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CTSI and Bidwell Training Center Partner to Create Research Assistant Training Program

Since 1968, the Bidwell Training Center has provided tuition free training in seven majors to students from underrepresented backgrounds who experience financial hardship. CTSI is now partnering with Bidwell to provide a competency-based clinical research assistant certificate program and a related hands-on externship, which involves working with research teams at the University of Pittsburgh. Known as the Strickland Research Training Program (START), this initiative hopes to broaden opportunities for students interested in a research career while at the same time helping to diversify the Pitt research workforce. Post-externship, mentorship will be provided to assist students with job placement. The program places an emphasis on mentorship and career planning.

START provides a 15 hour competency-based clinical research assistant training program; modular sessions cover research fundamentals like good clinical practice, recruitment and retention strategies, regulatory and ethical issues, confidentiality and information security, informed consent, research misconduct, study documentation, and laboratory regulations. Modules are followed by a quiz, homework, and a follow up session with presenters to do a deeper dive into subject matter. The first cohort of students completed virtual classroom learning and follow up sessions in November of 2020, and provided positive feedback on the experience.

START fills a gap in pre-career training as no local colleges or technical schools provide education geared specifically toward a research pathway; many entry level research team members learn most of what they know on the job. Having an educational path to a research career is valuable not only for students, but for research teams, which benefit from hiring a person already versed in research fundamentals. CTSI Recruitment Facilitator Katelyn Collinger, one of the main organizers of START, expressed her enthusiasm for the program: “We are very excited about the START program and the positive effect it could have on the research landscape at Pitt, as well as the career opportunities it will present to the Bidwell Training Center Students.”
RESEARCH RESOURCES | Regulatory Assistance

University of Pittsburgh Office of Research Protections Concierge Service

An integral part of the mission of The Office of Research Protections (ORP) is to help investigators ensure that study protocol design and research procedures meet ethical standards and abide by all applicable laws and regulations. ORP is a significant source of guidance for the research community; offices and committees that fall under the ORP umbrella oversee animal and human research protections, conflicts of interest, stem cell use, institutional biosafety, radiation safety, and research integrity, as well as providing education and compliance support.

Many research studies are complex and require guidance on multiple regulatory fronts. Recognizing this need, ORP developed a concierge service to help researchers access consultation via a short survey. Using this portal, research team members can request advice on a variety of regulatory issues. ORP screens all surveys and connects the requestor to a point of contact in the appropriate office or offices. Making these connections helps de-mystify regulatory processes and provides personalized support. The service is available to everyone in the research community; Vice Chancellor for Research Protections Bill Yates notes, “We are hopeful that the concierge service will be particularly helpful to new investigators and those who are unfamiliar with ORP services.”

Funding Opportunities

Applied Research Competition

The Organization for Autism Research (OAR) supports autism research that explores evidence based practices in several areas, including but not limited to analysis of current models of intervention and service delivery, development of new interventions, exploration of family support and social and community integration, and assessment and intervention with challenging behavior. More here.

Detection of HIV for Self-Testing

The National Institutes of Health seeks researchers who are investigating the development of innovative technologies that enable rapid self-testing to meet one or both of the following research objectives: 1) detecting HIV at the earliest stage of initial infection, ideally less than 2 weeks post-infection; and/or: 2) detecting HIV rebound in treated individuals as early as possible following treatment interruption or loss of viral suppression by antiretroviral therapy. Approaches may focus either the development of a novel technology or adaptation of an existing technology to detect HIV. More here.

Understanding Processes of Recovery in the Treatment of Alcohol Use Disorder

The National Institutes of Health seeks grant proposals examining processes of recovery and relapse in the treatment of Alcohol Use Disorders (AUD). Applications that address the following areas are encouraged: 1) defining recovery 2) examining new and innovative methods to examine precipitants of relapse 3) understanding mechanisms of mutual help and recovery 4) evaluating recovery systems of care; and 5) examining processes of extended treatment for AUD. More here.
REGULATORY NOTES | Issues in Informed Consent

Consenting People With Low Literacy Levels

“Low literacy” as defined by the University of Pittsburgh Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) means that a potential participant can speak and understand English, but cannot read or write. In the interests of fairness and inclusion, people with low literacy efforts should not be excluded from research; rather, HRPO has guidelines for the informed consent process to allow inclusion while protecting subject welfare.

HRPO requires that an unbiased witness observe the informed consent process; this witness cannot be a member of the research team or a family member of the participant. The informed consent process should take place orally, and the participant should mark an x or provide a fingerprint on the signature line of the informed consent documentation instead of providing a signature. The witness must also sign and date the consent form; by signing, the witness is attesting that the consent was accurately explained, and the participant appears to have understood the consent discussion and is freely consenting to take part in the study.

HRPO also recommends that the study team document the names of all the individuals who were present for the consent process and any procedures the study team used to enhance the participant’s comprehension in the research record. Researchers should consider audio or video recording as part of the documentation of informed consent.

CTSI UPDATES | Virginia Kaufman Pain Research Challenge Launched

The Virginia Kaufman Pain Research Challenge invites investigators to submit project proposals that address ways to ease the burden of pain, either physical or psychological. Three projects will be selected to receive a $50,000 award applicable to direct costs over a twelve month project period. Grants are funded by the Virginia Kaufman Endowment Fund and administered by the Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI), which provides project management support for the duration of the grant funding period.

Pain applications are judged on criteria that include significance and potential impact, innovation, feasibility, and the suitability of the team to conduct the research. Round one of the application process involves a simple one page proposal; advancing teams will be asked to submit a recorded slide presentation and a budget and budget justification. Round one applications are due February 15. Learn more about the Pain Challenge and the innovative projects submitted by past awardees here.
Dear CTSI,

**Question**: Our research group wants to begin advertising studies on social media. What are some things we need to consider in terms of launching a Facebook or Instagram campaign?

**Answer**: Social media advertising can be an effective way to reach a large number of potential participants. In order to launch a Facebook or Instagram campaign, the study or research group first needs to have a Facebook business page established. A business page needs to be created from a personal page; you can assign multiple administrators to the page and the personal page will not be connected publicly with the business page. Since Facebook owns Instagram, ads can be displayed on both platforms without having to create a separate Instagram page.

The business page will need to be regularly monitored and content should be frequently updated. The page can be named for your department, lab or study; approval should be obtained from department heads before proceeding. There should be a plan in place to monitor comments regularly and for how and when you should reply; the CTSI Social Media Playbook is a free resource that has guidance in this area. Budgets are also a factor to consider; general estimates indicate a minimum of $500 per month is the average investment to reach a sizable audience of adults in the greater Pittsburgh area, and results may vary depending on the nature of the study.

As with any form of study advertising, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Human Research Protection must review and approve social media advertising as a recruitment method, and review content. In addition, Facebook has advertising editorial guidelines that must be followed. CTSI has a social media expert who can guide researchers through the process of setting up social media advertising campaigns; please contact us for more information.

Readers, this space is reserved for your questions. If you have a research question you would like to ask, please send it to cliftons@pitt.edu and look for answers in our next edition.

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**Upcoming Virtual Events**

**How to Partner With and Recruit in Schools**
Presented by the University of Pittsburgh Clinical and Translational Science Institute
Responsible Conduct of Research Series
Thursday, February 18 from noon to 1 p.m.

**Get Your Research Published**
Presented by the University of Pittsburgh Health Sciences Library System
Tuesday, March 23 from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.

**Research Data and Copyright**
Presented by the University Library System
Tuesday, April 6 from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

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**Questions for us?**
*We’d love to hear from you*