

# A Cancer Research Partnership Training Program Evaluation

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## Introduction

Underrepresentation of African Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Hispanic (or Latinx), Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islander communities in the biomedical workforce is one of the challenges to reducing cancer inequalities among minority populations. The development of a more diverse biomedical workforce committed to lowering the burden of cancer health inequalities necessitates structured, mentored research and exposure to cancer-related research throughout the early stages of training. The Summer Cancer Research Institute (SCRI) is an 8 weeks' intense summer program with multiple components financed by a partnership between a Minority Serving Institute and a National Institutes of Health-designated Comprehensive Cancer Centre.

## Description

The purpose of this study was to see if students who participated in the SCRI Program had more knowledge and interest in pursuing jobs in cancer-related fields than their peers who did not engage in SCRI. The successes, problems, and solutions in delivering cancer and cancer health disparities research to enhance diversity in biomedical areas were also reviewed.

Minority underrepresentation in basic and clinical research is an impediment to reducing cancer disparities among minority groups. African Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Hispanic (or Latinx), Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islander communities are underrepresented in Bachelor of Science, doctoral, and biomedical workforce. Underrepresented Minorities (URMs) received 11.7% of scientific and engineering research doctorates in 2019, while accounting for roughly one-third of the US population. Furthermore, URMs with science, engineering and health doctorates held 8.9% of academic positions, which is significantly lower than their population percentage.

Enhancing early mentorship of rising scientists from URM communities has been proven to promote exposure, awareness,

and preparedness for graduate study in the biomedical profession, as well as to lower attrition reported later in the academic pipeline. Recent study suggests that undergraduate cancer research experiences can increase interest in cancer research and enrolment in graduate or professional school.

For example, one study reviewing an undergraduate program aimed at increasing the involvement of URM students in oncological research discovered that 69% of participants were enrolled in graduate or professional school, with 45% having finished an oncological program. Participants in this study also stated that working with a mentor inspired them to pursue a career in research. These findings show that developing a more diverse biomedical workforce committed to lowering the burden of cancer health inequalities necessitates structured, mentored research and exposure to cancer-related research from the early stages of training.

The Summer Cancer Research Institute, which was sponsored by the synergistic partnership for enhancing equity in cancer health between temple University/Fox Chase Cancer Centre and Hunter College, received positive feedback about the potential for an intensive program aimed at under-represented minority students to improve their knowledge of cancer health disparities, biology and prevention. Given that underrepresentation of minorities in basic and clinical research is a barrier to addressing cancer disparities among minority populations, the findings of this training institute suggest that progress towards diversifying the cancer workforce and supporting cancer-related career trajectories can be made.

## Conclusion

Furthermore, comparable intense training programs can boost interest in cancer research that is explicitly geared to address health inequities. By tailoring the program to fit the needs of all participants, including underrepresented minority trainees, positive experiences, contentment and most crucially, increased cancer research knowledge and appropriate professional skills can be obtained.