early in their higher education careers to research, mentoring, and professional development opportunities, ReBUILDetroit will encourage students to complete undergraduate training and matriculate into biomedical graduate degree programs to ultimately excel as the next generation of biomedical research scientists,” according to the project’s website.

Jacob Kagey, PhD, assistant professor of biology at Detroit Mercy and reBUILDetroit student training core director, says there’s a national need to increase diversity in the biomedical research community.

“At our institution, we have a large number of biology, chemistry, and science majors, but the diversity of our science majors didn’t necessarily represent the diversity of the university, and that doesn’t represent the diversity of the city,” Kagey says.

Students who pursue research during their undergraduate degrees “have a higher likelihood of success in graduation rates and in entering biomedical research careers,”

Arren Simpson, a reBUILDetroit trainee majoring in biology, works in the INSPIRE Laboratory, which was partially funded by the university’s reBUILDetroit grant. This program is one of the 10 Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD) programs, part of the NIH Common Fund’s Diversity Program Consortium. (Photo courtesy reBUILDetroit)
according to the reBUILDetroit project description.

ReBUILDetroit recruits students from high school and then supports them through their four-year program, beginning with an orientation the summer before freshman year that serves as a bridge program. The orientation has a few main goals: to develop a sense of community among the incoming scholars and faculty on campus, to expose scholars to what it means to be a scientist, and to provide academic preparedness training.

This experience provides a foundation for the rest of the program. In their first semester, students take a research methods course and join a Research Coordination Network (RCN). They begin working in a faculty-run laboratory in their second semester and continue this work for the duration of their program.

Key steps taken as part of the project include the following:

- Formation of a steering committee and an administrative core to oversee and coordinate the project
- Reconstruction of university laboratories for use by the RCN project and BUILD scholars
- Development of cross-institutional mentoring for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows
- Integration of research opportunities into the fabric of university scholarly activities

After the program’s completion, project leaders will evaluate the tested models of training and mentoring to compile recommendations for institutions nationwide, according to NIH. The ultimate goal is to pursue creativity and advancement in research, which “will come from a biomedical workforce that fully embraces our diversity.”

For more information about reBUILDetroit, visit rebuildetroit.org.

BUILD EXITO

With 10 partnering institutions, the BUILD EXITO program is a consortium within a consortium. Students enter the three-year program after completing their first year of college at Portland State University (PSU) or one of the partnering institutions, according to Jen Lindwall, communications coordinator for BUILD EXITO.

“The real vision was to think
about our Pacific North region and how we could support some of the most underrepresented students in the Pacific Rim, students from the Northern Mariana Islands, the American Samoa, and Guam," Lindwall says.

In the program’s first year, students work closely with mentors, attend enrichment sessions, and take a course on research ethics. The following summer, they are introduced to a research learning community where they work throughout the rest of their program.

“They’re in the labs 26 hours a week working on a research project,” Lindwall says. “These are undergraduate students who are getting incredible in-depth, hands-on experience. They get a stipend and partial tuition remission as part of their training appointment with NIH, so for a lot of them, it replaces part-time work.”

EXITO’s gift to its consortium members is the opportunity for the institution and research communities to learn from the students, Lindwall says. “We have an opportunity to ask ourselves, ‘What can we learn from students who have nontraditional backgrounds or are underrepresented in these fields? How do we need to respond to that in terms of how we structure our policies, our practices, our programs?’”

For more information on BUILD EXITO, visit pdx.edu/exito/about-build-exito.

National Research Mentoring Network
The NRMN is a nationwide mentoring network for those studying and working in all biomedical disciplines, from undergraduate students to early career faculty.

The network provides professional development, mentor and mentee training, networking opportunities, and mentorship. One of NRMN’s priorities is to provide grant writing workshops for postdoctoral fellows and early career faculty.

The second phase of NRMN, which begins this fall and will extend over the next five years, will be organized as a consortium of independent research projects on innovative strategies for research mentoring. Financial awards will be given to up to 15 projects exploring the science of mentorship, professional networks, and navigating academic transition points.

The awards are in the process of being announced. "That’s bringing a scientific approach to the mentoring process," says Gammie, the program leader. "There was a strong requirement that [the applicants] have comparative groups with enough statistical power to really be able to pinpoint what types of mentoring activities can shape outcomes.”

Tracking Progress
While each BUILD site owns its own data, the CEC is compiling consortium-wide data. There are processes in place for data requests within and outside the consortium, but Gammie says the project is “still in the early stages.”

“What everybody has to realize is how long it takes to go from being a student entering undergraduate [school] thinking about whether they want to go into the biomedical field, to actually choosing the major, graduating, and then going on to graduate school. The pathway [to collecting data] can take as long as 20 years.”

Jen Roberts is a contributing writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity.
Free Speech Executive Order Challenges Academic Freedom at Research Institutions

By Mariah Stewart

A recent federal mandate threatens to pull money for research from colleges and universities that don't enforce free speech, but uncertainty around what constitutes a violation leaves enforcement of the order in question.

While the federal agencies that administer more than $35 billion in grants will be responsible for enforcing the rule, it's still not clear what would cause a university to lose funding. Experts say institutions should be aware of the order and its possible implications but doubt any consequences will come to fruition.

In early March, President Donald Trump signed an executive order requiring institutions of higher education to provide more transparency around tuition costs, graduation rates, student loan repayment rates, and estimated median earnings after graduation. Later that month, he signed another order requiring universities to “protect free speech” or risk losing research and educational funding.

“If a college or university does not allow you to speak, we will not give them money,” Trump said.

Whether Trump follows through on this threat, the president has over the past two years repeatedly attempted to slash the country’s budget for science research — efforts that have been shut down by bipartisan disapproval from Congress.

At a press conference, Trump mentioned two incidents at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) as motivating factors for signing the order. One event dated back to 2017, when the school cancelled an appearance by right-wing polemicist Milo Yiannopoulos for safety concerns after protests on the campus resulted in more than $100,000 in damages. The second involved a non-student punching conservative activist Hayden Williams on the UC Berkeley campus. Trump praised Williams for “taking a punch for all of us” and suggested that Williams file lawsuits against the school and the person who assaulted him.

Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of UC Berkeley School of Law, is an advocate for free speech and believes the university handled both situations appropriately by fulfilling its duty to uphold campus safety. “[UC Berkeley] wasn’t trying to suppress speech,” Chemerinsky says.

A majority of the $35 billion in annual government research spending is split between universities, the research industry, and researchers who work directly for federal agencies, with each receiving nearly 30 percent of the budget, according to a 2015 Pew Research study. The other 10 percent is given to privately contracted, federally funded labs.
White House Office of Management and Budgeting did not reply to a request for clarification on the order.

The connection between the federal government and investment in research dates back more than 70 years, according to Joanne Carney, director of government relations at American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), one of the oldest scientific societies in the United States.

The federal government “recognized that our government investments in cutting-edge basic research will help to advance our nation’s innovation capacity,” according to Carney, as early as 1945, when Vannevar Bush, a scientist and former head of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, published a seminal report called “Endless Frontier” that built a bridge between government and the advancement of science relations.

Carney says her organization believes the new executive order creates “a solution in search of a problem” and doesn’t foresee the government defunding research from colleges and universities.

“We have a highly regarded research enterprise many other countries wish to emulate, and our advancements in scientific discovery innovation are founded on critical investments by our government,” Carney says. AAAS will “place faith in the many federal agencies that for over 70 years funded scientific research grants based primarily on scientific merit,” she adds.

Regardless of the longstanding relationship between research and the government, Robert Post, Sterling Professor of Law at Yale Law School, says Trump’s directive worries him.

“It is a very blunt instrument for the federal government to use the withholding of funding as a lever to beat universities,” Post says.

Post, who called the order “an existential threat to American preeminence in the world in the field of research,” is a member of the American Association of University Professors, an organization that advocates for free speech and academic freedom.

Although Post believes deeply in freedom of thought and expression, he says the government should be “very cautious” when interfering with free speech issues on campuses because maintaining independence of universities is crucial to the functionality of institutions.

The most worrisome part of Trump’s statement, Post adds, is that “free speech has become a kind of partisan issue.”

Stephen Solomon, editor of First Amendment Watch at New York University, says it should be up to judges to apply certain amendment principles, not government regulators. First Amendment Watch is a publication at the Carter Journalism Institute that covers first amendment conflicts around the U.S.

“The government should stay out of the [free] speech business. Except for government judges, where that’s their job,” Solomon says.

One university president refuses to be intimidated by the rhetoric surrounding the order. Patricia McGuire, JD, President of Trinity Washington University (TWU), says free speech in higher education is the foundation of her life’s work.

McGuire, who has held her position at TWU since 1989, says the president’s issuing of the order is “ludicrous” and his actions are “highly partisan.”

“The examples he lifted up in his press conference were all political operatives,” McGuire says. TWU is a private institution that receives federal grants.

“As with many [college and university] presidents, I will not be intimidated into doing something because Donald Trump said I should or should not do something, I will do what’s right, and I don’t need him to tell me what’s right.”

Mariah Stewart is a staff writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity.
Children who inherit cystic fibrosis face a shortened lifespan, lung infections, stunted growth, and respiratory failure. The hereditary disease is not curable, but diagnosis using genetic testing shortly after birth can help prolong and improve patients’ lives.

Despite the overarching benefits, genetic tests for the disease work better for White children than for those of color. Tests are 98 percent accurate in White infants, but the lack of information about Black, Asian, Latinx, or other children of color is so severe that scientists aren’t even sure how accurate the tests are for those groups, according to Eimear Kenny, PhD, associate professor of Medicine and Genetics at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai (ISMMS) and director of the Center for Genomic Health.

Genetic testing overall is more accurate for White people than for people of color, according to a 2019 study by researchers at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard published in Nature Genetics.

This disparity means new prescription drugs and other advanced healthcare developments will systematically benefit individuals with European ancestry more than people of color if changes aren’t made, according to the study.

The solution is to diversify genomic data, or information about the genes in a cell. Nearly 70 percent of studied genomic data come from people of European descent, making it difficult to study how non-White people might benefit from genetic testing and medicine personalized according to their genes, Kenny says.

For instance, if scientists had collected and studied more DNA samples from people of color over the decades of research into cystic fibrosis, it would be easier to more accurately identify the disease in them today.

The accessibility and popularity of genetic testing has exploded in the past two decades. When the Human Genome Project, an international research effort to determine the DNA sequence of the entire human genome, was completed in 2003, it cost $3 billion dollars and took 15 years to complete sequencing. Nearly 20 years later, an individual can go online and have their own genome sequenced for about $1,000.

“It’s really amazing how quickly the technology has developed,” says Kenny, who was the senior author of a recent study on diversity in genomic data. “Because of that, human genomics is now something that is really driving a lot of innovation. The innovation is in research, but also into health systems and societies.”

Healthcare systems such as hospitals and clinics routinely include genetic testing for diagnosis and family planning purposes, while private industries like 23andMe and Ancestry provide it for recreational purposes. The lack of diversity in DNA samples has been highlighted as an issue in recent stories about inaccurate or incomplete results for African Americans after they take
DNA tests. The more data available on a certain group, the more accurate those tests will be.

Whether it’s for recreation or for assessing risk for diseases such as cystic fibrosis, breast cancer, heart disease, or diabetes, diversifying datasets to include samples from people of color will increase knowledge about health issues and will make a difference in personal healthcare as medicine advances, according to the Broad Institute.

Unlike other biological sciences, genomics is primarily observational, Kenny says. It is extremely difficult to theorize about how a set of genes is organized. The only way to develop personalized medicine for people of color is to study their genomes by including their DNA samples in biorepositories — massive collections of complete genetic data.

“Genomics is failing on diversity,” Kenny says. “If the knowledge base you’re using does not represent most of humanity, that’s going to cause all sorts of problems for the practice of medicine.”

In the early days of genomics, researchers believed it prudent to focus on a single, homogeneous population for statistical reasons. They wanted to create a control group that would help avoid misleading results due to variability in the data.

“It was a well-established concern and a well-meaning effort,” Kenny says, “but the effect means the population they focused on was European and of European ancestry to the exclusion of sampling other populations in research settings.”

Modern researchers recognize that diversity in data does not negatively affect outcomes. In fact, it improves them. Intentions aside, logistical problems also played a role in the lack of diversity in today’s data.

When originally collecting samples, researchers and healthcare professionals gathered them from their patient populations, meaning they accepted “anyone who walked in the door,” Kenny says. The demographics in areas where research occurred likely caused a bias in the data.

Development of diagnostic technology has also failed to consider diverse populations. Tools that test for the presence or absence of specific gene sequences, for instance, are designed in such a way that they perform optimally for people from European backgrounds. Kenny and her colleagues at Mount Sinai developed a multiethnic tool that could be used for testing people from more diverse ancestries — just one example of the kind of efforts scientists should make to improve effectiveness in genomic testing.

Another logistical concern is the suspicion of medical testing on underrepresented groups, and for good reason. In the Tuskegee experiment, one of the most infamous examples,
the U.S. Public Health Service duped Black men into believing they were participating in research on “bad blood” without being told they were actually being studied for the non-treatment of syphilis.

The researchers’ motive was to improve treatment for syphilis by studying the effects of treating versus not treating it. They used Black men as the control group, choosing to not treat them when healthcare could have helped, resulting in undue suffering, congenital defects in children, and numerous deaths.

In another example, researchers at Johns Hopkins took cancer cells in 1951 without consent from Henrietta Lacks, an impoverished Black tobacco farmer. Scientists used her biological samples in perpetuity without her or her family’s knowledge, in some cases making a profit from them.

“Once you damage trust, you really have to go a long way to reestablish trust and reestablish connection,” Kenny says. She believes the ethical community has placed enough restrictions and regulations in place to prevent experiences like Lacks’ from happening again.

White researchers hoping to engage more diverse communities need to understand the ethics behind engaging with new populations who have different cultural expectations. Engagement needs to take the form of a partnership and should be established in a way that builds tools to get around the problem. There are a number of ways researchers can help build a true partnership with diverse communities, including the following:

- Seek discoveries that will benefit the community as a whole.
- Hire a diverse workforce to better connect researchers, clinicians, and communities.
- Invite community participation.
- Partner directly with a diverse group of clinicians who can provide improved communication with and information about their patient population.
- Expedite communication of findings to clinicians and people affected by the study.
- Consider implicit bias when deciding whom and what to study.

“The scientific community, much like the genomic databases, are skewed toward a White workforce,” Kenny says, “but things are changing. Universities are encouraging diverse students and leaders to enter the workforce and stay.”

The simplest solution to diversifying genomic data is for researchers to decide they’re going to diversify their data — and then do it.

ISMMS in New York City is one institution working to build biorepositories with diverse sets of genetic data. Their mission in a recent medical trial was to recruit more than 65 percent of participants from underrepresented communities, which mirrored the population of the city.

The Broad Institute also urges researchers to expand their genomic studies to include diverse ethnic groups. A 2017 study by institute researchers, for example, uncovered previously unknown mutant genes that appear to cause increased rates of deadly prostate cancer in Black men.

“The success of this effort in uncovering subtle genomic differences and revealing a new prostate cancer gene demonstrates the power of including diverse populations in genetic analyses,” the institute stated in a news release. “Discoveries made from studying patients of diverse ethnic backgrounds can shed light on the underlying biology of this disease for all patients.”

The more researchers use genetic data to treat people from all backgrounds, the more those diverse communities will benefit from personalized medicine advances.

Kelsey Landis is the editor-in-chief of INSIGHT Into Diversity.
### MAKING HISTORY: BARBARA ROSS-LEE

By Ginger O'Donnell

Barbara Ross-Lee, DO, became the first female Black dean of a medical school when she was appointed to the role at Ohio University’s College of Osteopathic Medicine in 1993. Later in her career, she served as dean of the College of Osteopathic Medicine at the New York Institute of Technology. During her time there, Ross-Lee “reformulated the entire course of study, and drafted a women’s curriculum, earning a reputation as a ‘change agent,’” according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

The older sister of entertainer Diana Ross, Ross-Lee originally wanted to pursue a career in show business. Instead, she studied biology and chemistry at Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit. After graduating, she had a brief stint as a teacher, serving as a member of the National Teacher Corps in the Detroit Public Schools, and later went on to earn her master of arts at WSU.

In 1969, Ross-Lee earned her medical degree from Michigan State University’s (MSU) College of Osteopathic Medicine. Upon graduating, she opened a family practice in Detroit. In 1983, she joined the United States Navy Reserves as a physician and became a professor in the Department of Family Practice at MSU, thus launching her career in academic medicine.

Source: thehistorymakers.org
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- **Tiger Alliance** mentors and prepares African-American and Hispanic high school males for college entrance and success.

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