College Biology Faculty Named Leadership Fellows

40 fellows will help reform how life sciences are taught in post-secondary institutions

WASHINGTON, DC – The Partnership for Undergraduate Life Sciences Education (PULSE) program announced today that it has selected 40 Vision and Change Leadership Fellows. The fellows will identify and consider how to eliminate barriers to the systemic changes that are needed to improve undergraduate life sciences education.

The PULSE program is a joint initiative of the National Science Foundation (NSF), Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The effort is supporting a yearlong program in which Vision and Change Leadership Fellows consider and then recommend models for improving undergraduate life sciences education.

“The fellows represent a diverse group of extremely capable faculty,” said Judith Verbeke of NSF. “They bring a variety of experiences that will inform the development of an implementation framework that will transform undergraduate education in the life sciences.”

These post-secondary life sciences faculty members were competitively selected by an expert panel for their experience in catalyzing reform in undergraduate biology education.

After evaluating more than 250 applications, the PULSE steering committee selected the fellows announced today. These individuals come from 24 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and represent research universities, liberal arts colleges, comprehensive/regional universities, and two-year colleges.

“We are very excited about the work on which the fellows are about to embark,” said Clifton A. Poodry of NIH’s National Institute of General Medical Sciences. “The PULSE program will help move life sciences education forward.”

“The strong response we received to the call for applications reflects broad consensus in the community that change is needed,” said HHMI’s Cynthia Bauerle. The way biology is taught needs to change in order to spark student interest in science and prepare them to answer challenging 21st century problems. “The time is now,” said Bauerle.

In 2006, NSF initiated a multi-year conversation with the scientific community, with assistance from the American Association for the Advancement of Science. That dialogue, which was co-funded by NIH and HHMI, generated the 2011 report, Vision and Change in Undergraduate Biology Education: A Call to Action.

The scientific community actively informed the recommendations in the Vision and Change report. Among these were a recognition that a 21st century education requires changes to how biology is taught, how academic departments support faculty, and how curricular decisions are made.
“To foster this widespread systemic change, NSF, HHMI, and NIH launched the PULSE program,” said Verbeke. Supporting the effort are Knowinnovation, Inc. and the American Institute of Biological Sciences.

PULSE will stimulate systemic change in undergraduate life science education by focusing on strategies that drive institutional change. Because a change in institutional culture is needed, PULSE activities are focused on academic departments and not individual faculty members.

In May, PULSE announced a national competition to identify Vision and Change Leadership Fellows. The 40 fellows announced today will produce an implementation framework describing strategies for change. This document will be available on the PULSE website where other life scientists may review it and provide comments from November 2012 until May 2013. The biology community is encouraged to review and enrich this framework via the PULSE online colleague community. Program organizers stress that they welcome the participation of the breadth of the post-secondary life sciences community.

A list of the Vision and Change Leadership Fellows is available at www.pulsecommunity.org/. Learn more about PULSE or engage with the growing online PULSE community at www.pulsecommunity.org.

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