



# University of Washington Summer Medical and Dental Education Program Seeks to Draw Native Americans to Medical and Dental School

## Summer Medical and Dental Education Program

### SUMMARY

The [University of Washington](#) conducts a free, six-week intensive summer academic enrichment program to help minority and disadvantaged college students compete successfully for admission to medical and dental school.

The university's program is part of the *Summer Medical and Dental Education Program*, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF).

The University of Washington is one of 12 sites participating in the program. The curriculum for each site includes:

- Instruction in the basic sciences, communications and study skills.
- Career development assistance.
- Contact with physician role models.

The university has participated in the RWJF program every summer since 1989—initially under the name *Minority Medical Education Program* and later *Summer Medical Education Program*. Through 2005, the program was open only to pre-medical students; in the summer of 2006 it will also be open to dental students.

### Key Results

The University of Washington reported the following key results.

- 2,092 students participated in the summer enrichment sessions from 1989 through 2005.
- 34 percent (705) of the pre-medical students who participated had entered medical school as of fall 2005.

## Funding

RWJF has supported the University of Washington's summer enrichment sessions with eight grants totaling \$5,644,954.

## THE PROBLEM

African Americans, Hispanics and certain other racial and ethnic minorities have long been underrepresented in medicine and dentistry. Research shows that the shortage of minorities in the health professions limits the access of minority populations to health care. Non-minorities from disadvantaged circumstances, including poverty and rural isolation, also face special challenges to entering the medical and dental professions.

The University of Washington in Seattle seeks to identify and assist people from underrepresented and/or disadvantaged groups who are interested in pursuing medical and dental degrees.

## CONTEXT

One RWJF goal is to assure that all Americans have access to quality health care at reasonable cost. As one strategy for improving access to care among the nation's underserved populations, RWJF has supported many initiatives to increase the diversification of the health professions.

As part of this effort, the RWJF Board of Trustees in 2005 authorized the *Summer Medical and Dental Education Program* to help undergraduate students from minority and disadvantaged groups compete successfully for admission to medical and dental school. The program is the third iteration of a summer enrichment initiative that RWJF launched in 1987:

- The first iteration (1989–2003), the *Minority Medical Education Program*, focused on helping pre-med students only and limited eligibility to members of four racial and ethnic minorities: African Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans and mainland Puerto Ricans (Puerto Rican-heritage residents of the continental United States).
- The second iteration (2004–05), the *Summer Medical Education Program*, expanded the program to include non-minorities disadvantaged by economics and other factors. Eleven universities and university consortia participated in these two iterations.

In 2005, RWJF decided to enlarge the program's scope still further to include pre-dental students, starting with the 2006 summer session. Twelve universities are participating in this new iteration. (See the [Appendix](#) for a list of the institutions.)

## THE PROJECT

The University of Washington has participated in the six-week intensive summer academic enrichment program since the first summer session in 1989 and is now one of the 12 universities participating in the new medical-dental program. RWJF has supported the University of Washington's summer enrichment sessions with eight grants totaling \$5.5 million (Grant ID#s 013543, 018034, 022671, 026086, 035660, 049441, 049854 and 055960).

Participating students receive:

- Instruction in the basic sciences, including organic chemistry, physics and biology.
- Instruction in writing, oral communication, study skills and learning methods.
- Career development assistance.
- A financial planning workshop.
- Exposure to hospitals and other clinical environments and contact with faculty and community physicians from varied backgrounds who serve as role models and mentors. This includes observation of an emergency department and an operating room, and visits to clinics and a migrant camp. Students visit their mentors on four days to observe and, the program staff hopes, help with the doctors'/dentists' normal routines.
- Social activities such as receptions, city tours, picnics and weekend daytrips.
- Free room and board in campus housing, a stipend to cover out-of-pocket expenses and reimbursement for travel costs.

The University of Washington's School of Medicine and School of Dentistry are collaborating in the Summer Medical and Dental Education Program. The university admits up to 80 undergraduates who have just completed their freshman or sophomore year—60 who are interested in attending medical school and 20 interested in dental school. Students must have a grade point average of 3.00 overall and 2.75 in the sciences.

Although a student anywhere in the country can apply, the university concentrates its recruitment activities in the West with an emphasis on attracting Native Americans.

Under the earlier two program iterations—the *Minority Medical Education Program* and the *Summer Medical Education Program*—each university participating in the national program enrolled up to 125 students a summer and accepted college seniors and recent graduates as well as sophomores and juniors.

For the new medical-dental program, RWJF reduced the enrollment target to 80 participants in response to a consensus that recruiting 125 participants was difficult. Also,

based on a determination that younger students benefited more from the curriculum, the new program limits eligibility to incoming sophomores and juniors, plus a limited number of academically advanced rising freshmen (the University of Washington program accepts only incoming sophomores and juniors).

Initially, the University of Washington participated in the *Minority Medical Education Program* in collaboration with four other universities in the region: University of California, Davis; University of Nevada, Reno; University of North Dakota; and University of Utah.

The University of Washington received the RWJF grant money for the collaboration—named the Northwest Consortium—and was responsible for program implementation on the other campuses. By 1994 the other universities had dropped out, and from then through 2005 the University of Washington partnered with the University of Arizona in what was called the Western Consortium.

From 2003 through 2005, the University of Washington served as a pilot site to test the concept of including pre-dental students in the program. The university and a second program site—Yale University—admitted a small number of pre-dental students to participate in the curriculum with the pre-medical students. Based on satisfactory results, RWJF decided to add pre-dental students to the program nationwide.

To recruit applicants, staff at the University of Washington and its consortium partner made presentations at educational conferences and workshops sponsored by groups focused on minority and ethnic groups. They also placed program information in publications distributed in the region.

Program staff published an article in *Medicine Northwest* and a guide for minority students. See the [Bibliography](#) for details.

To encourage interest in the medical profession, the university opens several program events each summer—including a pre-admission workshop—to college and high school students from underserved groups who are not participating in the RWJF summer education program.

The Association of American Medical Colleges, which runs the national program for RWJF in collaboration with the American Dental Education Association, assists with recruitment. Students apply online through the national program [website](#) maintained by the Association of American Medical Colleges. The applicant chooses up to three program sites and, if accepted by more than one of the three, decides which to attend.

Each university participating in the national program must match its RWJF funding with financial and in-kind support, including faculty salaries and student room and board. Over the years, the University of Washington contributed resources of its own plus

\$150,000 donated by the Warner-Lambert Co. to help cover student housing costs. Also, various programs of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, including the Indian Health Services and Area Health Education Centers, provided assistance.

Under the original program iteration, the *Minority Medical Education Program*, the University of Washington—with the concurrence of RWJF and the national program office—used federal Health Careers Opportunity Program funds to pay for the participation each year of several disadvantaged students who were not members of one of the four racial/ethnic groups covered by RWJF's initial eligibility guidelines.

## RESULTS

The University of Washington reported the following key results from the first two program iterations.

- 2,092 pre-medical and pre-dental students participated in the summer enrichment sessions conducted by the University of Washington and other consortium members from 1989 through 2005. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the participants is:
  - Mexican American and other Hispanic: 770
  - African American: 592
  - Native American: 380
  - Mainland Puerto Rican: 62
  - All other, including Asian and White: 288
- 34 percent of the pre-medical students who participated in the program—705 out of 2,062—had entered medical school as of fall 2005. Their racial/ethnic breakdown is:
  - Mexican American and other Hispanic: 277
  - African American: 224
  - Native American: 100
  - Mainland Puerto Rican: 37
  - All other, including Asian and white: 67

(The program did not collect data on the number of program participants who applied to medical school. Thus, the application success rate for program pre-medical alumni—the percent of those applying who were accepted—is unknown.)

- Thirty pre-dental students participated in the pilot dental program (2003–2005). As of October 2005, five students—100 percent of those who applied—had been admitted to dental school. Of the 30 students, 14 attended the dental pilot in summer 2005 and

would not be expected to apply to dental school until the fall 2005. Thus statistics on them were unavailable at the time of writing this report.

- The summer enrichment program appears to strengthen participants' confidence in their ability to enter and succeed in medical school. Many of the participants come from environments that provide little encouragement to enter medical school—or even to finish college, says Victoria Gardner, M.Ed., who directs the School of Medicine's Office of Multicultural Affairs and oversees the summer program. Students from underserved backgrounds are often the first in their family to attend college or to consider the health professions. While the program tries to help participants appreciate the difficult road that lies ahead, it also fosters confidence in their ability to complete the journey. "You don't have to be a genius to go to medical school"—that is a message the program delivers, Gardner says.
- The summer enrichment program enhanced the recruitment of underrepresented and disadvantaged students for the School of Medicine's regular medical degree program. The program is the flagship of the medical school's recruitment effort. In 1994, the medical school graduated its first summer program participant—Shannon Wiegand, whose father is a Native American. (See below and, for her full profile, see the [Shannon Wiegand](#) student profile.) She was soon followed by others. In 1997, for example, the medical school graduated five program alumni and admitted 10 others, all of whom subsequently graduated. As of October 2005, 118 students who attended the summer program at the University of Washington or one of the consortium schools had entered the university's medical school.

Shannon Wiegand was two years old when her father, a Fort Peck Tribe member of Sioux and Chippewa heritage, and her Norwegian-Irish mother moved from Montana to Alaska to teach in a native village for the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. The family later settled in Fairbanks.

Young Shannon liked Alaska and learned about native village life. She also liked science classes in school and had an interest in health care. In junior and senior high school and later in college, she worked as a hospital volunteer. However, she never considered becoming a doctor. "It wasn't something I thought I could do," she says, looking back.

A major factor, Wiegand believes, was the absence of a role model. Growing up in Alaska, she knew no female physicians, no Native American physicians, and no physicians of color. "You don't know what you can do until you're exposed to the possibility," she says.

Today Shannon Wiegand is a board-certified family physician on the faculty of the Alaska Family Practice Residency in Anchorage, the state's only medical residency program. Had she not attended the summer program, she doubts that she would have applied to medical school.

Being exposed to people from a variety of backgrounds in an academic medicine setting gave her the confidence that she did have, after all, what it would take to get in and through medical school, she says. "When I left [the program], I was going to medical school. It was kind of like: 'Eureka.'" For more information, see the full profile of [Shannon Wiegand](#).

## LESSONS LEARNED

- 1. Provide long-term funding for a summer academic program to enable program staff to establish ties with supporters in the university and the outside community.** A shorter funding commitment would have created the impression that there was not a serious commitment to the University of Washington enrichment program. In that event, the program most likely would not have succeeded. (September 1998 Report to RWJF from the Office of Multicultural Affairs, School of Medicine, University of Washington)
- 2. Ensure that a summer enrichment program for underrepresented groups has broad institutional support.** From the university president and dean down to the campus housing and library staffs, the effort requires widespread involvement and interest. Many people on and off campus help with the University of Washington summer program and receive no payment for their assistance. (Project Co-Director/Gardner)
- 3. Make program collaboration a true, full-time partnership.** As co-sponsors of the *Summer Medical and Dental Education Program*, the medical and dental school staffs at the University of Washington work together as partners year-round, not just during the summer. The program is not a medical school program but a joint medical-dental undertaking. (Project Co-director/Gardner)

## THE FUTURE

RWJF has committed funding to the University of Washington's medical-dental education program through summer 2009.

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Program area: Human Capital

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## APPENDIX

### 12 Summer Medical and Dental Education Program Sites

*(Current as of the end date of the program; provided by the program's management; not verified by RWJF.)*

- Case Western Reserve University Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, Cleveland.
- Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and School of Dental and Oral Surgery, New York.
- Duke University School of Medicine, Durham, N.C. (pre-medical students only).
- Howard University College of Dentistry and School of Medicine, Washington, D.C.
- University of Louisville Research Foundation, Louisville, Ky.
- University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, Neb.
- University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - School of Medicine, Newark, N.J.
- University of Texas Health Science Center, Houston.
- University of California - David Geffen Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, Los Angeles.
- University of Virginia School of Medicine, Charlottesville, Va. (pre-medical students only).
- University of Washington Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, Seattle.
- Yale University School of Medicine, New Haven, Conn. (pre-medical students only).

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