NIH Award from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences

Principal investigator: Richard McGee, medical education and faculty development
Feinberg School of Medicine

• Project: Career Decision-Making of Future Minority Biomedical Science Faculty
• Start Date: August 10, 2009
• Total Award Amount: $236,779

How the results of this project will benefit society:
Despite sizeable efforts, only minimal progress has been made in the past decades to increase the diversity of college and university science faculty, those who decide what research questions to study and serve as role models and mentors for future generations of biomedical scientists. The proposed research will study the decision-making processes of young scientists to determine what has to be done differently to increase diversity among university life science faculty. This supplement grant provides a new position for a social science researcher to work in collaboration with the multidisciplinary research group assembled for the ongoing study.

The problem the project is trying to solve:
For the past several decades, NIH and NIGMS have led efforts to increase diversity among biomedical scientists. Despite committing great financial and human resources to this goal, relatively little progress has been made, especially among science faculty. Many explanations and theories for this lack of improvement in faculty diversity have been put forth, but no studies have systematically attempted to determine if this low rate of improvement is due to inadequate preparation of trainees, ongoing discrimination, or the active decision of young minority students not to pursue academic careers. This last possibility will be studied in the proposed research because it has broad implications for the other possible explanations as well. The initial plan was to interpret interview data using Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) as the primary interpretative framework. However, early results have revealed that this interpretive framework will be too narrow to reveal the processes and influences of career decisions. Therefore, the aim of the research proposed in this supplement is to create an expanded interpretive framework consisting of multiple lenses.

How this project will work:
To expand the framework, we need to find, interpret and synthesize the interrelationships of previous work in: (1) the component variables of SCCT, (2) other career development theories, and (3) research about students from specific populations, including underrepresented minorities, women and STEM students. This synthesis has never been done. Preliminary work has revealed how complex and time-intensive it will be. Once completed during the two years of the supplemental request, it will allow for much more rapid and precise analysis of our interview data and could be used for other studies of career decision-making in the sciences.

This award is funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, NIH Award number: 3R01GM085385-02S1.