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UCSF HIV/AIDS TRAINING PROGRAM SUCCESSFULLY PROMOTES DIVERSITY

The Visiting Professor Program at UCSF is described as a national model for research training that promotes the success of scientists conducting innovative research in minority communities in a paper appearing in the April 2009 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

The program, based at the UCSF Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, known as CAPS, has been funded by the National Institutes of Health as the Collaborative HIV Prevention Research in Minority Communities Program since 1996. It has provided training, mentoring and technical assistance to 40 visiting racial and ethnic minority professors from universities in the continental United States and Puerto Rico who conduct social and behavioral HIV/AIDS prevention research.

“Our program graduates have been very successful in competing for NIH and other types of funding to support their research. The program is multi-year, includes both summer institutes and ongoing mentoring, and promotes networking among program participants resulting in many successful collaborative projects. While our program focuses on HIV prevention research, the model is applicable to many areas of scientific inquiry,” said the paper’s co-author, Olga Grinstead Reznick, PhD, professor emeritus at the UCSF CAPS and former director of the UCSF Visiting Professor Program.

During and after their participation in the program, current and past visiting professors have amassed over \$50 million in research funding and have generated over 425 scientific publications and technical reports aimed at halting the spread of HIV in communities of color.

“The visiting scientists are underrepresented in academia, yet come from and work in racial and ethnic minority communities disproportionately impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. A unique feature of this program is that visiting professors from racial and ethnic minority groups come to the UCSF CAPS, the leading social science-focused HIV prevention center in the world, and immerse

themselves in the myriad of mentors and activities that such a center can offer,” said current UCSF Visiting Professor program co-director, Diane Binson, PhD, associate professor of medicine at CAPS.

The UCSF Visiting Professor Program takes junior faculty with nascent ideas from around the country who are often the only HIV/AIDS-prevention researchers in their home departments. They may also be the only minority faculty members in their department. The program brings them together to share ideas and support each other in refining their research ideas into fundable research grant proposals. This experience accelerates their careers and programs of research in ways unavailable to them at their home institutions.

One graduate describes his experience this way: “Not only has the program been central in assisting me to improve my grantsmanship to secure extramural funding to pursue an integrated program of research, it has by its very interdisciplinary nature pushed me to expand my theoretical and methodological knowledge to consider alternative bodies of knowledge and approaches to investigating HIV risk behaviors among adolescents. Moreover, I can unequivocally say that it is because of my involvement in this program and what it is has supported me in accomplishing that I am only the second African American scholar in the almost 100 year history of my school to be tenured up through the ranks of assistant professor,” said Dexter Voisin, PhD, University of Chicago, a graduate of the UCSF Visiting Professor Program.

The visiting professors’ research projects are as diverse as the scientists who participate in the program. One scholar is studying how stigma among Puerto Rican medical professionals-in-training can discourage patients with HIV from seeking out needed treatments for their condition, thereby increasing the likelihood of those patients spreading the virus to others. Another scholar is studying how some churches in New York City are promoting HIV prevention measures in their congregations while others stigmatize individuals with HIV and AIDS and analyzing how these radically different approaches to dealing with the AIDS crisis are linked with protective or risky behaviors among congregants in these churches.

“Our program is very much driven by the needs of the scientists who participate in it. While UCSF faculty mentors offer structured seminars on grant writing skills and related topics, the centerpiece of the program is the set of research planning seminars that focus directly on the scientists’ planned research projects,” said UCSF Visiting Professor Program co-director, Torsten B. Neilands, PhD, associate professor of medicine at CAPS.

The paper's co-authors are two former directors of the UCSF Visiting Professor program, M. Margaret Dolcini, PhD, now at Oregon State University and Barbara V. Marin, PhD, founding director, now retired from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Established in 1986, the UCSF Center for AIDS Prevention Studies conducts domestic and international research to prevent the acquisition of HIV and to optimize health outcomes among HIV-infected individuals.

The UCSF Center for AIDS Prevention Studies is affiliated with the AIDS Research Institute (ARI) at UCSF. UCSF ARI houses hundreds of scientists and dozens of programs throughout UCSF and affiliated labs and institutions, making ARI one of the largest AIDS research entities in the world.

UCSF is a leading university dedicated to defining health worldwide through advanced biomedical research, graduate level education in the life sciences and health professions and excellence in patient care.

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