

The following excerpt is from:

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### **Fostering diversity**

Most training projects address cultural competency in the educational curriculum; for some, it is a central component of the curriculum, and a few have developed materials on cultural competency that they have shared widely, both among MCH training projects and other groups.

Even though projects state that they address the topic of cultural competency, the survey of former trainees suggests that, at least in the past, cultural competency has not been a major strength of the projects. When asked to identify strengths of their training project, only 2 of the 110 respondents volunteered that their training programs had enhanced their knowledge of cultural competence.

Like many other professional training programs, most training projects are not particularly successful in recruiting or retaining trainees or faculty from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Of those projects that reported the race/ethnicity of their trainees in continuation reports (421 trainees out of the total of 709 for all projects in FY 1999), 79% of trainees were white and the rest were minorities. However, this figure probably overstates the percentage of minority trainees because projects with poor cultural representation may have been less likely to report the race/ethnicity of their trainees. In addition, some of the minority trainees who were reported were actually international students.

Project directors who have been less successful at minority recruitment cite several reasons:

- the limited number of minority faculty are in great demand, and the projects cannot offer a competitive salary;
- it is difficult to attract minority trainees to some fields because those fields are so poorly paid relative to others that require a comparable educational commitment;
- the pool of trainees of diverse heritage from applicable undergraduate or master's level programs is limited.
- minority trainees tend to require a larger stipend than the MCH grants allow, since these students often have fewer resources.

On the other hand, some projects have worked hard and been successful at recruiting

faculty and trainees from diverse backgrounds. Two projects (Howard University and Drew University for Medicine and Science) have developed high school programs to introduce minority students to various health professions in an effort to encourage them to study science in college and consider a health field as a career. A few universities also have such programs, but not as a part of the grant; both Baylor College of Medicine and the University of Alabama at Birmingham, for example, sponsor summer high school programs for minority students. Such programs reflect an understanding of the need to interest students very early in health careers and a commitment to building a pipeline of future trainees of diverse heritage.

*Quote box: “The LEAH program at the Baylor College of Medicine has increased the percent of minority candidates from 13% in its first year of funding to 38% in its fourth year of funding.” Project director, LEAH*

One approach to minority trainee recruitment used by some projects is to develop close relationships with local HBCUs, Hispanic-serving institutions, and tribal colleges and universities. Project personnel visit these schools and meet with career counselors, participate in career fairs, and provide written information about their programs. In some cases, faculty give guest lectures at the institution or joint faculty appointments are established. Another approach that several projects have employed is to develop short-term undergraduate practicum placements which are used to recruit minority students into graduate programs.

A few MCH training projects have worked to establish relationships with practicing minority professionals, with one goal being to encourage them to return to school for graduate training. Another successful approach is an MCH Certificate program, such as the one at the School of Public Health at Boston University, in which practitioners can take a limited number of courses to enhance their knowledge while obtaining the certificate. This contact provides the faculty an opportunity to support minority practitioners and encourage them to enter a graduate program. The behavioral pediatrics program at Boston University has developed a special fellowship program for mid-career minority professionals as a way to enhance services to minority children and to ensure greater cultural competency within the training program. Additionally, one faculty member founded and developed a new organization—the New England Regional Nurse Midwives of Color—to assist nurse midwives. MCH faculty provide support to the organization through seminars on advancing one’s nursing career, individual mentoring of nursing students to help them complete their programs, and encouragement for nurse midwives of color to become active in public health.

The communication disorders project at Howard University views its mission as the training of faculty of racially and ethnically diverse faculty in order to correct the existing shortage of doctoral-trained individuals in the field. The nutrition project at the University of Minnesota also focuses on improving diversity among faculty; it has developed a relationship with an historically black university in which a doctoral-level student or junior faculty member from Morgan State University spends three months at the University of Minnesota to receive training in nutrition that would not otherwise be available; upon return to Morgan State, the individual continues to be mentored by

faculty at Minnesota.

One interviewee commented that, “It is critical for universities to work on minority recruitment, but it is pointless to do it just enough to fail.” By this the interviewee suggested that half-hearted efforts at minority recruitment will not be successful.

A few project administrators who have been relatively successful in their minority recruitment stress the importance of attitudes; they have found that a true commitment to diversity and to ensuring success on the part of minority trainees and faculty have led to real improvements in recruitment.

*Quote box: “We have the highest proportion of African-American students of any school of public health in the U.S. mainland. Minority students tell their friends that the environment in the department is supportive to them and a good place to obtain a degree.” Faculty member, School of Public Health*

The commitment of the university as a whole to diversity is also a factor in a project’s success at minority recruitment. Some universities are not as welcoming to minority students or faculty and, in fact, this is the complaint of some trainees who were interviewed for this evaluation. They stated they had been subjected to hurtful comments and that more support for minority students is needed at the university. Where lack of diversity is a university-wide problem, projects must work with greater diligence to recruit and retain faculty and trainees from diverse backgrounds and advocate for university-wide reform.