

NEW GRADUATE SCHOOL

By Nancy West

FOCUSES ON CAREER DIVERSITY

Founding Dean Elisabeth Van Bockstaele, PhD, has one overriding goal for the College of Medicine's new Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Professional Studies. She wants every graduate student to be able to launch their careers immediately once they receive their degrees, well equipped with skill sets that ensure success in nonacademic as well as academic health science institutions.

This goal has been driving an avalanche of initiatives since Van Bockstaele came on board in September 2013, following an illustrious 17-year career at Jefferson Medical College, where she was founding director of the graduate program in neuroscience.

"I was drawn to Drexel because of the University's reputation for innovation and focus on results — employment for graduates through its well-known co-op system," says Van Bockstaele. "Drexel is very career oriented. The money you spend to obtain a degree at Drexel provides incredible return on investment because the moment you walk across the stage and receive your diploma, you are marketable. We have a responsibility as educators to make that happen."

Careers Beyond the Bench

Van Bockstaele intends to build on the College's outstanding biomedical and professional studies programs, shaping them for an innovative 21st-century graduate education geared to the growing diversity of career choices in the sciences.

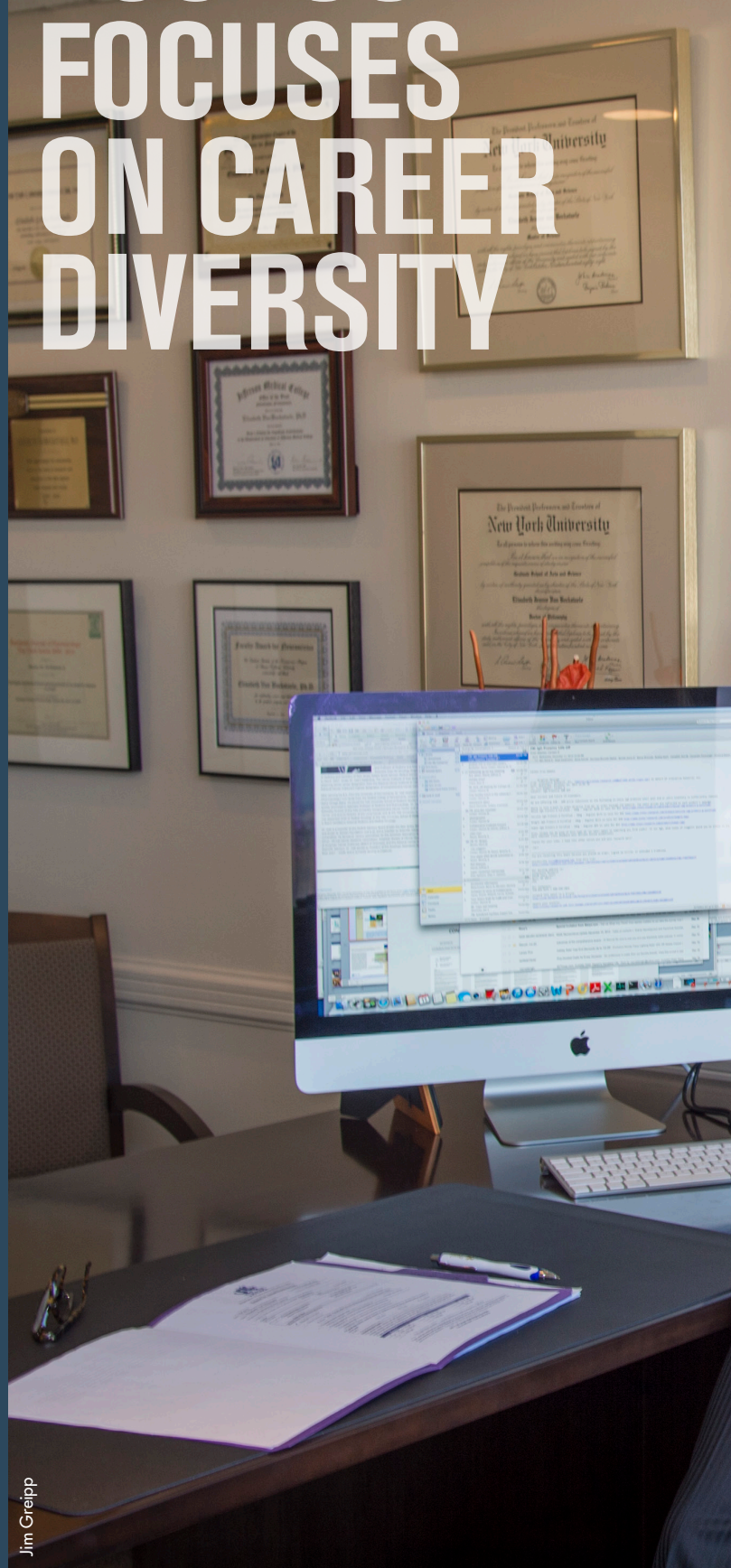
She has already launched a committee to plan "Careers Beyond the Bench," a symposium to be held in fall 2014 for midlevel and senior graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. The innovative half-day program will focus on nonacademic careers in the health sciences, discussing skill sets needed in those careers and employment opportunities.

The idea for this symposium was informed by the National Institutes of Health Biomedical Workforce Report published in 2012. "The report was sobering," notes Van Bockstaele. "It indicated that there probably wouldn't be enough tenure track positions to accommodate the plethora of PhDs that we were training for academic settings. It also indicated that academic institutions may need to broaden student experiences in science and training to accommodate different job prospects.

"The NIH findings allow academic institutions to realize that success in graduate studies is not solely dictated by one academic career track," she continues. "Our success is dictated by accomplishments in multiple areas of science and our ability to train our students to achieve various professional goals."

Van Bockstaele is quick to add that it is also extremely important to train students to be successful in academia. "We plan to offer our career symposium annually," she relates, "and our planning committee may alternate the focus between academic and nonacademic careers every other year."

Another goal of the symposium is to create a "success network" by affording students the opportunity to network with participants from business and industry. "This will give them the opportunity to hear firsthand about career paths they may never have considered or even knew existed," observes Van Bockstaele. "Having the face-to-face opportunity to listen to other people's personal stories about how their careers unfolded is invaluable."



Jim Greipp



Dean Van Bockstaele plans to expand on the College's graduate programs with a data-driven approach so that students are prepared for the growing diversity of academic and nonacademic career choices.

"This also points out the critical need for mentorship as an ongoing process," she continues. "Students might not know how to adjust in the middle of their training for another career possibility. Our faculty has a responsibility to listen to the students they are mentoring and address their professional goals continuously, and they are committed and passionate about this."

Crafting the Curriculum

The new graduate school has begun a strategic planning process with a major emphasis on designing new master's degree programs with specific targets for employment. To inform this effort, the school plans to create an advisory board of leaders from biomedical companies in the region who will share their vision for the needs of their companies in the next five years.

"This will enable us to ensure that our training programs are crafted to meet the needs of these companies so they, in turn, will know that a Drexel graduate will bring the skills needed to do the job for their company," explains Van Bockstaele.

One such program is the recently created master's program in drug discovery and development directed by Paul McGonigle, PhD, which provides students with management courses and the opportunity to pursue internships in industry, where they can learn what is required to be successful in that environment.

Two other degree programs currently being developed include a master's in patent agency, led by Karen "Chava" Hurley, PhD, and a master's in human cognition and aging, led by Drs. Barry Waterhouse, Andres Kriete and Karol Osipowicz. "We have solid data showing that law firms are looking for people with patent agency training because they are less expensive to hire than lawyers," notes Van Bockstaele. "We also know that our elderly population is growing, and we need people to work in settings that serve them. We are leveraging the College of Medicine's strength in neuroscience and partnering with the School of Biomedical Engineering, Science and Health Systems; College of Arts and Sciences; and School of Public Health to develop a program to meet that need."

Cross-Disciplinary Collaborations

Cross-disciplinary initiatives are a major emphasis of the new graduate school. To build new collaborations with other Drexel schools, Van Bockstaele has launched a Collaborative Graduate Council, which she co-chairs with Teck-Kah Lim, associate vice provost of the University's Office of Graduate Studies. "Having the ability to brainstorm ideas will be a tremendous force for collaborating and finding ways to do things better," Van Bockstaele says. "We have invited graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to serve on the council, always keeping us informed about issues that are important to them."

"Drexel University has always distinguished itself by being clear about its mission — we want to prepare you for the real world. That is my goal for the new graduate school," concludes Van Bockstaele. "The energy on campus is palpable and we're excited about the possibilities that lie ahead."