Porter Physiology Development and Minority Affairs Committee

The goal of the Porter Physiology Development Program is to encourage diversity among students pursuing full-time studies toward the Ph.D. in the physiological sciences and to encourage their participation in the American Physiological Society. The program provides 1-2 year full-time graduate fellowships. The program is open to underrepresented ethnic minority applicants who are citizens or permanent residents of the United States or its territories. Fellows are expected to be/become APS members, participate in EB, complete specific professional development activities, and participate in K-12 outreach. Since 1967 the program has provided more than 228 fellowships to 111 trainees.

2012-2013 Porter Physiology Fellowship Program
In 2011-2012, the program provided funding for eight fellows. One fellow took a leave of absence beginning in December 2012, bringing the number of Fellows to seven.

2013-2014 Porter Fellowships - New and Renewal Applications
A total of nine new and five renewal applications were submitted for the January 15 deadline and reviewed by the Committee. The stipend paid to the Porter Fellows for 2013-2014 will again be $28,300, consistent with the NIH scale. The Porter Fund allowed for a total of eight awards, as recommended by the Committee, for the 2013-2014 Fellowship period.

The Porter Physiology Development Fund (Financial Status)
The Committee expresses its sincere appreciation for the continued support of the William Townsend Porter Foundation, the Pitts Family Foundation, APS member contributions, and the APS Council that makes these fellowships possible.

Porter Facebook Fan Page
In 2011, Heidy Contreras launched a Facebook fan page for current and past Porter Fellows to facilitate networking among minority physiologists. Contreras, fellow Porter Committee member, Keisa Mathis, and APS staff are posting 2-3 times monthly. The group currently has 22 members (not including staff).

Minority Travel Fellows Program
2012-2013 Travel Awards
The Porter Committee reviewed and recommended award recipients for Minority Travel Fellowships to attend two APS meetings and conferences in 2012. Two travel fellows received funding to attend the APS Conference, “Autonomic Regulation of Cardiovascular Function in Health and Disease,” from July 7-10, 2012 in Omaha, Nebraska. Four travel fellows received awards to attend the APS Intersociety Meeting, “Integrative Biology of Exercise,” from October 10-13, 2012 in Westminster, Colorado. The Committee selected 30 Travel Fellows to attend EB 2013 from April 20-24 in Boston, MA. Again this year, the Committee was pleased that former Porter Fellows and past Travel Fellows volunteered to be mentors for the younger Travel Fellows.

2013 Porter Reception
As in the past, the Committee held a reception for Travel Fellows, their meeting mentors, and past and current Porter and Travel Fellows. This reception builds stronger connections between minority students and the larger community of APS scientists, especially other minority scientists. The Porter reception again this year was extremely successful.

2013 Travel Fellows Luncheon
The Travel Fellows Luncheon was held on Wednesday of the EB meeting. The Fellows heard from keynote speaker, Dr. Eric Floyd, Vice President of Regulatory Affairs and Quality Assurance at Lundbeck A/S. Dr. Floyd’s talk, “Making the Transition from Academia into Industry: Crossing the Divide” highlighted the differences between academia and industry and provided advice on how to prepare for a transition. His talk provided a personal perspective on the positives and negatives of both career tracks and reinforced the fact that the skills the students are gaining now are transferable.

Program Evaluation
Similar to the Porter Fellowship evaluation, the Education Office staff, with support from NIDDK, has evaluated data from a survey of past Travel Fellows. This survey, conducted every 4-5 years, provides information on the career development of Travel Fellows, their involvement in physiology and in APS activities, and their perspectives on how the fellowship contributed to their career development. A poster presentation was given at the EB 2013 meeting.

Grant development
The APS Minority Travel Fellows program has been generously supported by an R13 grant from NIDDK since 1987. Funding ended on June 30, 2013.

Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS)
The APS exhibited at the November 2012 meeting in Anaheim, CA to promote undergraduate programs, graduate study in physiology and the APS programs for minority students. The APS was pleased to again provide $2,500 for cash awards for the most outstanding undergraduate presentations in physiology research. Twenty undergraduate students received APS-sponsored awards for the best oral and poster presentations in the physiological sciences. Students also received a complimentary one-year print subscription to the APS journal, Physiology, and an APS “Life, Logic, Study” shirt. Awardees were added to the APS Minority Physiologists and APS Trainee Listservs.

Society for the Advancement of Chicanos & Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) National Conference
2012 APS Exhibit
In 2012, the theme for the SACNAS annual conference was “Science, Technology, and Diversity for a Healthy World.” The conference took place from October 11-14, in Seattle, WA. Over 3,700 attendees participated in the conference: 1,497 undergraduates, 88 post baccalaureate students, 556 graduate students, 104 postdocs, and 1192 professionals. More than 1,200 posters and nearly 70 oral presentations were given at this national conference. There were also more than 300 exhibitors.

K-12 Minority Outreach Fellows Program
Due to the ending of the NIDDK grant, the program did not support any Fellows in 2012-2013. However, thanks to Council approving funds to support Fellows at the 2012 meeting, the program did accept applications this year. Three students submitted applications for this fellowship. The two awardees selected are Raisa Loucil-Alicea, Ponce School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Dept. of Biochemistry, and Abigail Ruiz-Rivera, Ponce School of Medicine, Dept. of Microbiology. These fellows received training at the 2013 EB meeting and will do outreach activities throughout the coming year.

“BE COUNTED” CAMPAIGN
The Porter Committee continued the campaign in 2013 and at the fall meeting reviewed the efficacy of the campaigns and discussed means to maintain momentum. Support and enthusiasm of APS Council and Society membership remains genuine for the campaign and for all APS programs to promote diversity. However, many APS members, irrespective of demographic, have not renewed
their membership profile. Interestingly, the Committee learned that many APS members had not renewed their information regarding academic ranking or specialty section affiliation in many years. Another issue and challenge that still must be addressed is apprehension on the part of some individuals of underrepresented minority groups to ‘self-identify’ their race and/or ethnicity. It is important to note that such apprehension is wide-spread and not unique among only APS membership. The Committee plans to continue the BE COUNTED campaign through 2014.