

Response to Graduate Studies and Policy Resolution 2017-18A
Department: Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health
Faculty of Health Sciences

The Translational Biology, Medicine and Health (TBMH) graduate program is a multidisciplinary degree program that provides students a biomedical research experience that spans multiple departments as well as levels on the National Institute of Health's translation spectrum. This multidisciplinary aspect is a core strength of this program, but can also present a series of challenges for students. Research is housed within many different departments, each with different available classes and resources. In addition, students in this degree program currently span across two campuses. This presents its own unique set of challenges in providing equitable opportunities for students to fulfill a single requirement beyond the first year, when the students are based in Roanoke as a single cohort.

Required Topics for resolution:

1. The Virginia Tech Principles of Community as they apply to the valuing of human diversity and inclusion.
2. The impact that personal actions and words have on self, others, and the communities – university, national, and global – in which we live; issues of privilege, bias, power, prejudice, and discrimination; concepts of multiple personal, social, and cultural identities.

Plan of action:

A mandatory coursework solution within the first year is incompatible with the SCHEV approved first year course load of the TBMH program. An elective seminar response to the resolution does provide an opportunity for students to complete some of the requirements for training within the first year and beyond.

-Students are to attend at least 3 seminars in their time as a TBMH student that are focused specifically on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion with biomedical research. This allows the students to understand their role as researchers in promoting diversity, advocating for equity, and understanding the importance of inclusion within all aspects of translational biomedical research—from lab bench to patient care.

Graduating with a PhD focused on Translation Science puts our graduates in a privileged position to make major biomedical discoveries. Exposure to how leading experts in the field are advocates through their discipline provides the students a template of how they can be advocates in leading change and enhancing equity.

- *Examples from the 2018-2019 seminar speakers they could choose from:*
- “The Science of Minority Health and Health Disparities: NIMHD Perspective,” presented by Eliseo Perez-Stable, director of the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities, on Oct. 17, 2019.
- “Preparing for Global Climate Change,” presented by Vicki Arroyo, executive director of the Georgetown Climate Center, on Nov. 7, 2019.
- “Social Inequality and Cancer Survival: How Can We Close the Gap?” presented by Ophira Ginsburg, director of the Perlmutter Cancer Center's High-Risk Cancer Genetics Program at NYU Langone Health, on Dec. 5, 2019.

“The Neurobiology of Social Bonding, Empathy and Social Loss: Implications for Autism”
Presented by Larry Young, Director of the Center for Translation Neuroscience at Emory
University School of Medicine, on Feb. 14, 2020

Each year as the seminar speakers are scheduled, effort will be made to provide multiple seminars to students with regards to required topics within the biomedical community.

Required Topics for Resolution:

3. Available avenues of redress and our shared responsibilities as active by-standers.
4. The process of individual introspection required both to understand one’s own forms of implicit or unconscious bias and to create inclusive environments.

Plan of Action:

-Students will participate in an active learning session about their role in recognizing, mitigating, and engaging in disrupting systemic power plays. The goal of this component is for students to play an active role in change, beyond the listening component from the seminars. Their first introduction will be a workshop on implicit bias and inclusive classroom behaviors occurring during orientation week for first year students. After that, they will be asked to engage in one more activism initiatives found at either the Blacksburg or Roanoke Campus in a subsequent year.

Examples from the 2019-2020 school year students can choose from:

Roanoke Campus:

- Beginning March 2020 – Collaborative Conversations series
- Bring in staff from Inclusive VT to provide training days and opportunities
- Implicit Bias/Micro-aggression trainings
- Work with Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator with the School of Medicine for workshops and opportunities

Blacksburg Campus:

- Events and opportunities can be found at <https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/>

Student Accountability for the Resolution:

The Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health graduate program will include a check box on both its Masters and Doctorate Plan of Study forms. This will indicate that graduate students have received/participated in diversity and inclusion educational programs pertinent to their degree and future success beyond graduation.

Implementation:

Pending Graduate School Approval, this is set to be applied to the incoming class in Fall 2021. This timeline allows for purposeful selection of seminar lecture speakers, as well as setting up opportunities for student participation.