Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Partners with Three Universities to Create University Centers of Exemplary Mentoring

Cornell, Georgia Tech, and Penn State to Extend and Enhance Initiatives to Recruit, Mentor, and Support STEM Doctoral Students from Underrepresented Minority Groups

(New York, NY) The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation announces that it will partner with Cornell University, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Pennsylvania State University to create three University Centers of Exemplary Mentoring (UCEMs). The new type of partnership, initiated through the Foundation’s Minority Ph.D. program, is designed to identify universities with a proven track record of successfully educating underrepresented minority graduate students in STEM disciplines and empower these universities to expand, strengthen, and institutionalize efforts aimed at minority recruitment, mentoring, educational support, and professional development. Each institution will receive a three-year grant of approximately $1M for these activities, most of which will go directly to students for stipend support and professional development funds.

Selected through a competitive review process, the three universities were chosen based on a number of criteria, including their historical success in recruiting and mentoring doctoral students from underrepresented minorities; the quality of the departments and programs constituting the UCEM; the quality, breadth, and creativity of their planned future activities; and the strength of their institutional commitment to furthering education for underrepresented minorities in the natural and physical sciences, mathematics, and engineering.

“Cornell, Georgia Tech, and Penn State have demonstrated a truly exceptional commitment to the education of underrepresented minorities in STEM fields,” says Dr. Elizabeth S. Boylan, Program Director at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. “On every level, from the lab where the experienced mentor guides the student, to the department that provides academic and social support, to senior administrative leaders who champion the value of diversity, these institutions are doing whatever it takes to ensure that minority students have the resources and the environment they need to succeed.”

The UCEMs are designed to assist universities that are national leaders in educating underrepresented minorities in STEM fields, institutions that can serve as catalysts and models for other educational institutions around the country. “These institutions are forging a new path in minority graduate education,” says Boylan, “and we are proud to partner with them as they apply best practices and develop new ones.”
The creation of the University Centers of Exemplary Mentoring represents a change in the direction of the Sloan Foundation’s Minority Ph.D. program. First initiated in 1995, the program initially focused on support at the individual mentor or department level, providing scholarships to students in over 60 graduate programs across the country. A year-long program-wide evaluation in 2012 led to a change in strategy. “After consulting with students, professors, educators, administrators, and program participants all across the country, we determined that we could leverage our funds if we concentrated our resources for student scholarship support on fewer institutions,” says Boylan, who oversaw the evaluation. “The most effective programs for educating students marshal resources from all levels of university faculty and administration and provide support at every step of a student’s career. That’s exactly what the University Centers of Exemplary Mentoring are expected to do.”

Though the UCEMs represent a shift in the direction of the Foundation’s Minority Ph.D. program, each Center will continue to receive administrative support through the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (NACME). Students supported through Center programs will also participate in the Southern Regional Education Board’s (SREB) influential Institute on Teaching and Mentoring, the largest professional development conference for minority scholars. “NACME and SREB will play a pivotal role in the operation and success of the University Centers of Exemplary Mentoring,” says Boylan. “We are proud to continue our longstanding partnership now and into the future.”

What follows are brief descriptions of some of the activities planned for the three new Centers.

**Cornell University**
The University Center of Exemplary Mentoring at Cornell will host a variety of exciting initiatives, including an ambitious recruitment and outreach effort, a mentoring program that provides personal, one-on-one support for minority scholars, an immersive three-day leadership development training program, and a year-long series of seminars, workshops lunches, and other social events focused on providing professional development advice and opportunities to minority students. Cornell’s program, managed through its Diversity Programs in Engineering and also open to students in select fields in the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, will also provide direct stipend support to 27 new minority students in STEM fields over the three year grant.

**Georgia Institute of Technology**
A partnership among the eight schools in its highly-rated College of Engineering, the University Center of Exemplary Mentoring at Georgia Tech will provide stipend support to some 21 additional minority Ph.D. students over the next three years. Beyond stipend support, Georgia Tech will offer a comprehensive array of support initiatives that cover the lifecycle of a student’s tenure at the school, including a program that brings college juniors and seniors to the school every year to discuss opportunities for graduate study, a transitions program to familiarize entering graduate students with the resources available to them, and enrichment courses that help new engineers approach coursework successfully, conduct research, prepare for exams, and write papers for publication.

**Pennsylvania State University**
Penn State has exhibited exceptional commitment to minority graduate education, designating a multicultural director in every academic college and the graduate school whose primary function is to promote the success of students from underrepresented groups. Penn State’s University Center for Exemplary
Mentoring will expand on the successes of its Bunton-Miller assistantship program for diverse students, and will offer stipend support to an additional 20 minority scholars over the next three years. In addition, Penn State has plans for several innovative initiatives, including an alumni visitation program to provide students with professional development and networking opportunities and a “buddy” system that will link Ph.D., Masters, and undergraduate students into a supportive pipeline that will prepare students for future advanced study.

Cornell, Georgia Tech, and Penn State are the first three universities to host University Centers of Exemplary Mentoring. Additional Centers are planned, with the names of other host universities to be announced in the fall of 2013.

In addition to the new University Centers, the Foundation will also be supporting smaller grants for Programs in Exemplary Mentoring. Two have been awarded to date, to the Department of Chemistry at Purdue and to the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Texas, Austin, with others to be named by the end of 2013.

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The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation is a philanthropic, not-for-profit grantmaking institution based in New York City. Established in 1934 by Alfred Pritchard Sloan Jr., then-President and Chief Executive Officer of General Motors, the Foundation makes grants in support of original research and education in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and economic performance. This grant was made through the Foundation’s STEM Higher Education Program Area, which aims to increase the quality and diversity of higher education in STEM fields. [www.sloan.org](http://www.sloan.org)