



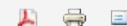
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CMI to Open New Research Training Laboratory



May 9, 2012 marks the official opening the Pacific STEP-UP (Short-Term Education Program for Underrepresented Persons) Research Training Laboratory at the College of the Marshall Islands (CMI), a project supported by a grant from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) to the University of Hawaii. The lab is a result of a new collaboration between the NIH, CMI and the University of Hawaii's School of Medicine. This summer, for the first time, high school students will be able to work alongside CMI faculty on molecular biology experiments in the new laboratory.

The STEP-UP program, originally conceived by Dr. Lawrence Agodoa at NIH's National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), provides short-term research education and training for high school students from communities underrepresented in biomedical and behavioral research, including African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, students with disabilities and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The program exposes 11th- and 12th-grade students to hands-on laboratory research to foster an interest in biomedical research. The long-term goal is to increase the number of underrepresented minority and disadvantaged students who are committed to a career in biomedical, behavioral, clinical, or social science research. This will help build and strengthen a biomedical research and healthcare work force that is culturally competent and responsive to the needs of underserved communities. STEP-UP is part of NIDDK's [Strategic Plan on Minority Health Disparities](#).

Launched by NIH in 2002, STEP-UP focused on high school and undergraduate students in the continental U.S., Hawaii, Alaska and Puerto Rico. Dr. Agodoa and NIDDK Director Dr. Griffin P. Rodgers came to realize an even greater need for programs like STEP-UP in the Pacific communities. The timing was just right, as Congress and President Obama passed the America Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), allowing the University of Hawaii to use Recovery Act funds to expand STEP-UP activities to the entire Pacific region, encompassing Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Another competitive, 5-year NIH grant has just been awarded to the University of Hawaii to continue to develop the Pacific STEP-UP program. Because of the scarcity of biomedical research infrastructure in many of the Pacific Islands, research training laboratories like the one at CMI are being established at local colleges in American Samoa, CNMI, and Palau so that local faculty mentors can eventually adopt and incorporate molecular techniques in their STEP-UP interns' research projects. Much of the needed research equipment is being donated from NIH's surplus equipment warehouse, and research supplies are covered by the NIH grant. The intent is that access to NIH surplus laboratory equipment will serve as a conduit that will remain open to support future equipment needs for STEP-UP training. University of Hawaii faculty and staff are conducting workshops at local colleges to train potential STEP-UP mentors to use lab equipment and on research techniques.

The Pacific STEP-UP is an unprecedented effort by NIH to grow the next generation of biomedical research scientists, who will bring the benefits of cutting edge medical sciences to the U.S. and to U.S.-affiliated Pacific communities. The program's success hinges on long-term partnerships between local colleges, communities, the University of Hawaii and the NIH. But judging from the positive experiences and collaborations developed thus far, there is ample justification for enthusiasm.

The new Research Training Laboratory will have an opening ceremony this Wednesday May 9th 10 am at CMI Tolmour Hall Room 105.

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