



UMB News

UMB Hosts First Diversity Pipeline Programs Meeting

October 23, 2019 | By [Jena Frick](#)

Collaboration and commonality were the two buzzwords of the inaugural Diversity Pipeline Programs Meeting on Oct. 11 at the [Institute of Marine and Environmental Technology](#) (IMET). Hosted by the [University of Maryland, Baltimore](#) (UMB) and sponsored by [Becton Dickinson](#) (BD), this first-of-its-kind meeting brought program leaders and participants from around the country together to discuss their innovative pipeline programs.

([View a photo gallery](#).)



“There are similarities and differences among all of the programs,” explains **Bret Hassel, PhD**, professor at the [University of Maryland School of Medicine](#), who organized the Diversity Pipeline Programs Meeting. “On the surface, the urban Baltimore and rural Nebraska populations are really different, but underneath of that we really share a lot. It’s great that we

UMB President Jay A. Perman, MD, welcomes academic leaders from across the nation to the inaugural Diversity Pipeline Programs Meeting.

can get together on a national level because there's a lot that we

can all learn from each other."

From Baltimore to Omaha to Chicago, representatives came from far and wide to share their best practices for running successful pipeline programs that span all levels of education. Diversity pipeline programs are designed to provide educational and career support to students belonging to racial/ethnic minorities and other groups who face challenges in entering health professional programs and are under-represented in the biomedical sciences. Near-peer mentoring and holistic approaches to the students' basic needs are integral components of these programs, which go beyond academics to provide support and resources necessary for students to reach their full potential.

The daylong event was held in conjunction with the [Cancer Biology Training Consortium](#) (CABTRAC) Retreat, a three-day meeting hosted by the [University of Maryland Marlene & Stewart Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center](#) (UMGCCC) and attended by the [National Cancer Institute](#) (NCI) training branch as well as cancer research faculty and students from all around the country. The Diversity Pipeline Program started with a series of presentations from 10 program leaders from local and national academic institutions who took turns at the podium discussing the successes and challenges of their pipeline programs. UMB President **Jay A. Perman, MD**, led off the series of speakers by emphasizing how critical pipeline programs are to the future of medicine.

(View list of speakers below.)

"A diverse cancer workforce, a diverse biomedical workforce, and a workforce of men and women fully representative of the populations they serve is essential to efficacy and innovation," he told the crowded auditorium. "It's essential to eliminating these disparities and achieving health equity."

The common thread in these presentations was commitment. Each speaker emphasized that the secret to creating a successful pipeline program is to establish trust and prove that you are committed to the community you're serving.

During her presentation, **Gia Grier-McGinnis, DrPH, MS**, executive director of the UMB [CURE Scholars Program](#), discussed the holistic approach of the CURE program. Funded by an NCI grant to UMGCCC, the CURE Scholars Program is a nationally recognized initiative in which strong mentoring, academic enrichment, and community engagement aim to excite middle school students from three West Baltimore partner schools about science and inspire them to pursue promising careers in science and health care.

Grier-McGinnis explained that CURE's program leaders go beyond the classroom and take great care to get to know all the students and their families on a personal level. There's even a social worker on staff to help them with family matters and personal needs.

Maurice Godfrey, PhD, from the University of Nebraska Medical Center directs programs that engage Native American students in cancer research and establish the same holistic approach and deep sense of trust, but in a less-populated rural community.

"The issues in these rural communities are pretty much the same as inner cities, but there's just more elbow room," he explains. "We have a small but very spread-out population, and sometimes reaching our students takes a six-hour car ride. That's why mentoring is critical, so our students have someone they can rely on all the time within their local communities."

Because of the rural populations in the Midwest, Godfrey's pipeline program stretches across four states — Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota — and is focused on engaging Native American students in STEM careers starting at the pre-K level.

“We have a whole host of programs and curriculum that are fun and hands-on in such a way that they don’t realize that it’s science,” Godfrey said. “We’re using that as a hook to get them to like learning and then to follow whatever academic or career path they choose.”

In contrast, the [MERIT Health Leadership Academy](#) uses a rigorous schedule and workload to prepare high school students for the demands of an MD or PhD program. Stephanie Withey, program director of MERIT, explained in her presentation that the curriculum is designed to ensure that the scholars know what to expect when they get to college, graduate school, and medical school.

While program leaders were giving presentations about their respective pipeline programs, a number of students who participate in the programs were down the hall at a mentoring workshop led by **Jennifer Aumiller, MEd**, director of career and professional development at the [University of Maryland Graduate School](#).

She led the students in a number of activities to help pinpoint their communication styles and gave them sound advice about finding multiple mentors who can help them succeed in their professional and personal lives.

The second half of the day brought the students and pipeline program leaders together for lunch and a speed mentoring session. The students — ranging in education level from middle school to graduate school — also had the opportunity to showcase their individual research with poster presentations.

(View a list of [poster presentation winners](#).)

“It is so cool getting to meet students from around the country with similar aspirations doing the same type of program,” said Aysha Ahmad, a participant in the [Eyes on Cancer Program](#) at the University of Chicago and a pre-med freshman at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “I was surprised to see posters from middle school students but was so excited to walk through and read them. They look phenomenal!”

Uriel Jean-Baptiste, a participant in UMB’s [Science Training for Advancing Biomedical Research Postbaccalaureate Program](#) (STAR-PREP) who is applying for a PhD in biochemistry and structural biology, felt very inspired to be surrounded by so many people involved in different stages of pipeline programs.

“There is such a gradient in this room,” he said. “You can actually see all of the levels of these programs, and it’s showing me how I can contribute to helping others get to where I am. At the same time, I can see others who can help me keep climbing to reach my career goals. It feels very good.”

With the success of this inaugural Diversity Pipeline Programs Meeting, academic leaders hope to make this collaborative gathering an annual event.

Diversity Pipeline Programs Meeting Speakers

Jay A. Perman, MD, President, UMB

Nikos Pavlidis, Vice President/General Manager for Molecular Diagnostics and Women’s Health & Cancer, Becton Dickinson

Alison Lin, PhD, Deputy Chief, Diversity Training Branch of National Center to Reduce Cancer Health Disparities

Tony Beck, PhD, SEPA Program Director, Division for Research Capacity Building, National Institute of General Medical Sciences

Gia Grier-McGinnis, DrPH, MS, Executive Director, UMB CURE Scholars Program

Bret Hassel, PhD, Professor, UMB, UMGCCC — PI, Nathan Schnaper Intern Program and Bridges to the Doctorate

Elizabeth Parker, PhD, Assistant Professor, UMB, UMGCCC — PI, CURE Connections

Greg Carey, PhD, Associate Professor, UMB, UMGCCC — PI, STAR PREP

Stephanie Withey, Program Director, MERIT Health Leadership Academy

Christine Newman, PhD, Assistant Dean for Engineering Education Outreach, Johns Hopkins University and B'more STEM Working Board

Eileen Dolan, MD, Professor, University of Chicago — PI, Eyes on Cancer Program

Mark Jackson, MD, Associate Professor, Case Cancer Center — PI, Youth Engaged in Science

Maurice Godfrey, PhD, Professor, University of Nebraska Medical Center — PI, Youth Enjoy Science: Engaging Native American Students in Cancer Research

Christine Hohmann, PhD, Professor, Morgan State University — *BUILD ASCEND Program*

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