

ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION AWARDS SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH TO ADVANCE ACADEMIC EQUITY

The University of Memphis School of Public Health (UofM SPH) is proud to be one of seven schools of public health in the nation funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to integrate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) into their culture and operations. Funding from the RWJF's Transforming Academia for Equity initiative allowed us to implement an interprofessional model to support strategic change.

We created a 10-person guiding team composed of UofM SPH administrators, cross-department faculty, graduate students and DEI champions from three other UofM colleges (Law, Education and Communication & Fine Arts).

Priority focus areas of the UofM SPH include:

1) Recruitment and retention of underrepresented faculty and staff



Marian Levy, DrPH, RD, FAND
Associate Dean & Professor
(Principal Investigator)

2) Examination of Tenure and Promotion policies that are barriers to equity

3) Recruitment and mentorship of underrepresented doctoral students

In the Fall of 2022, an initial school-wide climate survey was conducted to assess faculty, staff, student and alumni



Vikki Nolan, Dsc, MPH
Assistant Dean
Associate Professor of Epidemiology
(Co-Principal Investigator)

perceptions of personal inclusion and equity in SPH policies, practices and culture. Next, a series of eight listening sessions were held with SPH stakeholders (faculty, staff, students and alumni) to elicit feedback to inform our school's vision and strategic plan of action.

In October, an Academic Equity Fellowship (AEF) program was launched to invest in the mentorship of underrepresented doctoral students and master's

level students aspiring to enter doctoral training and is designed to enhance the pathways of the next generation of diverse scholars.

The AEF program introduces graduate students to skills that promote academic equity and provides resources to succeed in their training and careers in public health.

Each of the 18 fellowship recipients receives a stipend for attending a total of six 75-minute interactive sessions held monthly during the 2022-23 academic year.

We also implemented ongoing cultural humility/anti-bias and inclusion training for UofM SPH faculty and staff with



Debra Bartelli, DrPH
Director of Undergraduate Programs
Research Associate Professor of Urban Health

sponsorship by a school-wide faculty committee.

In January 2023, focus groups are planned with underrepresented faculty



Fawaz Mzayek, MD, MPH, PhD
Associate Professor of Epidemiology

from various colleges across campus to obtain perspectives about barriers related to academic success for historically excluded scholars and those from marginalized social identity groups. Using feedback from these assessments, interviews and workshops, as well as



Xinhua Yu, MD, PhD, MS
Associate Professor of Epidemiology,
PhD Program Coordinator for Epidemiology

mentorship from experienced DEI leaders, the UofM SPH strives to imbed principles of diversity, equity and inclusion into the SPH vision & mission, and develop a strategic plan that encompasses DEI priorities, recommendations and an action plan.

ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FACILITATORS' THOUGHTS ON WORKING WITH THE TEAM:



This collaboration is beneficial in bridging our shared interests between departments and strengthening our University's overall commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Lucienne Dorrance Auz, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
University of Memphis College of Communication & Fine Arts
Modern and Contemporary Art History
Department of Art

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the RWJF program to provide insight drawn from our shared experiences and my work at the law school. Yet, the discipline differences make our obstacles unique—so I have learned much from the other team members as well.

Demetria D. Frank
Associate Dean for Diversity & Inclusion
Associate Professor of Law
University of Memphis

Developing a culture and climate of belonging is central to my role in the College of Education. However, serving as an external member of the guiding team has allowed me to extend this work beyond our college.

Steve Zanskas, Ph.D., CRC, LPC (MI & WI)
Past-President ARCA, TCA, & TACES
Professor & Associate Dean College of Education
University of Memphis

