

1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Faculty Development in the Health Professions – Oral/Poster Proposal

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Theme: Research and Scholarly Activity in Faculty Development

Title: Career Decision-Making of Young PhD Scientists: A Longitudinal, Interview-Based Qualitative Research Study Across Gender and Ethnicity

Background and Purpose/Objectives: Despite decades of intensive financial and human resource investment by the NIH, NSF, and private foundations, gender and racial/ethnic diversity of biomedical PhD faculty remains very low. Many explanations for this continued disparity have been suggested, but few studies have attempted to evaluate them. In 2008, we launched a prospective, qualitative study of young scientists to determine if these explanations fit with scientific career development “on-the-ground”. New insights from this research should identify sites for interventions to promote faculty diversity.

Methodology: This study uses annual semi-structured interviews to follow the progress and career decisions of ~500 U.S. new PhD students. The study population is sufficiently large and diverse to allow comparisons across ethnic/racial groups, gender, and undergraduate institution types (including women’s colleges, WISE program sites, and HBCUs). Qualitative analysis will draw on multiple theoretical perspectives, including: Social Cognitive Career Theory; Identity Development; Stereotyping; Cultural Capital; and Communities of Practice.

Results/Impact/Outcomes: Students are enthusiastic about the study and freely discuss their experiences and evolving career thinking. Nearly 100% of those who enroll in the study continue in second year interviews. The first year of the PhD is a time of much growth for most students, substantial challenges for some, and changes in career thinking are already occurring during the year.

Conclusions and Discussion: The study’s novel scale, scope, and attention to both individual and community-level factors will offer a major contribution to the theory and practice scientific development in general and new insights into faculty diversity.

Key Words: gender research careers