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Pitt Joins Initiative to Advance Women of Color in STEM+Fields

*By Adam Reger***Issue Date:** January 19, 2016

The University of Pittsburgh will be conducting research valued at \$1 million to advance the success of women of color in universities.

This five-year commitment is part of the broader Collaborative to Advance Equity through Research, an affiliation of more than two dozen American colleges, universities, and public interest organizations that has collectively pledged \$18 million in research to support new and existing efforts concerning women and girls of color.

The pledge was made during the Advancing Equity for Women and Girls of Color summit, held in November at the White House and cohosted by the White House Council on Women and Girls and Wake Forest University.

Pitt's research efforts will focus on increasing the number of women of color in graduate fields related to STEM+ (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, as well as quantitative disciplines such as economics), said Mark S. Redfern, Pitt vice provost for research.

"The goal of our research will be to understand the best way to advance women of color to succeed in STEM+ fields and become faculty members at other institutions," Redfern said. "Women of color coming into universities can benefit from role models. They need people who've gone through what they're going to go through, and we just don't have enough in academia."

Pitt chose to concentrate its efforts on STEM+, which is one of the collaborative's five broad areas of focus. The other areas include fostering school success and reducing unnecessary school discipline for girls of underrepresented populations; meeting the needs of vulnerable youth; sustaining reduced rates of teen pregnancy; and fostering economic prosperity.

Redfern anticipates forming a team of researchers, drawn from the University's School of Education and from social science and behavioral science departments, to design and plan the research effort during the spring 2016 semester, with the research beginning during fall 2016. At the conclusion of the five-year research period, Pitt researchers will publish their findings, sharing their recommendations with other universities.

The researchers' work will be aided significantly, Redfern said, by a program Pitt

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already has in place to help underrepresented populations succeed academically.

Hot Metal Bridge Program, a post-baccalaureate program established by the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in the 2010–2011 academic year, prepares students of color and women to enter PhD programs in fields in which they are underrepresented. The program has posted impressive results, with more than two-thirds of women in the program entering graduate programs.

Research projects like this national collaborative fit Pitt’s broader research agenda perfectly, Redfern said.

“We want to do research that has impact, and we think this has the potential for significant impact through understanding how we can get more women of color PhDs into universities,” Redfern said.

He added that researchers’ findings may be useful across a range of disciplines.

“This might spark mentorship programs for faculty, further research on the best ways to educate different populations, or research in social work that looks at racial parity and justice,” he said.

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