

Exploring *New Ways* to Champion Diversity



Through a recent recruitment grant and the input of current students, Dr. Beverley Crawford, the new Director of Diversity Affairs, strives to create a more diverse student body.

In a small office on the first floor of Penn Dental Medicine's Evans Building, new strides are being made toward an important School goal: recruiting more dental students from underrepresented backgrounds. Here, Dr. Beverley Crawford is exploring new and creative possibilities for bringing minority students to campus, and for ensuring that these students feel welcomed and supported once they arrive.

As a Clinical Assistant Professor of Preventive & Restorative Sciences and dentist in the Penn Dental Faculty Practices since 1989, Dr. Crawford was already an active and visible asset to the Penn Dental Medicine community when, last summer, she was named director of the Office of Diversity Affairs, formerly known as the Office of Minority Affairs. In her new role, Dr. Crawford is charged with recruiting underrepresented minority students — defined by the federal government as African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics — into the dental school population, including those from the community surrounding Penn. Once the underrepresented students enroll at Penn Dental Medicine, the Office provides academic and advisory support and works closely with minority student organizations to ensure a smooth and comfortable transition to campus.

Diversity Leads to Innovation, Professionalism

Nationally, dental and other professional schools are working hard to recruit qualified candidates from underrepresented populations in an effort to make their campuses reflect more closely the communities that their graduates will someday serve. Penn Dental Medicine is no exception. Because urban communities like West Philadelphia are often underserved by qualified dentists, and because dental patients often feel more comfortable with practitioners who look like them and share their experiences, having more graduates who come from these neighborhoods could help ensure that residents of the surrounding community receive better dental care in the future, Dr. Crawford says. But the benefits of a diverse student body don't end there.

"Diversity among students is critical to Penn Dental just as it is to all dental schools," says Dr. Crawford. "Bringing a diverse group together leads to new and different points of view, which ultimately leads to innovation and growth."

Like other professional fields, she adds, dentistry can't be practiced in a vacuum. "Part of becoming a professional is learning how to interact with and relate to all kinds of people," she says. "In the real world, there is diversity, and our students must learn to work effectively in the real world."

Updating Tried and True Programs

For years, Penn Dental Medicine has offered successful shadowing and mentorship programs to students who might otherwise not have considered dental school an option — or Penn Dental Medicine as a specific possibility. These programs bring high school or college students to campus for a first-hand look at what dentistry is really like. Other outreach efforts offer support to underrepresented students already attending Penn Dental Medicine. Dr. Crawford is updating these valuable programs to make them more streamlined and consistent, with dedicated faculty members who will remain involved from year to year. (For a full list of these programs, see the sidebar box, page 5.)

In addition, Dr. Crawford will continue to work closely with the international and minority student organizations on campus, such as the Student National Dental Association (SNDA), the Hispanic Student Dental Association (HSDA), and the Indian Student Dental Association (ISDA), providing support and direction in organizing events, and suggesting ways for these organizations to pool their talents and energies for the benefit of all underrepresented students. The efforts of these organizations are subsidized financially as well: special funding from the Linda Gilliam Endowed Education Fund, established by Board of Overseers member Dr. Linda Gilliam, supports

members of these groups who attend conferences and initiate programs that impact the minority community and strive to improve dental care for underrepresented populations.

Fresh Funding for an Innovative Partnership

Recently, Dr. Crawford received some good news: The University had agreed to support a brand new outreach program that will soon join the existing ones. Last July, the Office was approved for a \$30,000 specialty recruitment grant from the Division of the Vice Provost for University Life. Dr. Crawford's grant proposal outlined a new recruitment partnership with Howard University, in which interested and qualified undergraduates from the largely African-American school in Washington D.C. will be invited to visit Penn Dental Medicine for a week-long internship program, shadowing students in the Graduate Residency programs in endodontics, periodontics, oral surgery, oral medicine, and

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—Rayna Strong (D'13)

orthodontics. The grant will help pay for housing for these college juniors as well as supplies and other administrative aspects of the program, which is slated to start next year. Once the students have completed their internships, Dr. Crawford's office will follow up periodically with application and admissions information in the hope that these students will maintain an interest in Penn Dental Medicine, possibly returning as full-time dental students after graduating from Howard.

The Office is also looking closely at its traditional recruiting strategy with an eye toward innovation, drawing current dental students into the effort in creative ways. Through Penn Dental Medicine's new honors program, Dr. Crawford is collaborating with two enthusiastic students who are committed to the recruitment effort, and she is guiding another student in a promising research project that asks some fascinating questions about what it means to be a minority student at Penn Dental Medicine.

Fresh Faces: Honors Students Lend a Hand

Last October, Penn Dental Medicine launched an honors program allowing exceptional students to earn a DMD with honors in research, clinical dentistry, and/or community health. Two of those students, Rachel Callaway (D'13) and Rayna Strong

(D'13), have chosen to work directly with Dr. Crawford in her efforts to recruit underrepresented students, particularly those from West Philadelphia. The two students, both of whom aspire to work in community dentistry after graduation, collaborate with Dr. Crawford on recruitment strategies and accompany her to local high schools, and community and career fairs, connecting with area students who have thought of dentistry as a career but need information, support, and a real-life example of minority achievement.

"As a recently recruited underrepresented minority myself, recruiting other underrepresented students comes very naturally to me," says Rayna. "I am part of a biracial family, raised in both low-income rural and urban settings. I'm glad to have a chance to use my experiences to positively influence other young people in following their dreams the way I was able to follow my own."

The opportunity also struck a chord with Rachel: "When I arrived at Penn Dental Medicine, I found it interesting — and also unfortunate — that despite the population we serve here, there are so few students that can relate to the culture and background of our patients," she explains. "What we are trying to do is to expand the reach of Penn Dental beyond simply serving the local community to actively supporting those in the community who are best prepared to become dentists and return to work in their neighborhoods."



Support, Opportunity and Resources

In talking with prospective students, Rayna and Rachel are honest about the challenges minority dental students may face academically, but they also let them know that help is available. "Penn Dental has an intimate support network that allows underrepresented students to thrive in the vigorous process that is dental school," says Rachel. "Among minority students, faculty, and staff members, there is a supportive community that welcomes new students to the school and helps us as we progress through the years." In addition, she adds, the SDNA can be particularly helpful in providing support, information, networking, and social events for underrepresented students who are new to the School.

As the SDNA's minority recruitment officer, Chioma Nwaneshiudu (D'13), who also aids Dr. Crawford in her recruitment efforts, agrees. "SDNA is critical to Penn Dental because it provides an opportunity for dental students from diverse backgrounds to get involved in different volunteering activities, both at the institution and in its surrounding communities, and exposes them to different career possibilities in dentistry," she says.

Having all experienced firsthand the benefits Penn Dental Medicine has to offer to minority students, students like Chioma, Rachel, and Rayna are in an excellent position to spread the news. "What Penn has to offer underrepresented students is opportunity upon opportunity," Rayna says. "At Penn the world is yours, and your education is what you make of it, just like anywhere. The difference is the resources that are at our disposal here. There are few other schools which hold within their doors the expertise that Penn Dental has maintained throughout its history. This is a highlight point I use when I am recruiting students, because this is what makes Penn stand out."



A Promising Research Project

While the team of student recruiters works hard to connect with prospective students, another ambitious student is also collaborating with Dr. Crawford — in this case, to further the recruitment effort by better understanding the minority experience at Penn Dental Medicine. Through a research project entitled “Implications of Outreach Programs on Campus Climate and Sense of Community in Dental Education Among Students of Color”, Deena Alani (D’13) and Dr. Crawford are trying to find out how outreach efforts to welcome and support underrepresented students on Penn Dental Medicine’s campus are working and how this type of outreach can be improved.

“There have been very few qualitative studies that look at the experiences of underrepresented students in dental education,” says Deena, a student in the Program for Advanced Standing Students (PASS) and a native of Iraq (see story, page 6), who is conducting personal interviews with students for the project. “We know that the number of underrepresented students has increased, but we do not know how they feel in our School environment. Do they feel as though they belong? Do they feel they are part of the community? Our findings will hopefully assist the Office of Diversity in working toward increasing the number of satisfied underrepresented students graduating from Penn Dental,” she says.

Dr. Crawford welcomes the chance to work closely with a student on a research project of this nature, which she hopes will lead to a published paper, and which, she says, “will give us a good idea of what students are concerned with in this environment. Already, it has alerted me to issues that I wasn’t aware of and has changed my perception of how our outreach efforts should work.”

A New Era

Armed with fresh ideas, grant funding, and the input of talented and ambitious students, Dr. Crawford looks forward to a new era at Penn Dental Medicine, one in which minority students are more fully represented on campus.

“In the past, our diversity policy has focused on what we will not do — we will not discriminate, we will not stereotype — and of course those are critical goals,” she says. “But to move forward, we need to make our policy more positive and clarify what we will do. We will actively recruit as many highly qualified minorities as we can to make our campus more diverse, and we will ensure that it is as welcoming and supportive an environment for underrepresented students as it can possibly be.” **PDJ**

—Juliana Delany

Reaching Out:

Ongoing Recruitment & Mentorship Efforts

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The Office of Diversity Affairs oversees the following recruitment and mentorship programs that offer underrepresented students an inside look at real-world dentistry.

For prospective students

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SUMMER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM: This University-wide program is a month-long, full-day immersion experience for select juniors and seniors from Philadelphia public and charter high schools.

SHADOWING PROGRAM: Participants from recruitment initiatives and pre dental undergraduates from local colleges and universities may shadow both dental students caring for patients and alumni in local practices.

IMPRESSIONS PROGRAM: Sponsored by the Student National Dental Association, the program offers a series of one-day workshops for college students, focusing on careers in dentistry, the application process, and financial aid.

For current Penn Dental Medicine students

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MENTORSHIP PROGRAM: Dental students are paired with local alumni role models for support and networking.

PEER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM: Upperclassmen provide support to incoming dental students to ensure a smooth transition to dental school.