The Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, a multidisciplinary department with responsibilities for education, patient care, and research, maintains a commitment to diversity in all of its divisions. Our mission statement says, “The Department strives to conduct its affairs in accordance with the highest ethical standards and in a manner that promotes and respects diversity among faculty, staff, and trainees”. In a department that seeks to reduce the impact of disability on persons’ lives, this means persons with disabilities, as well as those of ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity.

1. Student access and opportunities

Our department makes special efforts to recruit diverse trainees into prosthetic and orthotic, occupational therapy, physical therapy, clinical psychology, rehabilitation sciences research, and physical medicine and rehabilitation (resident physician) training programs. For example, during recruitment of residents, we select for interview all African American, Latino, native American or disabled applicants, regardless of their academic record. Via the housestaff office, black residents are identified who will correspond with/speak to our black applicants. Two of our physician faculty, Dr. Diana Cardenas (Hispanic) and Dr. Steve Stiens (paraplegic) and the director of minority affairs for the school of medicine have reviewed all our application materials to see if there is anything we can do to make them more friendly to students of color and those with disabilities. We also have advertised our program at SNMA meetings.

The Physical Therapy program has worked with offices on our campus to present information about the profession to prospective students, some of whom are still in high school. Presentations have been made to EOP students in biology classes, to high school students from underrepresented groups in the U-DOC program, and to special career days for high school or college students of color, Latino students, native American students to attendees at the Minority Association of Pre-Health Students Conference, and to students in the STAR program that attempts to recruit students into research careers. The PT program has been pleased to see the proportion of minority students in their applicant pool increase from 11% (1995-1999) to 20% in the three years since their last accreditation review.

The Occupational Therapy program works with the Office of Minority affairs in recruitment activities and provides special counseling to students who are considering the field of occupational therapy.

2. Student development and retention

Students in all of our programs are on a rather rigid lock-step curriculum, and required courses are only offered once per year. All students are given extensive counseling and encouraged to meet with instructors for extra assistance. Our goal is to make all of those selected for our training programs succeed, and our drop-out rates are very low. On occasion, students have been granted adjusted schedules to allow one year of courses to be spread over two years.
Students with physical disabilities or learning disorders are given enlarged notes, extra time and quiet spaces for exams, etc.

3. Engagement with the external community

Our students have clinical rotations and experiences at many clinical sites in the Seattle area and beyond. This exposes them to a wide range of community members.

4. Staff and administrative diversity

Our staff includes ethnic minorities and persons with physical disabilities, and our advisory board members also include persons with disabilities. We do not keep a list of the ethnicity of all of our staff, per instructions from the university.

5. Faculty diversity

Our faculty include three persons with physical disabilities due to paraplegia, cerebral palsy, and low vision. We also have one female Hispanic faculty member, Dr. Diana Cardenas, who is active in the efforts of the School of Medicine and the University to recruit diverse students, staff, and faculty. For example, a Hispanic high school student who was part of the UDOC summer program for minority high school students, spent one half day/week shadowing Dr. Cardenas. In spite of extensive advertising and networking for all of our recent faculty searches, we have been unable to identify candidates of ethnic minorities, other than Asian. We currently have five Asian faculty members in our department.

6. Curriculum and research

All of our curricula attempt to present opportunities for trainees to experience and understand the diversity of our patients, our students, and our colleagues. For example, in the first quarter, the occupational students are introduced to the topic of diversity as it applies to occupational therapy philosophy and intervention. Diversity is then threaded throughout the curriculum as a theme that runs through the series of eight courses in OT Theory and Practice.

7. Climate

As the initial quote from our mission indicates, the Department of Rehabilitation seeks to live out a commitment to diversity, as represented by the active inclusion of persons with disabilities and those of diverse gender and ethnic and cultural backgrounds on our faculty and staff. We seek to model this diversity to our
trainees and to insure a training experience that produces professionals with respect for a diverse society.