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The College's Commitment to Diversity

In this blog, I hope to convince you that the ACNP is committed to further enhancing diversity and inclusivity within our College and at our Annual Meeting. Not only is this the right thing to do – it is also one of the best things we can do for the future of the College, based on numerous studies showing that diversity in the workplace boosts important outcome measures. However, many of the simple and obvious steps to increase diversity have already been taken by the ACNP leadership, with limited success, leaving us in more challenging territory. An important part of our ongoing Strategic Planning process is to identify additional ways to improve the recruitment of outstanding scientists from URM groups and to foster a climate of inclusion for scientists of all backgrounds at the Annual Meeting.

The blog is organized into four sections: a summary of the numbers, steps we are taking to enhance the pipeline of URM scientists potentially interested in the ACNP, improvements to the Annual Meeting to increase inclusivity and make it more useful and welcoming for URM scientists, and additional issues and ideas to consider as we work to further advance these goals. If you only read one section, please read the last section (“We need to do more”) and send your ideas to acnp@acnp.org.

I’m drawing in part on resources provided by the URM Task Force and Natalie Zahr. I thank them for their work.

Numbers. For decades after the founding of ACNP, the membership included only a handful of scientists from URM groups. The earliest mention of the need to recruit URM scientists is the Strategic Plan developed in 2004. As of 2018, scientists from URM groups represented 5% of the total membership, up from 3% in 2011. Not surprisingly, change has been most rapid at the Associate Member level (7% in 2014 and 11% in 2018), while representation has grown more slowly for Full, Fellow and Emeritus members (due to the larger denominator). It is sobering to consider the situation in real numbers rather than percentages. For example, considering the ACNP as a whole, only 66 out of 1237 members are scientists from a URM group. In terms of meeting attendance, this translated into just 17 URM attendees at the 2014 meeting and 23 in 2018. We are trying to obtain comparable statistics for the Society for Neuroscience and for categories of NIH Awards to put this into context and to help us set targets for URM membership levels in the future, but I think we can all agree that these numbers are disappointing in any context.

Pipeline. An inadequate pipeline is widely recognized as contributing to low representation of people from URM groups in the STEM fields. Expanding this pipeline has been a focus of ACNP efforts and we are having some success. I am

proud to report that, of the 2019 Travel Award Class, 22% are URM scientists. In addition, to encourage continued advancement of past URM Travel Awardees in the College and more generally in the field of neuropsychopharmacology, ACNP offers two years of additional support following the initial award year, contingent on brief documentation of continued progress in the field which is reviewed by the Education & Training Committee. Over the past six years, an average of 82% of the URM past Travel Awardees have taken advantage of this opportunity, which includes waiver of registration, hotel accommodations, airfare, and coverage of additional expenses including childcare. In addition to trying to keep URM scientists in the pipeline, the Diversity Invitation Bank was developed to attract URM scientists to our Annual Meeting by allowing members to offer one invitation to a URM scientist in addition to their usual invitation. The Diversity Invitation Bank was recently updated by Council to include not only African American, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, and scientists with a disability, but also LGBTQ+ scientists. Please note that this change is, at present, restricted to the Diversity Invitation Bank. A more general broadening of URM categories is discussed in the last section of this blog. At the level of encouraging membership, Council approved a policy change in 2013 allowing members to write one additional letter of nomination if the additional nominee is a woman or a URM.

Finally, the ACNP partners with the APA to support the APA Research Colloquium for Junior Psychiatrist Investigators, which is designed to increase the pipeline of young investigators in the field while increasing the quality of training and mentoring. This prestigious program, which includes a half day training session at the ACNP Annual Meeting, includes a substantial number of URM scientists (28% in 2019). We hope that this experience puts the ACNP on the radar of these promising young investigators!

These strategies for bringing URM scientists to the Annual Meeting are proving effective at increasing the number of URM members of the ACNP. Out of the 66 members in the College who are URM, 39% are past Travel Awardees, 58% are past Invited Guests, and 3% were invited to the Annual Meeting from the Diversity Invitation Bank. Furthermore, from 2014-2018, the acceptance rate of URM applicants into Associate Membership paralleled the overall rate of acceptance.

At the meeting. The Travel Award Program and other initiatives discussed above bring URM scientists to the meeting and into the membership, but what do we do to make the meeting more useful and welcoming? A key development was the establishment of the Minority Task Force in 2013, which primarily consists of URM members of the College and focuses on URM recruitment and career development.

The Task Force oversees two URM Annual Meeting Events, the Under-Represented Minority Women's Networking Session (a breakfast focusing on the unique challenges and opportunities of navigating a career in academic medicine as a URM woman) and the Minority Task Force Networking Reception. In 2017, the College established the Dolores Shockley Minority Mentoring Award to an ACNP member who has been particularly successful in mentoring young scientists from underrepresented minorities in the field of neuropsychopharmacology and related disciplines to increase visibility of the contribution URM are making to the College. Finally, the Minority Task Force and others within the ACNP are working to increase the visibility of URM related content on the ACNP website through a variety of strategies. For example, we are planning to add a URM subheading to the Annual Meeting tab to highlight URM events at the meeting, and a URM subheading in the Career tab that will highlight URM trainee events, funding and training opportunities, blogs, testimonials, and educational presentations like Ted Talks that are relevant to the goal of increasing diversity and inclusivity within the College.

We need to do more. The message to this point is that the ACNP is committed to increasing diversity and inclusion, and we have already implemented numerous policy changes to better accomplish this goal. As noted above, advancing this effort is an important part of the Strategic Planning now underway for the ACNP. I welcome your suggestions along these lines. However, while policies can be "legislated", this is not true for some other ingredients that are important for achieving more equitable representation as well as improving inclusivity and the climate of our College and its meeting.

One issue is the potential contribution of unconscious or implicit bias, which leads us to attribute particular qualities to members of a certain group and therefore treat them differently. In the ACNP this could affect our behavior at many levels: who we choose to mentor and encourage towards participation in ACNP, how we assess the CV's of those applying for Travel Awards or Membership, and perhaps whether we decide to stop at a particular poster or strike up a conversation while waiting in line for a drink at the poster session. Many universities and organizations have instituted training to increase recognition of our implicit bias, and the ACNP Council is discussing making such training a requirement for registration for the Annual Meeting as well as conducting mandatory training before any reviews are conducted (e.g., prior to selecting Travel Awardees, Members, or panels). There is no doubt that making individuals aware of their unintentional involvement in perpetuating inequalities will benefit the workings of the College. However, we cannot stop there. I refer you to a very thoughtful Lancet article (1) arguing that the current focus on

implicit bias – which is mainly directed at initiating change at the level of the individual – must not divert attention from broader structural inequalities that have an even more devastating effect.

Another issue is whether we go far enough with our Code of Conduct (<https://acnp.org/annual-meeting/code-of-conduct/>) to promote inclusivity. My sense is that we do. The Code is clear and when it is violated a series of events is triggered to investigate and, if appropriate, to sanction the perpetrator. Most members are completely unaware of this process because it is conducted in a manner consistent with protecting the privacy of those involved. Despite our “radio silence” in this regard, please be assured that nothing is swept under the rug. Thus far, none of the complaints made have been related to discrimination or harassment directed toward a member of a URM group. I hope that this reflects reality rather than unwillingness of URM scientists or other attendees to report violations of the Code.

At present, a discussion is underway within the Minority Task Force and the Council about expanding the definition of URM – for the purposes of College membership statistics and applications for Travel Awards and Membership – to include LGBTQ+ scientists, scientists with disabilities, and scientists from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those from low income families and those who are the first in their family to attend college. Similar discussions are underway at the NIH and other professional societies. One important issue is how broadening the definition of URM will affect the development of goals for recruitment of particular groups of URM scientists. To pose a hypothetical example, if all first-generation scientists are white, we could get a false sense of reaching equity with regard to groups that would remain under-represented. This is not a small issue, as setting specific and measurable goals for increasing diversity of the ACNP membership, and then devising strategies to reach those goals, is an essential part of the Strategic Planning process.

Distinct from the question of representation in the College is the issue of the climate of the Annual Meeting. At the July Council meeting, we discussed some simple strategies that will be implemented this year to make the Annual Meeting more welcoming to all scientists.

The fact remains that, even with the multiple policy changes instituted by the ACNP and outlined in this blog, we have taken decades to creep to the level of 5% URM scientists in our membership and we are still working to improve the climate of the Annual Meeting. I hope that this blog communicates the fact that our slow pace does not reflect a lack of desire to achieve change, and captures the complexity of steps on

the table to accomplish change at both the individual and organizational levels. Although progress is slow in coming, it is coming.

(1) C Pritlove, C Juando-Prats, K Ala-leppilampi, JA Parsons. The good, the bad, and the ugly of implicit bias. *Lancet* 393 (1071), p. 502-504. Published: February 09, 2019 DOI:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32267-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32267-0)

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