Recruitment and Retention Plan to Enhance Diversity

The CTSI Translational Workforce Development Program will lead efforts to document and align UF resources to improve translational workforce diversity, and it will support the 2015-2020 UF Health Strategic Plan recommendation that all HSC Colleges implement a diversity office. Further, the CTSI will collaborate with and support faculty applying for NIH diversity supplements. The CTSI’s diversity initiatives are led by Dr. Folakemi Odedina, a professor in the Colleges of Pharmacy and Medicine, Director of Cancer Health Disparities for the UF Health Cancer Center, and Dr. Gonzalo Torres, Associate Professor of Pharmacology in the UF College of Medicine and PI/PD of a NINDS-funded Mentoring Institute for Neuroscience Diversity Scholars. As members of the FINDERS Directorate, Dr. Odedina and Torres will work closely with the other programs to support their recruitment and retention plan to enhance diversity.

By providing a hub for the HSC activities in recruitment and retention for underrepresented groups, we will be able to bring together URM Scholars to provide support, career development, and visibility to the leaders of tomorrow. By drawing URM Scholars together, their collective strength, leadership potential, and scientific knowledge will be visible not only to themselves but to other institutions. As the flagship university in the state of Florida, UF is already a dynamic leader among colleges and universities with important outreach to URM students across the state.

History. The recruitment and retention plan builds on the established success of UF in recruiting and retaining diverse students into graduate and professional education programs. UF has been successful at recruiting URM students and is the only major public university in Florida to have fully recovered its minority enrollment following a State legislative ban on the granting of admission preference to minority students. In 2014-15, 6% of all UF students were African-American, and UF ranked 15th among all US Universities in the number of African-Americans receiving doctoral degrees (4th in Engineering). In that same year 16% of all students were Hispanic, and UF ranked 7th among all US Universities in the number of Hispanics receiving doctoral degrees (2nd in Biological and Biomedical Sciences). Among AAU public universities, UF ranked 2nd in Doctoral Degrees and 2nd in number of Bachelor’s degrees awarded to Hispanic students in 2014-15. UF is also ranked 1st in Bachelor’s degrees and Doctoral degrees awarded to African-American students in that same year. Also in 2016, UF ranks #1 as source of African American students applying to US medical schools. For the 2015-2016 academic year, the most recent data available, the percentages of doctoral degrees awarded at UF to African-American and Hispanic students were 5.3 % and 5.9%, respectively, similar to the National Science Foundation reported national averages of 6.4% and 6.5%. For STEM programs, the number of PhD awards increased 100% percent since 2001. Graduate enrollment level increased from 10,000 to 12,000 graduate students from 2005 to 2015, and from 10% to 13% URM enrollment.

Students from Underrepresented Minorities (URM). We will benefit from long-standing institutional efforts by UF to successfully recruit minority students, as described below, but we are still not where we want to be as an institution, thus the CTSI is placing emphasis on workforce diversity and is implementing new recruitment and retention programs, as described below.

UF Programs. Recruitment and retention of URM students at the University level is a collaborative effort between the academic units and the UF Office of Graduate Minority Programs (OGMP). Established in 1984, OGMP looks to increase the number of graduate students who are ethnic/cultural minorities, underrepresented in their field of study, low-income or first-generation college students, as well as advancing and promoting professional development for all students at the graduate level. OGMP has a two-fold mission: (1) increasing the number of graduate students from underrepresented ethnic or racial groups; and (2) providing prospective and enrolled graduate students in underrepresented demographic groups with material aid and mentoring to help in their successful pursuit of a graduate degree. OGMP retention efforts include a variety of social/networking programs and professional development workshops aimed at retaining UF’s URM graduate students. OGMP works in collaboration with the Graduate School’s Office of Graduate Professional Development, to provide a number of workshops annually on topics such as academic writing, thesis and dissertation, financial and stress management, summarizing and critiquing readings or scientific articles, effective oral and poster presentations, passing qualification examinations, publishing, using professional meetings to advance one’s career, networking and branding, and writing and receiving research grants.
Notable among the university minority programs are the Bridges to the Doctorate Program awarded to UF by the National Science Foundation. The Delores Auzenne Dissertation Award, Florida A&M University Feeder Program, the Florida Board of Education Summer Fellowship Program (an orientation program designed to prepare URM students for graduate education), Supplemental Retention Scholarships, the McKnight Doctoral Fellowship, and the McNair Graduate Assistantship Program. We will also work with the South East Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (SEAGEP) to facilitate campus visits for trainees. The UF College of Liberal Arts and Sciences also sponsors three federally-funded programs collaborating with the UF HSC to train minority undergraduates: the MARC GatorSTAR program funded by NIH in 2016 to support 14 students per year to work in NIH-funded labs; SF2 UF Bridge to the Baccalaureate Program (R25) to fund 30 URM students transferring from Santa Fe College and Bioscience Scholars Program (NSF) to fund 25 URM students in a BS/MS Program. UF has been awarded the Florida-Georgia Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation – UF Bridge to the Doctorate (NSF) to support 16 URM graduate students in 2017 – 2019. UF is a member of the National Name Exchange, a consortium of universities that annually collect and exchange the names of their talented URM students in their junior or senior years of undergraduate education. UF also created the Historically Black Colleges and Universities-UF (HBCU-UF) Master’s to PhD Pathway Project to identify top-performing students in master’s programs at participating HBCUs who demonstrate the capacity to be strong PhD students as indicated by their creativity, intellectual curiosity, ability to think critically, and their academic performance. This project is highly effective by developing and producing PhD students from a pool that is not effectively tapped. OGMP retention efforts include a variety of social programs and Professional Development Workshops aimed at retaining URM students, addressing issues such as writing literature reviews, effective reading strategies, summarizing and critiquing readings or lectures, passing qualification examinations, publishing, using professional meetings to advance one’s career, and getting research grants.

UF HSC Programs. UF HSC investigators work with a number of programs to encourage workforce diversity, including the Center for Precollegiate Education and Training, which links UF faculty and graduate students with in-service teachers and students from underrepresented backgrounds in grades six through twelve; and the UF Area Health Education Center Health Care Summer Institute, a 4-week program for 25 rural and underrepresented students interested in healthcare professions. The Colleges of Medicine and Pharmacy offer the Florida Prostate Cancer Research Training Opportunities for Outstanding Leaders, funded by the Department of Defense, to attract outstanding underrepresented minority students to UF graduate and medical schools from HBCUs. The College of Dentistry offers the Summer Learning Program for underrepresented minorities and educationally and economically disadvantaged students. The students shadow dental students to learn about opportunities in dentistry. In 2014, UF partnered with FAMU to establish the Florida Minority Cancer Research & Training Center. Funded by the NIH/NCI, the Center aspires to increase the number of underrepresented minority cancer researchers in Florida. The HSC also participates in a Visiting Scholars Program with Meharry College, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Doctoral fellows visit partner universities for mentoring, and faculty from partner universities serve as visiting professors at Meharry. The College of Medicine hosts an R25 Award from NINDS entitled: “Mentoring Institute for Neuroscience Diversity Scholars (MINDS)” coordinating a national mentoring program for URM early career faculty adding 10 new neuroscience investigators each year to a national network of mentors and workshops. Finally, in 2016, the Colleges of Dentistry and Medicine were awarded a Summer Health Professions Education Grant from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for URM undergraduate students interested in Medical or Dental careers.

CTSI Programs. As we have described above, CTSI is committed to recruitment and retention activities with each individual program committed to the success of our trainees. The CTSI KL2 Program will enhance and strengthen these already successful individual efforts by providing a hub of activity for URM Scholars and their faculty mentors. For example, UF has a strong presence at the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS) for some individual activities, with attendance each year by faculty members and UF URM students. By gathering the research success stories across the individual programs of our outstanding URM students, the KL2 program will be in a position to develop material that highlights the strength and breadth of URM Scholars at UF. The KL2 Program will work with the CTSI Communications and Dissemination Program to develop display and advertising materials that highlight the scientific success of our URM trainees, which will convey to trainees attending as well as the program directors a larger picture of the strength of the scientific community of URM trainees at UF. Using recruiting funds from multiple training programs will allow more cost-effective recruiting at national meetings such as ABRCMS, and the addition of a presence at the annual meeting of the Society for Advancement of Hispanics/Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS).
In 2014, the CTSI created the OneFlorida Minority Education Program in collaboration with Florida A&M University (FAMU) and Edward Waters College, two HBCUs. The program links junior faculty and graduate students with faculty mentors from UF, the University of Miami, or Florida State University on the design and conduct of pragmatic clinical trials and implementation science studies to prevent or reduce health disparities, with an initial focus on cancer control and prevention. The CTSI Mentor Academy will proactively recruit faculty members from underrepresented groups to serve as mentors, and the CTSI will develop a Personal Roadmap Program for trainees and junior faculty who are underrepresented minorities to link them to appropriate mentors.

Recruiting materials (PowerPoint presentations and brochures) will be provided to faculty members who are invited speakers at other institutions that traditionally enroll a high percentage of minority students, so that they may make additional presentations to describe the program to undergraduate students and/or meet with students (prospective recruits) and career advisors. Prospective minority Scholars will be introduced to training opportunities and career perspectives offered by UF via a webpage which outlines our program, our faculty and research, and potential career opportunities that arise from being a successful trainee in the program. We hope that incoming trainees take into account these unique opportunities when making their decisions about graduate and postgraduate programs. Based on past surveys of UF HSC program applicants, the most important recruiting tools will be websites providing detailed and accurate information about program features and research opportunities; thus the CTSI Communications and Dissemination Program also will invest significant effort in updating the CTSI website to reflect the expanded career and professional development opportunities and changes. A full-time Recruitment Manager, Monica Delaorra, has been hired to provide IT help to UF training programs. Websites for all partner programs will be updated to include links to CTSI Programs and to other relevant web sites, such as the NSF BioLink website (www.bio-link.org), and the Florida Department of Education website (www.fldoe.org/college).

For retention, academic performance and research progress will be followed closely by the Program Director via regular progress reports from the mentors, monitoring of academic performance and participation in professional and career development activities, and annual personal interviews. Close monitoring will allow early intervention if the need arises, which may take advantage of services offered by the UF Dean of Students Office and/or counseling services available at the college and university level. A dedicated student counselor is available in the COM to Scholars seeking guidance on personal and academic and career issues. We have limited experience with peer mentoring of entering students by advanced PhD students, but will encourage peer mentoring for URM undergraduate or graduate students by URM postdoctoral fellows.

Students with Disabilities and Disadvantaged Backgrounds. Information on applicants with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds has not been collected historically at UF, but data collection has begun. UF and its HSC collaborate with the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind on a number of clinical and educational programs. The University has prioritized accessibility for students challenged with differing abilities. Students and trainees can receive a variety of “Disability Accommodations and Services”, such as: American Sign Language interpreters; Assistive Technology; Assistive Transportation Arrangements; Books on Tape; Classroom Accessibility; diagnostic referrals; distraction-reduced exam sites; enlarged print; FM systems; in-class note-takers; preparation of accommodation requests for postgraduate entrance examinations; readers and scribes; and time extensions for class exams. The University is ADA-compliant, and all spaces used by trainees are accessible.