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Filling the Minority Pipeline

Even among minorities underrepresented in the sciences, Native Americans are underrepresented. And even at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, a leader in seeing Native Americans through to their bachelor's degrees, very few go on to medical school or graduate programs in biomedical science.

Humboldt State hopes that reaching them earlier will help. The northern California campus of the California state universities will use part of a new science education grant from Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) to attract minority high school students—particularly Native Americans—to the sciences.

Students from area high schools, where there is a concentration of Native Americans, will be invited to Humboldt State for summer workshops in biology, chemistry, math and English, culminating in an eight-week summer research program in faculty labs. Stipends and travel allowances will enable students who might otherwise not be able to participate to do so.

Humboldt State also plans to use another resource, HHMI-supported undergraduate science majors, to communicate the thrill of science to children and their families. Working with the university's Natural History Museum, which already offers science workshops, classes, field trips, and displays, a series of five three-hour classes in cell structure and function will be taught by HHMI undergraduate research students.

“There are talented individuals who, because of circumstances beyond their control, have never had a chance to showcase their abilities,” says Jacob Varkey, professor of biology and HHMI program director at Humboldt State. “Everyone should have an opportunity to realize their potential.”

Through its science education grants, HHMI demonstrates a longstanding commitment to attracting and retaining minorities underrepresented in the sciences.