Published in final edited form as:

Science. 2013 November 15; 342(6160): 798. doi:10.1126/science.342.6160.798-a.

Biomedical Research: Strength from Diversity

ELIZABETH L. WILDER, LAWRENCE A. TABAK, RODERIC I. PETTIGREW, and FRANCIS S. COLLINS*

National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD 20892, USA

The Recent Education Forum By M. J. Graham and Colleagues (“INCREASING PERSISTENCE of college students in STEM,” 27 September, p. 1455) called for widespread implementation of a much-needed framework for increasing persistence of college students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The Persistence Framework that they describe is evidence based, drawing from a rich body of research that has identified the relevant education and psychosocial issues that must be addressed, as well as effective strategies.

Recognizing that the biomedical research enterprise would be greatly strengthened by attracting the most talented individuals from all groups, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has been intensively engaged for more than 2 years in a planning process. As a result, a distinguished working group (1) has made a series of bold recommendations that are now in the process of being implemented. These include the systematic evaluation of NIH training programs, the appointment of a Chief Office for Scientific Workforce Diversity, and the launch of a new three-component program that will provide the resources necessary to implement and assess, on a large scale, approaches such as those described by Graham *et al.* Developing new ways to engage college students, sustain their interest in research, and provide trainees at all career stages with the strategies and tools to thrive in the biomedical research workforce are the goals of the “Enhancing the Diversity of the NIH-Funded Workforce” program (2). This program will consist of three highly integrated initiatives:

- i. The National Research Mentoring Network (NRMN) will develop transformative approaches to mentoring. The network will engage diverse mentors from many biomedical research disciplines and link them to mentees at multiple career stages.

*Corresponding author. collinsf@mail.nih.gov.

- ii. The Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD) initiative will support relatively under-resourced academic institutions with a demonstrated commitment to students from highly diverse backgrounds. These institutions will have the opportunity to develop a series of potentially transformative education and training activities that address the many factors underlying student/trainee persistence in biomedical research career paths and successful transition into the research workforce. BUILD emphasizes and requires the provision of research opportunities. The program will seek strength through collaboration across the spectrum of types of institutions.
- iii. The Coordination and Evaluation Center will work with both the BUILD consortium and NRMN to assess the efficacy of the various approaches that are being piloted.

History has revealed that addressing problems that disproportionately affect minority populations has often had a transformative impact for the majority as well (3). We predict that transformative approaches to student engagement and training developed through the Common Fund's Diversity Program will have a similar far-reaching impact on training everywhere.

References

1. NIH Advisory Committee to the Director. Diversity in the Biomedical Workforce Working Group Report. NIH; Bethesda, MD: 2012.
2. NIH. Enhancing the Diversity of the NIH-Funded Workforce. (<http://commonfund.nih.gov/diversity/>)
3. Davidson, MN. The End of Diversity as We Know It: Why Diversity Efforts Fail and How Leveraging Difference Can Succeed. Berrett-Koehler Publishers; San Francisco: 2011.