INFORMATION FOR MENTORS OF HEALTH DISPARITY FELLOWS (HDFs)

A. HOME DEPARTMENT MENTORS’ (HDMs’) RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Supervise a health disparities fellow (HDF) who is pursuing doctoral work in the mentor’s department by ensuring that they meet the Fellowship program academic requirements. These are described below:

   a. The HDF must attend a minimum of 7 meetings Community Health Task Force meetings in Albany and/or Amsterdam.

   b. The HDF must meet with other Fellows and the Director of the Center for the Elimination of Minority Health Disparities on a monthly basis during the academic year.

   c. The HDF must have four (4) different Experiential Learning Placements (ELPs; aka rotations) during the course of their program. For more detail see section #3 of this document.

   d. The HDF must complete the Health Disparities Certificate before they graduate and preferably within the first two academic years of their program. Please check with the Fellowship Program’s Director for the most up-to-date list of courses for the Certificate.

2. Discussing (with the HDF), completing, and approving the Job Description Form as required for their appointment with the Research Foundation (RF) or UAlbany HR. A sample is provided here.

   a. The HDF is not to be classified as a regular Research Assistant (RA) or Graduate Assistant (GA) by the mentor.

   b. The HDF is not expected to work for their mentor in any capacity.

   c. The ongoing work done by the HDF as a RA or GA is to aid in the progression of the HDF’s degree, as the HDF is hired by the RF or UAlbany and not by their home department.

The Health Disparities Research and Training Fellowship program is a paradoxical hybrid. It is a training program originally awarded as a research grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). The letter of award specifically states that the funds cannot be used for research (because it is a training program). In 2020, the Hearst Foundation awarded UAlbany additional funding to expand the fellowship program under the same regulations and requirements as the original NIMHD award. Therefore, we cannot pay for HD Fellows to perform research, nor can the funds for mentors described in the Mentor’s benefits document which you will receive separately. However, we are also prohibited from paying stipends (as a research or graduate assistant or teaching assistant or a student on a training grant would receive). According to the Research Foundation (RF) and UAlbany HR, they can only be paid for work performance. Therefore, to accommodate the diverse and apparently contradictory sets of rules, each fellow must develop with their Home Department Mentor (HDM) a work plan for which
the fellow will be paid as a RF or UAlbany employee.

The work plan cannot include any coursework or labwork for credits. Their work should involve some activity in the area of health disparities. The activity does not have to be extensive especially in the early years of the HDF’s program. For example, the Fellows are required to attend at least 7 monthly Task Force meetings (currently virtually but may revert to in-person) in addition to meeting monthly with the Fellowship Program’s Director. These activities could be a large part of the work plan.

Each HDM must sign off on the work performed for the student to be paid. You will receive an email to review and approve their timesheet electronically. This is a requirement for all RF and UAlbany employees.

At the end of each semester a simple form for evaluation of the student’s progress will be sent to the HDM which needs to be completed before the beginning of the next semester. A significant part of that evaluation will be evaluating progress towards completing the Health Disparities Certificate Program. If an evaluation is not returned by the HDM, it may affect their HDF’s support in subsequent years.

3. Assisting the HDF in selecting four Experiential Learning Placements (ELPs; rotations) – (for additional detail, please see the document Guidelines for Experiential Learning Placements for Health Disparities Fellows).

Part of the HDM’s responsibility is to help the HDF find beneficial ELPs that are an integral part of each fellow’s NIH-required transdisciplinary training). These rotations must be outside their focus of study and cannot be with their primary mentor/advisor.

The blueprint for the program proposal to the NIH states: “Together the HDM and the HDF, with assistance from the program director, will choose ELPs among mentors in other academic units or extra-university agencies. It is expected that some of these ELPs will occur after the first year of graduate study and before the dissertation writing stage. Each ELP is equivalent to approximately 20-25% of the HDFs course load.

In each of those semesters, the HDF will work with a health disparity researcher (defined here as a Rotational Mentor or RM) or a member of a government organization or a non-governmental organization that addresses health disparities to gain exposure and expertise in the RM’s research specialty and/or area of professional practice.

The close work between RM and HDF could be through participation in a research project, volunteer type work for an NGO or a government agency (e.g., Albany County Department of Health; Trinity Alliance), a regularly scheduled course in health disparities outside of the HDF’s dissertation area with additional tutorials, or an independent study course mechanism. Again, the intention is that the rotation is an activity that is complementary to the HDF’s dissertation area but not directly related to their research focus or discipline in order to achieve transdisciplinary training. A RM can be either a senior or a junior faculty.

The HDM will evaluate the rotation monthly during the semester of each rotation, consulting with the RM and meeting monthly with the HDF to evaluate and guide each rotation experience. After the HDF completes four (4) rotations, the HDF will concentrate on doing their own research under the supervision of their HDM.
Among the ELPs that may be available will be a one-semester internship with the New York State Chapter of the American College of Physicians. Through the Schools of Public Health, Education and Welfare, fellows also may serve an ELP with a local NGO/CBO devoted to community and preventive health. In the State’s capital, the city of Albany has numerous NGO/CBOs nearby. CEMHD has many community partners (non-academic) as a source for internship placements. More information is available here.