Effective mentoring is one of the most critical components of a successful academic career. It involves a dynamic reciprocal relationship between an advanced career incumbent and a less experienced professional. This collaborative relationship gives experienced professionals the opportunity to share their experiences and knowledge with the next generation. In return, the protégé develops the self-esteem and self-confidence necessary to achieve their goals for career success and advancement (Kowtko, 2009). A successful relationship between mentor and mentee can result in advancements in many arenas. Strong mentorship has been linked to enhanced mentee productivity, self-efficacy, and career satisfaction; it is also an important predictor of the success of researchers in training (Manson, 2009).

Meet the 2014 - 15 Health Equity Leadership and Mentoring Mentees

Program in Health Disparities Research launched the mentoring program, Health Equity Leadership and Mentoring (HELM), to enhance the academic excellence and leadership capacity of diverse faculty and health disparities researchers at the University of Minnesota and ultimately reduce health inequities. HELM focuses on the challenges of scholars from minority and underserved groups whose research is addressing health equity.

HELM scholars were asked to address one of two of the following questions regarding experience with the mentoring program: 1) How has or will HELM impact your work and/or career? OR 2) Why are programs like HELM important?

Tiffany R. Beckman, M.D., M.P.H., is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Medicine and serves as a Clinical Endocrinology Consultant for Indian tribes throughout Minnesota. Dr. Beckman’s primary clinical and research interests are the neurobiology of obesity and diabetes prevention in high-risk populations.

“HELM has helped to create effective networking opportunities with established diverse faculty who provide strategies for successful academic careers by sharing their stories with us. Programs like HELM are critical for the professional development and success of diverse faculty in academic medicine.”

Brooke Cunningham, M.D., Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. Dr. Cunningham’s research examines factors at both the provider and organizational levels that shape the ways in which healthcare systems address disparities, including organizational culture and climate, the use of race in medical decision-making, and healthcare personnel’s motivation to address disparities.

“HELM provides a forum to openly discuss topics that are critically important yet are rarely, if ever, talked about in other venues. HELM promotes a sense of belonging, which is often absent in academia, particularly for those who come from minority groups.”
In recent years, mentoring has become a popular practice in health sciences education because of the challenges facing the profession in regard to recruitment and retention (Kowtko, 2008). This specifically holds true for underrepresented minorities (URM). Data shows that in spite of entering college with the same intent to major in the sciences, URMs disproportionately leave the sciences in their freshman year. For those who do continue on, estimates show that only 3 percent of individuals graduating with a science doctoral degree were African American, 4 percent Latino, and 0.4 percent Native American (Daley, 2008).

Studies have also shown that URMs typically receive less mentoring than their non-minority peers (Beech, 2013). In studies on barriers to National Institute of Health (NIH) funding, minority investigators indicate that inadequate mentoring, lack of understanding about institutional requirements, lack of institutional support, and social, cultural, and environmental factors all posed obstacles to success (NIAMS, 2007). Not only do these barriers pose significant difficulties, but potential bias against minority scientists seeking NIH funding also escalates the struggles URMs face. In fact, a 2011 study in Science found that white researchers receive NIH grants at nearly twice the rate that African American researchers do (Reardon, 2014).

"Programs such as HELM are essential for creating supportive, interdisciplinary, and collaborative networking and learning opportunities for junior faculty representing groups who historically have been isolated and marginalized in the Academy."

Roli Dwivedi, M.D., is a Physician with the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. Dr. Dwivedi’s special interests are in medical education. These interests drive Dr. Dwivedi’s teaching and mentoring interactions with medical students and residents especially in culturally diverse populations.

"Meetings with HELM mentors, attending workshops and reading the assigned material has broadened my vision, stretched my personal and professional growth; this has been very helpful in stepping up my leadership roles in different organizations."

Oscar Garza, M.B.A., Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Pharmaceutical Care and Health Systems at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Garza’s special interests are in improving access to and the utilization of medical and pharmaceutical care services to ultimately improve the medication experience to ensure equitable as well as optimal health outcomes.

"HELM has provided an indispensable opportunity for continued personal and professional development. It has served as an essential conduit for accessing the wealth of knowledge and experiences that exists within the program’s leaders, mentors and fellows. Having a space for critical and honest dialogue among scholars will undoubtedly foster important synergistic relationships within and across our diverse disciplines as we work together toward improving health and social equity within our global community."

Rachel Hardeman, Ph.D., is a Research Assistant in the Office of Health Disparities Research, Mayo Clinic. Dr. Hardeman’s seeks to improve our understanding of how providers unintentionally contribute to disparities in healthcare and healthcare delivery. Her current work explores if and how the role of health care provider during prenatal care potentially contributes to disparities in birth outcomes.

"Programs like HELM are essential to efforts to dismantle practices that continue to harm the progress of academics of color."
Marchion Hinton, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. Dr. Hinton’s research and medical interests are underserved populations, empirically supported contextual-based therapies (e.g., “third wave” therapies such as behavioral activation, ACT, DBT), and residency education.

“The HELM program speakers have helped me to formulate a framework for talking with my colleagues and trainees about health disparities and/or other race-based concerns that affect healthcare.”

Melissa Lewis, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor with the University of Minnesota Medical School, Duluth in the Department of Biobehavioral Health and Population Sciences. Dr. Lewis’ research interests include integrated care in military and Indigenous populations, with a particular focus on the role that stress plays in cardiovascular disease for Indigenous communities with interventions aimed to empower Indigenous families and communities by privileging Indigenous knowledge and practices.

“I’ve found the assigned HELM readings critical in addressing the barriers and disparities for minority faculty and should be read and embraced by everyone in academia; the readings have been helpful in mapping out my long-term professional goals.”

Olihe Okoro, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Pharm., is an Assistant Professor with the College of Pharmacy, Duluth. Dr. Okoro’s medical and research interests are in cultural competency in pharmacy education and healthcare delivery, combined with a linkage to care and medication adherence in vulnerable populations living with HIV/AIDS.

“Formal mentoring programs like HELM enhance productivity and facilitate successful career growth by providing linkage to people, access to available resources, and relevant information.”

Rebekah Pratt, Ph.D., is a faculty member with the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Minnesota. Her interests are in mental health, primary care, health disparities and peer support. Dr. Pratt leads an effort to assess patient complexity in primary care, which aims to identify and address social determinants of health, while considering mental health and physical health from an integrated approach.

“The HELM program has created a valuable space for me to think about my work in health equity, and my own development in this field. This program brings together a diverse group of scholars to learn from and support each other, and it has beneficial for me to be better connected with my peers.”

In September 2014, the Program in Health Disparities Research launched the mentoring program Health Equity Leadership and Mentoring (HELM) at the University of Minnesota. The goal of the program is to enhance the academic excellence and leadership capacity of researchers from communities underrepresented in the health sciences as well as researchers whose research includes health disparities. The scholars attend seminar series sessions with local and national speakers as well as worked one-on-one with mentors on individual development plans. The 2014-2015 HELM scholars are featured in this edition of The Connection.

2014-2015 HELM Mentors

Medical School:
Kola Okuyemi, M.D., M.P.H.
Sue Everson-Rose, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Susie Nanney, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.D.
Anne Joseph, M.D., M.P.H.
Cathy Jordan, Ph.D.
Christine Danner, Ph.D.

School of Public Health:
Rhonda Jones-Webb, Ph.D.
Jean Forster, Ph.D., M.P.H.

School of Nursing:
Teddie Potter, Ph.D.
Barbara McMorris, Ph.D.

School of Social Work:
Hee Lee, Ph.D.
For more information about effective, culturally responsive mentoring relationships, check out the National Research Mentoring Network (NRMN) at NRMNet.net and consider enrolling as a mentor or mentee.

NRMN is a nationwide consortium of biomedical professionals and institutions collaborating to provide enhanced networking and mentorship experiences in support of the training and career development of individuals from groups identified by the NIH as under-represented in biomedical, behavioral, clinical, and social science research careers. NRMN is intended to enable mentees across career stages to find effective mentors who will engage in productive, supportive and culturally responsive mentoring relationships.

Charles R. Rogers, Ph.D., C.H.E.S., is a Post-Doctoral Associate in the Cancer-Related Health Disparities Education and Career Development Program. Dr. Rogers’ research interests include colorectal cancer awareness and prevention, health disparities among African American men, community-based interventions, and survey methodology.

“J.R. Moehringer once stated, “to be a man, a boy must see a man.” Similarly, in order for HELM fellows to be successful health disparities researchers, it is critical for us to be surrounded by other successful health disparities leaders in the field. Accordingly, I am confident that the leadership capacity and academic excellence of the other HELM fellows and I will be enhanced exponentially.”

Elizabeth Rogers, M.D., is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Medicine. Dr. Rogers’ interests include socioeconomic and ethnicity-based disparities and chronic disease risk, supporting patients in prevention and management of chronic diseases such as diabetes, health coaching and peer education, implementation science, and community-engaged research.

“Programs like HELM are important, because for early career faculty mentorship is the key; as we begin to navigate our progression through an academic career. In addition, developing a cohort of colleagues from various backgrounds with similar interests in eliminating health disparities will hopefully prove to foster long-lasting collaborations and peer-mentorship potentials.”

Karim Sadak, M.D., M.P.H., M.S.E., is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Pediatrics Hematology and Oncology. Dr. Sadak’s clinical and research expertise focuses on survivors of childhood cancer, with a particular interest in identifying facilitators of transition for survivor-focused care across the age continuum.

“HELM has impacted my work and career by expanding my potential mentoring network outside the institution. It has allowed me priority consideration for local and national professional development opportunities and access to professional development scholarship funds.”

Rebecca Shlafer, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor with the Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine. Dr. Shlafer’s interests are children with parents in prison, as well as the programs and policies that impact families affected by incarceration.

“I think HELM will provide me with additional opportunities to connect with other early career investigators who are invited in health equity. I’m excited to work with, and learn from, the other HELM scholars and faculty mentors.”