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HHMI Expands Program to Introduce Ph.D. Students to Clinical Medicine

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute has announced that it will award up to \$25 million in new grants to build on a unique program that prepares scientists to translate laboratory discoveries into new medical treatments.

The second round of grants in the “Med Into Grad” initiative will be open to up to 25 institutions. The deadline for registering the intent to apply for the grants is January 6, 2009.

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HHMI launched the initiative in 2005 to support the development of graduate training programs that incorporate an understanding of the principles of medicine and disease into the education of Ph.D. researchers. Thirteen grants—ranging from approximately \$600,000 to \$1 million—were awarded in the first round.

“We believe the researchers trained by these programs will be able to recognize important scientific problems of medicine and address these problems in their research,” says William Galey, program director for HHMI's graduate education and medical research training programs

Galey says the program is already having an impact, noting that participating institutions have considerable flexibility in the way they introduce medicine

into graduate education. For example, the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine immerses students in medical specialties, including clinical practice, and offers courses in drug design and stem cell biology. Another grantee, the Baylor College of Medicine, has created a new Ph.D. program in translational biology and molecular medicine; students receive rigorous training in the basic biomedical sciences, participate in clinical rounds, and are mentored by both clinicians and basic science researchers.

Graduate students at all participating institutions are able to collaborate with physician-scientists, choose medically relevant thesis topics, and publish work in medical journals. Their projects often bring together research from their clinical and basic science mentors.

“The initiative has been a resounding success,” says Peter Bruns, HHMI's vice president for grants and special programs. “The programs have attracted highly talented students who are now doing innovative research at the interface of basic science or engineering and clinical medicine.”

Yet Bruns notes that many schools have found it difficult to find permanent funding for their programs. The new competition will support continued funding for some existing programs and enable additional institutions to expand their graduate training programs.

“We now know that many more institutions would like to establish and run such programs,” said Bruns. “Unfortunately, there are few funds from other private or government sources available to support them.”

Any university in the United States that offers Ph.D. training in a biomedical science is eligible to apply for a grant through the “Med Into Grad” initiative, including previous grantees. A distinguished panel of graduate educators, biomedical researchers, and physician scientists will help select the awardees. Programs must register their intent to apply by January 6, 2009. The application deadline is April 27, 2009.

To register an intent to apply or to read more about the HHMI Med Into Grad Initiative, please go to www.hhmi.org/competitions