

ABSTRACT: 2018 ELAM Institutional Action Project

Project Title: Improving Graduate Education in the Medical Sciences through Alumni Outreach
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Collaborators and Mentors: Charles Ray, Dean of the College of Medicine; Karen Colley, Dean of the Graduate College; and Mia Johnson, GEMS Program Administrator

Background, Significance of project: The UIC Graduate Education in Medical Sciences (GEMS) program has traditionally focused on training graduate students for faculty positions at research-centered universities. However, faculty positions are limited and it is important to train students in ways that enable them to take advantage of diverse careers. Our graduate program alumni represent an untapped resource for career advice and opportunities in diverse job markets. In addition, alumni who are engaged and appreciated are more likely to give back to UIC and support the graduate program in ways that include job shadowing and/or financial support for graduate programs. We currently do not have a robust mechanism for maintaining a database of UIC graduate alumni nor do we significantly engage them in activities. This project therefore addressed two related needs: the need to better train our students for careers both inside and outside of academic medicine and the need to better engage alumni as a resource for our current graduate students.

Purpose/Objectives: Engage GEMS graduate alumni as a resource for our current graduate students for career advice, shadowing opportunities, and philanthropy.

Methods/Approach/Evaluation Strategy: Assessments included: (1) the state of the existing GEMS database of students and alumni; (2) the resources of the GEMS Program Administrator; and (3) the training needs of the current GEMS graduate students as based on a recent student survey. Additional approaches included gathering information on alumni outreach strategies used by other medical colleges and garnering support from the Dean of the Medical College, the Dean of the Graduate College, the Senior Associate Dean of Research, and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Medical Advancement.

Outcomes/Results: Based on a 50% survey response, the current GEMS graduate students cited Career Development and Advice as their most significant need. The database of GEMS alumni complete with current positions and skill sets was updated and plans were introduced in cooperation with the Advancement Office for database maintenance. Outreach efforts to GEMS alumni were initiated together with plans for an annual Graduate Student Career Day as well as the establishment of an Annual Distinguished Alumni Recognition Seminar with opportunities for career advice and feedback. An alumni newsletter is planned for the Fall of 2018 that will feature alumni updates and GEMS program news and initiatives.

Discussion/Conclusion with Statement of Impact/Potential Impact: The engaged GEMS alumni base will be an ever expanding resource to be used both for expertise in different career areas as well as for funds for graduate student-related scholarships and programs. By broadening graduate training potential UIC will become more competitive for NIH training-based funding initiatives while also being recognized for better preparing our students for a variety of career options. Such recognition will aide in the recruitment of talented graduate applicants.