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MDA Foundation: How Foundation Grants Assist DEI Efforts at Detroit Mercy, U-M

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By Anne Berquist
Foundation Director of Development

How Foundation Grants Assist DEI Efforts at Detroit Mercy, U-M

The Michigan Dental Association's strategic plan for 2021-25 includes fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion in the dental profession. To help support the MDA's

quest to develop a pipeline of historically underrepresented minority group members pursuing a career in dentistry, the MDA Foundation contributed \$6,000 to both the University of Michigan School of Dentistry and the University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry HURM dental preparatory programs. The programs are designed to help prepare students from non-traditional backgrounds to pass the dental school entry examination.

For the past 10 years, Detroit Mercy Dental has offered HURM cohorts the opportunity to participate in its nine-week Summer Enrichment Program. According to Betsy Lozano, interim director of DEI at the school, the SEP provides free housing and dental admission test preparation, and a stipend to cover food and travel expenses. From 8:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, during the four-week residency portion on the program, participants study for the DAT, receive assistance writing their personal statements for the DAT application, conduct mock interviews, and engage in other preparatory activities. Participants must be college juniors, seniors, or have graduated college within the last five years and must have taken the DAT at least once. They must be from a disadvantaged background or be environmentally or economically disadvantaged.

"We have 20 people every year in the cohort," Lozano said. "Typically, we have over 200 applicants for 20 seats. The DAT preparatory course costs \$1,500 per person. The MDA Foundation grant helps with costs related to that."

Generally, Lozano said, the program has a 70% success rate for dental school acceptance. Eight SEP participants from the 2023 cycle have been accepted into dental school so far.

"I believe the SEP helps students believe in themselves and their ability to get into the dental school of their choice," Lozano said. "Participating makes for a stronger

application. A more diverse student body helps us have stronger dental schools."

The U-M Dental School's Profile for Success program has been operating for 29 years. It is a six-week summer residential program designed for college juniors, seniors, and recent college graduates from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds. Qualifications also include a demonstrated commitment to work with underserved populations within the United States. Each weekday, students take preparatory courses, listen to speaker presentations, and attend workshops. Evening and weekend events and activities also occur. Historically, 56% of Profiles for Success participants graduate dental school, and 33% of them graduate from the U-M School of Dentistry.

Dr. Todd V. Ester, assistant dean of DEI at the U-M Dental School, said 30 people applied for the 14 available seats in the 2023 Profile for Success cohort.

"Programs such as our help make the dental profession more inclusive and available to future dentist who come from educationally, socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds — or who have a compelling interest to serve those communities," Dr. Ester remarked. "There are over 6,000 underserved communities in our country, and the kind of students who come into our program to become dentists often go to work in the communities that need service."

The direct cost for each student in the Profile for Success program is \$7,000, Dr. Ester said, noting that the total costs per student are higher. The MDA Foundation grant largely funded the addition of one student to the program.

"We are very thankful for the gifts from the MDA Foundation," Dr. Ester said. "When outside organizations such as the MDA Foundation provide financial support, it broadens the acknowledgement of the program's impact and importance. I thank the MDA Foundation for this year's grant and for its efforts to support programs like Profiles for Success that have the goal to increase diversity in the dental profession."

MDA members can support the Foundation's DEI efforts by donating funds specifically for DEI. Please visit foundation.michigandental.org/DEI-Fund. ●