

2015 MHIRT Program – Frequently Asked Questions

Updated November 11, 2015

General Information:

What is the purpose of this training program?

Diversity in the research workforce is a NIH priority, and a key intervention towards addressing health disparities affecting racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. Global health research is part of this mandate, given the commonality of disease threats around the world, the shared genetic makeup, health practices and lifestyles of groups in the U.S. and abroad, and the mobility of populations across borders. Towards this end, ICAP's MHIRT program provides: (1) exposure to landmark findings and current challenges in global health and health disparities research; (2) training in qualitative and quantitative research methods; (3) hands-on experience conducting mentored research in the Dominican Republic, Kazakhstan, Kenya, or Swaziland; and (4) career and graduate admissions counseling. The ultimate goal, from the perspective of NIH, is for the program to contribute to a diverse global health research workforce. From the trainee perspective, the program provides a terrific introduction to research in global health and health disparities, as well as hands-on experience conducting research overseas.

Where is the training program located?

Trainees will spend an initial two weeks at the Mailman School of Public Health (MSPH) in New York City, eight weeks overseas, and a final week at MSPH in New York.

Can I choose which country I go to?

Yes and no. You are encouraged to indicate a preference on your application (if you have one), and the selection committee will take this into account. Following screening and interviews, you will be offered a position at a specific international research site, which you may accept or decline. *NB* that Spanish fluency is a requirement for placement in the DR, and Russian fluency is a strong plus for placement in Kazakhstan.

What types of research training will be provided?

The MHIRT program includes a robust research training curriculum. In weeks one and two, trainees will have classroom-based training at MSPH, including five seminars: Introduction to Global Health Research; Introduction to Minority Health and Health Disparities Research; Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods; Introduction to Quantitative Research Methods; and Bioethics and Responsible Conduct of Research. In weeks three through 10, trainees will work hand-in-hand with research mentors at international sites, and will also continue their core seminars via distance education. In week 11, trainees will return to NYC to conclude the core seminars, and share their work at a poster presentation.

Is the program appropriate for students with prior training and experience in global health research?

Probably not – the curriculum is designed to be an introduction to global health and to health research. But if you have prior experience and think you might be interested, just reach out to us and we can discuss on a case-by-case basis.

How much time will I spend abroad during the training program?

Eight weeks. In 2015, this will be from approximately June 15th through August 7th.

What types of research projects are available? What types of research activities will I be doing?

We won't have a final list of research projects until the first quarter of 2015, but the majority of the international research sites do substantive work on HIV, reproductive health and tuberculosis. Once accepted into the program, trainees will be matched with ongoing research projects and with two

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research mentors – one in New York and one at the international research site. The mentors will develop a detailed scope of work for each trainee, and orientation to the project will begin in April or May 2015. Trainee scopes of work will be somewhat tailored to prior experience; in past years, activities have included chart review/data abstraction, data quality assurance, work on monitoring and evaluation of service programs, data entry, and data analysis. Trainees have also assisted with literature reviews, translation and/or piloting of research tools (such as questionnaires), and development of research protocols.

Will I get course credit for the program? Is the program graded?

No.

Is this a paid program?

Yes. In addition to support for travel and living expenses, trainees receive a modest stipend for their summer's work. Undergraduate trainees receive \$1,200 per month (a total of \$3,300 for the 11 week program) and graduate trainees receive \$2,000 per month (a total of \$5,500 for the 11 week program). *NB* that the stipend is provided after the program is complete, not in advance.

Is housing provided?

Yes. In New York, housing will be provided, likely in the Barnard dorms or at 60 Haven Avenue on the Medical Center campus. Housing at the international sites will be in apartments or guest houses (similar to a bed and breakfast). It is possible that trainees will share rooms with other students.

Is travel provided?

Yes. Economy-class travel to the international sites is provided.

Will there be any costs for trainees?

Possibly, although these should be minimal. While the program pays for travel visas, it does not pay for passports, so trainees without passports would need to budget for that expense.

What are the start and end dates for the program?

In 2015, the start date will be Monday, June 1 and the last day will be Friday, August 14.

Can I talk to program alumni to learn more about the program?

Yes. Many of 2014 trainees have volunteered to speak to interested applicants, and some emails are below:

- Loxley Bennett, CC class of 2015 [ldb2134@columbia.edu] spent the summer of 2014 with ICAP Swaziland
- Karole Collier, Barnard class of 2015 [ktc2124@barnard.edu] spent the summer of 2014 with ICAP Swaziland
- Daisy Fernandez, CC class of 2015 [df2443@columbia.edu] spent the summer of 2014 with IFAP in the Dominican Republic
- Othanya Garcia, CC class of 2016 [ogg2103@columbia.edu] spent the summer of 2014 with GHRCCA in Kazakhstan
- Robin Tinglin, CC class of 2016 [rnt2109@columbia.edu] spent the summer of 2014 with GHRCCA in Kazakhstan

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Eligibility

What are the eligibility criteria for the training program?

1. Candidates must be U.S. Citizens or permanent residents.
2. Candidates must meet at least one of the NIH-defined criteria for membership in an “underrepresented or minority group.” Please see the NIH definitions below for underrepresented racial and/or ethnic minority,ⁱ rural geographic location,ⁱⁱ and low socioeconomic group.ⁱⁱⁱ
3. Candidates must be enrolled in one of the following Columbia University schools: Barnard College; Columbia College; College of Physicians and Surgeons; School of Social Work; School of Nursing; College of Dental Medicine; Mailman School of Public Health.
4. Undergraduate candidates must be current sophomores and juniors (i.e., rising juniors or rising seniors in summer 2015), majoring in an eligible department (see list),^{iv} who have successfully completed coursework in biomedical or behavioral health sciences. A minimum GPA of 3.0 is required.
5. Graduate candidates must have successfully completed at least one year of graduate coursework by the beginning of the training program. *NB* that the fellowship is an introduction to research, and not appropriate for more advanced graduate students.

Is the program limited to specific majors?

Yes, undergraduate trainees must be majoring in one of the areas listed below (see endnotes). For those who are *not* majoring in a biomedical or behavioral health science, at least some coursework in these fields is required. See endnotes for the list –if you think your major should qualify and it is not on the list, contact us to see if you might be eligible.

Is there a minimum required GPA?

Yes, for undergraduate trainees, the minimum GPA is 3.0. This is a NIH requirement.

Are specific language skills required?

Fluency in Spanish is required for placement in the Dominican Republic – at least one of the screening interviews will be in Spanish. Russian and/or Kazakh language skills will be a strong advantage for placement in Kazakhstan.

Can I apply if I am not a citizen or permanent resident of the United States?

No. This is a NIH requirement.

Application Procedures

What is the deadline for submission of applications?

All materials must be received by ICAP no later than 5pm on December 19, 2014. We realize this is too soon for you to include a transcript of your grades from the Fall semester – a transcript that includes your grades through Spring or Summer 2014 is fine.

Do you have any tips for writing the personal statement?

While we do not have specific guidelines, past successful applicants had personal statements ranging between 500 to 1000 words. The purpose of the personal statement is to provide an opportunity for the selection committee to get to know you better as an applicant. You are encouraged to discuss relevant past experience (if any); research interests; global health interest; career goals, or anything else that you think would help strengthen your application.

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How are applications reviewed?

Applications are first screened to ensure that applicants meet eligibility criteria, and then ranked based on statement of interest, transcripts, GPA (for undergraduates), letters of recommendation, experience and language skills. A short list is developed and reviewed by the MHIRT program Steering Committee; applicants on the short list are then invited for an interview with ICAP Columbia faculty.

ⁱ For the purposes of this program, NIH defines underrepresented racial and/or ethnic minority to include: African Americans, Hispanic Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hawaiian Natives and natives of the U.S. Pacific Islands.

ⁱⁱ Individuals from rural backgrounds include those who come from a family residing in an area designated by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as non-metropolitan. The home address of prospective trainees can be entered into the Rural Assistance Center's 'Am I Rural' website (<http://ims2.missouri.edu/rac/amirural/>) to obtain a Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSA) designation of Metropolitan, Micropolitan, or Rural.

ⁱⁱⁱ For the purposes of this program, NIH defines low income individuals as those who come from a family with an annual income below established low-income thresholds, published at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.shtml>. Applicants must demonstrate that they have (a) qualified for Federal disadvantaged assistance; or (b) received any of the following student loans: Health Professional Student Loans (HPSL), Loans for Disadvantaged Student Program; or have received scholarships from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the Scholarship for Individuals with Exceptional Financial Need.

^{iv} Eligible undergraduate majors include: Africana studies, Anthropology, Archaeology, Asian and Middle Eastern cultures (Barnard), East Asian languages and cultures (Columbia), Astronomy, Biological sciences, Chemistry, Comparative ethnic studies, Computer sciences, Earth and environmental sciences, Ecology, evolution and environmental biology, Economics, European studies, Latin American and Caribbean studies (Columbia), Latin American and Iberian cultures (Columbia), Mathematics, Philosophy, Physics, Political science, Psychology, Slavic Studies (Columbia), Sociology, Spanish and Latin American cultures (Barnard), Statistics, Women's, gender and sexuality studies. If your major is not on this list but you think it should be, please contact Katie Tang at kkt2115@columbia.edu to see if you might be eligible.