



Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

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Grant seeks to diversify participation in biology, biomedical graduate studies

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Avery August, vice provost for academic affairs, will spearhead a new initiative that works with incoming graduate students to provide training and guidance for success. Photo by Lindsay France/University Photography.

A new initiative aims to increase participation rates and enhance the success of underrepresented ethnic minorities and students who are deaf or hard of hearing in biological and biomedical graduate fields at Cornell.

The new five-year, \$2.4 million National Institute of General Medical Sciences/National Institutes of Health-funded program, the Cornell Initiative to Maximize Student Development (IMSD), will work with incoming graduate students to provide training and guidance needed for success.

“The grant addresses the need to increase representation of both ethnic minorities as well as students with disabilities in research careers in the biomedical sciences,” said Avery August, vice provost for academic affairs, principal investigator of the grant, and professor of immunology in the College of Veterinary Medicine.

The program, which takes effect in fall 2018, will support three incoming doctoral students for the first two years of study in graduate fields representing seven departments and five colleges. Students will apply through graduate fields for doctoral study, and students identified by the Graduate School and IMSD administrators who are likely to benefit from the initiative will be nominated for the program. Selected students will receive a stipend, tuition and health insurance for the first two years of their doctoral studies from the grant. The remainder of their studies will be funded through a combination of research and teaching assistantships.

“We provide an individualized development plan,” August said. “We look at each student to identify what they need for success here and we work to provide that to them.”

A plan may involve short summer modules, opportunities for additional research experience, intensive training to boost writing and oral presentations skills, a program for fostering creativity, leadership development, social integration skills and mentoring. All underrepresented biological and biomedical sciences graduate students may participate in various aspects of the program, though they will not receive financial support from the grant.

“The Graduate School’s suite of professional and personal development programs through our Pathways to Success framework provides additional opportunity for IMSD students to build skills that are crucial to their academic and career success” said Barbara Knuth, senior vice provost and dean of the Graduate School. “We look forward to welcoming these talented scholars to Cornell.”

While developing the IMSD, August and colleagues collaborated with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college of the Rochester Institute of Technology. The collaboration allowed IMSD to incorporate the special needs of students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

“While deaf/hard of hearing students are underrepresented in our application pools, and in biological and biomedical sciences overall, we will have programming in place for these students who come to Cornell,” August said.

Participating graduate fields include biomedical engineering, biochemistry, cell and molecular biology, biophysics, genetics, genomics and development, microbiology, neurobiology and behavior, nutrition, and the fields of comparative biomedical sciences, immunology and infectious disease, pharmacology, and molecular and integrative physiology.

By Krishna Ramanujan

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