1. Student access and opportunities

During our graduate student recruitment we endeavor to attract applicants who come from a broad range of backgrounds. We utilize two name exchange consortia, The National Name Exchange, also known as the Committee on Cooperative Minority Student Recruitment, which includes 28 major U.S. universities. The Western Name Exchange Consortium is comprised of 26 universities in the western United States. Each year these consortia provide the University with approximately 3,500 names of minority juniors and seniors interested in graduate and professional study. The names are distributed to departments, and each student is also contacted by the Minority Education Division and encouraged to apply for admission to graduate school. Each student who is interested in Pharmacology is contacted directly; they are sent an informational packet and encouraged to apply.

In the next recruiting year, we have made plans to purchase names and addresses from the GRE Search Service and send out an informational flyer to those who have indicated certain areas of research interest. This service is reputed to be tremendously helpful in identifying students from a broad range of backgrounds, cultures and socioeconomic status.

While reviewing graduate applications, conducting interviews and making offers, diversity of background and life experiences are among the criteria considered. Our program does not have formal prerequisites beyond an undergraduate degree, enabling us to accept people from a wide variety of academic backgrounds with a broad range of experience. This flexibility greatly increases the pool from which we pull applicants and also increases the diversity within the graduate student population in the department.

We are also committed to the financial support of all of our students through completion of their PhD dissertation. This support includes both a tuition waiver and a competitive stipend. We do not want financial issues to be a barrier to graduate school for highly qualified candidates.

2. Student development and retention

The Department of Pharmacology participates in and supports the BRIDGES Program. The BRIDGES (Biomedical Research Identification of Graduate Education Successful Student Support Services) Program, funded by the NIGMS, represents one of the primary efforts of the School of Medicine to identify and recruit minorities. BRIDGES has a number of components that work both at the graduate and undergraduate level. For graduate students, it helps during the recruitment period to show prospective students that there is a strong commitment at the UW to support minority students. Once the students arrive, BRIDGES works to help retain them. Activities include an orientation for new graduate students, a journal club specifically for minority students, academic advising and counseling, professional development seminars and travel scholarships to present research at conferences.

We also make a conscious effort to ensure that our students find the best fit when choosing a lab and a thesis advisor. To make certain that a good fit is achieved we encourage everyone to complete at least three separate lab rotations. These rotations allow students to try out a lab, make sure the research is a good fit and that they are comfortable in the lab environment and with their advisor. One of our highest priorities is for our students to find the atmosphere, which is most beneficial and conducive to their learning style and where their individual personalities are allowed to thrive.

The Pharmacology Student Association (PSA) represents all graduate students in the Department of Pharmacology. The PSA hosts quarterly meetings for Pharmacology graduate students; topics of concern are discussed. PSA representatives attend the public meeting portion of quarterly faculty meetings in the Department, and inform and advise the faculty of graduate student issues. Issues that have been addressed have included curriculum, Ph.D.
requirements, and teaching assistant duties. Both the faculty and the graduate students have been able to share valuable information through this avenue of communication.

3. Engagement with the external community:

Faculty members have made their laboratories available for research experiences of minority individuals through three programs:

- Stipends for Training Aspiring Researchers (STAR) Program
- Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) Program
- BRIDGES Program.

Six of our faculty hosted one or more students from these three minority access programs in past years. Moreover, a Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Pharmacology trained a STAR/BRIDGES student and has taught with her at a local minority high school. Student participants in these programs receive state-of-the-art training in one of the research laboratories in this training program and learn about training opportunities presented by this training program and by other related mechanisms of training support available at the University of Washington.

In addition, our faculty has contributed in recruiting efforts for minority students through four national programs, which receive representatives of the University of Washington and the School of Medicine for their research training forums and symposiums:

- Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) Symposia
- Minority Graduate Education Forums
- National Minority Research Symposia
- Minority Biomedical Research Symposia (MBRS)

Participation in these programs informs interested minority individuals of research and training opportunities at the University of Washington.

Pharmacology graduate students are encouraged to attend national conferences to present posters and meet others in their respective fields. These meetings give the outside scientific community exposure to the diverse group of people that the department has to offer while at the same time allowing our graduate students to make connections within the scientific community.

4. Staff and administrative diversity:

The Department of Pharmacology celebrates the differences in our staff members and believes that the unique points of view, life experiences and distinctive contributions that individuals bring to the department are what make it great.

Employee ideas for improvement, effectiveness and efficiency are valued, are most always considered and are frequently implemented. Employee contributions are viewed as extremely important and are appreciated by the department as a whole. We take a value-added approach by recognizing that different life experiences and view points can only enhance both the productivity of the unit and the overall work environment.

5. Faculty diversity:

The Department of Pharmacology is committed to expanding and maintaining faculty diversity. This commitment has been put into practice in the hiring of new faculty in the last five years. Search committees are appointed by the Department chair, who takes great care in selecting a group that is diverse in gender, seniority and (when possible) ethnic background. Two of our most recent five faculty appointments in university-funded positions have been women. These new appointments both enhance our research and education programs and broaden our faculty representation. Regrettably, we have not been as successful in identifying highly qualified minority candidates to consider in these recent faculty recruitments. This primarily reflects a very small pool of highly qualified minority applicants for faculty positions in pharmacology in the national pool. We plan to continue expanding the faculty diversity in the department and embrace the individuality already present in our current faculty members.
6. Curriculum and research:

As mentioned above in the student section we are very much committed to finding a good fit for our graduate students when choosing a thesis advisor. We strongly encourage students to complete three lab rotations and in the past some students have chosen to complete additional rotations, which the department completely supports. Having our students find the right lab environment is much more important to us than the extra cost of supporting them for an additional rotation quarter. We try to shy away from the “one size fits all” approach.

We are also committed to tailoring the course curriculum to a certain extent to individual student needs. The department has very few core course requirements and we pride ourselves in being flexible and assessing each student’s educational needs on an individual basis based on their background and prior history. When a student enters the Pharmacology graduate program they are given an assessment to determine which classes they need to give them a solid science background. They are also given suggestions for additional classes to take beyond the core requirements, based upon their scientific interests and the research direction towards which they are moving. We feel that because the department has such a wide range of research interests and students with such different backgrounds a more individual approach to coursework and curriculum is the correct approach for us to graduate education.

The department has historically been, and continues to be, receptive to suggestions for changes in the course curriculum by working with the Pharmacology Student Association (discussed above).

7. Climate:

The Department of Pharmacology is committed to promoting a working and learning environment that encourages respect, inclusiveness and individuality. This ideal holds true for everyone, whether they are a member of the faculty, a graduate student, a staff member or a post-doctoral fellow. We genuinely believe that when people who have different experiences and views colored by those experience are brought together they are forced to consider things from a slightly different perspective than they would have on their own. This interaction fosters creativity and is exactly the ideal that the department is striving to promote.