NIGMS IMSD Fellowship Program

Background

The National Institute for General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) Initiative for Maximizing Student Development (IMSD) fellowship at UCSF is designed to improve the academic and research competitiveness of underrepresented minority students and to facilitate their progress toward careers in biomedical research. UCSF’s first IMSD grant was awarded in 1997, which supports selected students in the first two years of their graduate studies. To date, over 100 students have benefited from an IMSD fellowship at UCSF.

Eligibility and Selection

The NIGMS IMSD Fellowship at UCSF targets underrepresented minority students in the ten basic science PhD graduate programs. These groups include US citizens or permanent residents who are African American, Hispanic American, Native American, and natives of the US Pacific Islands.

Students do not apply to the IMSD Fellowship; rather, the graduate programs identify and nominate newly admitted students who qualify for the fellowship. Final selections are confirmed by the IMSD faculty advisory committee. Six first-year students are selected each year.

Student Support

Recipients of the IMSD fellowship at UCSF are supported in the following ways:

Summer Research Rotation (SRR)

The Summer Research Rotation (SRR) is the centerpiece of the UCSF IMSD fellowship program. The first-year IMSD fellows arrive early at UCSF and carry out a 10 week, closely mentored summer research rotation in the laboratory of a faculty member chosen with their graduate program director. Many students and PIs have found that an additional summer research rotation can provide smooth transition to UCSF (finding housing, exploring facilities, etc.), as well as providing opportunities for additional training, acquiring specific skills, and valuable exposure to the program’s research opportunities. IMSD SRR fellows’ benefits include:
- Summer salary to cover housing and expenses.
- Option to participate in the co-curricular and social activities of the UCSF Summer Research Training Program (SRTP). SRTP students are rising juniors and seniors from a diverse range of universities across the United States and Puerto Rico. SRTP weekly meetings include faculty research lectures, professional development workshops, and panel discussions. IMSD students are also welcome to present research posters during the final SRTP symposium.
- Reception with Dean Watkins, IMSD faculty advisory board, and fellows from previous years.

Financial Support

A cohort of six first-year IMSD fellows is selected each year. The graduate programs identify and nominate newly admitted students for the fellowship and final selections are confirmed by the IMSD faculty advisory committee. The IMSD award supports the fellows in years 1-2. In subsequent years, students are supported in a variety of ways, including funding from other fellowships, and through their labs and graduate programs.

Stipend: Each student receives a Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) payroll appointment with a monthly stipend and is required to meet in person with Human Resources to complete paperwork before payment is made. Stipends are adjusted for inflation each year and paid in arrears, so the first payment will be made on the first day of the month following the fellowship start date. Fellowships begin on September 1 and the first payment will be made on October 1. Payment will be disbursed monthly by the UCSF payroll department. Taxes are withheld from all salary payments and additional withholding applies during the summer. (See additional information about taxes on student employment [1].)

Tuition and Fees: In the first and second year of the student's program, the IMSD fellowship pays 60% of resident tuition plus fees or $16,000 toward non-resident tuition and fees. The student's lab or program covers the rest. After the first year in a program, students should establish California state residency, at which point non-resident tuition is waived. Information about residency requirements for tuition purposes is available through the Office of the Registrar [2]. As stated above, the fellow’s graduate program or advisor pays the full resident tuition and fees in years 3-5, unless the student has other funding, for example from a different fellowship.

Workshop/Conference/Meeting Funds: After passing their qualifying exams, IMSD Fellows are eligible for an annual educational allowance of up to $750 for travel to scientific meetings.

Travel Policy:

- Each IMSD fellow is eligible to receive up to $1500 in funding; you must be a current, directly-funded IMSD fellow at that time the expense is incurred.
- Travel funds can be used for conferences or for courses/workshops (e.g., Cold Spring Harbor courses).
- Funds can be used for any conference related expenses, subject to UCSF’s travel policies [3].
- You must consult with your program or PI before making any plans (as you would for any research-related travel).
To apply, please complete the Travel application at least 30 days before the conference or workshop.

**Academic Enrichment Activities**

To add to the value of their academic experience at UCSF, IMSD fellows participate in academic enrichment opportunities both on- and off-campus. The co-curriculum focuses on developing research, communication, and other skills, work-life balance, and meetings with minority and/or first-generation faculty and industry leaders from UCSF and other universities in the Bay Area. Some sessions are held at the small cohort level; previous IMSD cohorts (those currently in years 3-5 of their degree program) will participate in other meetings and serve as mentors for the current cohort.

**Career Development and Planning**

One of the goals of the IMSD fellowship program is to stimulate students' involvement in career planning, and to ensure their access to campus resources related to research career placement strategies. Fellows are encouraged to use the services and participate in the programming offered by the UCSF Office of Career and Professional Development.

**Peer Mentorship**

Faculty mentorship within the laboratory setting is augmented by effective peer mentoring. IMSD fellows have the opportunity to develop personal and professional relationships with their fellow researchers. IMSD fellows may also provide guidance and mentorship to undergraduate and prospective students through participation in campus outreach activities.

**Current Fellows**

Yewande Alabi - Biomedical Sciences  
Stella Belonwu - Pharmaceutical Sciences and Pharmacogenomics  
Stephen Cutie - Bioengineering  
Sean de la O - Developmental and Stem Cell Biology  
Veronica Escalante - Tetrad  
Gretchen Ford - Bioengineering  
Elma Frias - Biomedical Sciences  
Yessica Gomez - Biophysics  
Matthew Johnson - Biological and Medical Informatics  
Carlos Johnson-Cruz - Neuroscience  
Dana Kennedy - Tetrad  
Jose Liboy - Tetrad  
Jocelyne Lopez - Tetrad  
Michael Mobarak - Developmental and Stem Cell Biology  
Megan Montoya - Biomedical Sciences  
Kevin Rivera - Oral and Craniofacial Sciences  
Eric Simental - Tetrad  
Daniel Schwarz - Chemistry and Chemical Biology  
Donovan Trinidad - Biomedical Sciences
IMSD Faculty Advisory Committee

- **Ryan Hernandez, PhD** [6] (co-PI and co-chair of UCSF IMSD grant/program)
- **Elizabeth Watkins, PhD** [7] (co-PI and co-chair of UCSF IMSD grant/program)
- **Jayanta Debnath, MD** [8]
- **Jason Gestwicki, PhD** [9]
- **Natalia Jura, PhD** [10]
- **Susan Lynch, PhD** [11]
- **Wallace Marshall, PhD** [12]
- **Kira Poskanzer, PhD** [13]
- **Julie Sneedon, PhD** [14]
- **Saul Villeda, PhD** [15]
- **Orion Weiner, PhD** [16]

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Pictured in NIGMS group photo above: (Back row, from left): Donovan Trinidad, Roberto Diaz, Chase Webb, Aaron Velasquez-Mao; (Front row, from left): Veronica Escalante, Dana Kennedy, Elma Frias, Daniel Schwarz; Missing: Stella Belonwu, Yessica Gomez. Photo by Elizabeth Silva
[10] https://profiles.ucsf.edu/natalia.jura
[12] https://profiles.ucsf.edu/wallace.marshall
[14] https://sneddonlab.ucsf.edu/
[15] https://profiles.ucsf.edu/saul.villeda
[16] https://profiles.ucsf.edu/orion.weiner