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Chemistry Professor Led National Committee to Open More Doors for Minority Scientists

Winthrop University

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Chemistry Professor Led National Committee to Open More Doors for Minority Scientists

Quick Facts

- The group's work prompted the National Science Foundation to award the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) a \$500,000 grant to support a comprehensive mentoring program for postdoctoral fellows and early-career faculty members.
- The program focuses on teaching grant-writing skills and career-development strategies, and promotes diversity in the scientific workforce by supporting underrepresented minority postdoctoral scientists and new assistant professors in their efforts to secure research funding.



Takita Sumter

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – Winthrop University [Chemistry Professor Takita Sumter](#) chaired a national committee that has devised a strategy to mentor young minority scientists to research and teach science.

The group's work prompted the [National Science Foundation](#) to award the [American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology](#) (ASBMB) a \$500,000 grant to support a comprehensive mentoring program for postdoctoral fellows and early-career faculty members. The program focuses on teaching grant-writing skills and career-development strategies, and promotes diversity in the scientific workforce by supporting underrepresented minority postdoctoral scientists and new assistant professors in their efforts to secure research funding.

Sumter chairs the society's **Minority Affairs Committee** whose overall goal is to increase the participation and visibility of underrepresented life scientists within **ASBMB**. Their portfolio of projects targets K-12, undergraduates, graduates and early-career scientists.

The **Minority Affairs Committee** launched a faculty mentoring program in 2013 that is open to all faculty but aims to have 30-50 percent of its participants from **underrepresented backgrounds** or **minority-serving institutions**. These workshops, which are targeted at early-career faculty from minority populations, include mock review panels, presentations from **National Science Foundation program directors** and **panel discussions** on how to respond to reviewer feedback.

After three annual offerings beginning in 2013, the program has evolved into an annual mentoring program, now called **Interactive Mentoring Activities for Grantsmanship Enhancement, (IMAGE)**. Since its inception, 93 percent of mentees reported that participation in the workshop increased their confidence in applying for funding and nearly 56 percent of alumni from the 2013 workshop have obtained funding.

The **\$500,000 grant** will support **IMAGE** for the next three years and not only increase the number of participants able to attend the workshop but will help organizers foster peer-to-peer relationships and long-term professional bonds between mentors and mentees. New investigators will receive mentoring in the preparation and submission of **National Science Foundation grant applications**, and postdoctoral mentees will learn effective strategies for obtaining faculty positions. Committee members hope their plan to include post-workshop mentoring will have a significant impact on participants' success.

"We're going to try to pair them based on research expertise, so we'll hopefully find someone within the society who is in a similar field and able to give project-specific guidance," **Sumter** said.

This project is a continuation of work Winthrop undertook in 2010 when it was awarded \$100,000 to support the society's investigation into obstacles faced by minorities in securing federal research funding. Those grant funds were used to host a focus group to explore and discuss the barriers and potential interventions. A white paper with results was presented as a national call to action that addresses the challenges identified, which included an opaque review process, lack of a support network and a lack of underrepresented minority directed initiatives.

Sumter said that it's been rewarding to work with **up-and-coming investigators** through the program. Sumter reported that the grant-writing workshop has become the premiere resource for early-career faculty because the funding success rate of attendees exceeds the national average. She is one of four principle investigators from across the nation who will integrate a year-round mentoring component for the association.

The three others are: **Marion Sewer** of University of California San Diego, **Squire Booker** of Pennsylvania State and **Sonia Flores** of University of Colorado-Denver. The organizers have secured an external evaluator and intend to publish the best practices taught at IMAGE workshops online to reach a larger audience and build a network of past and present mentees.

For more information, contact **Judy Longshaw**, news and media services manager, at 803/323-2404 or e-mail her at longshawj@winthrop.edu.

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