HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENT GRANT

The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) is an interdisciplinary graduate and professional student government at the University of New Mexico (UNM), whose mission is to support the endeavors of the diverse graduate and professional student body. In an effort to identify areas of organizational growth and support students at UNM, our organization employed several methods of surveying to determine the need of UNM Health Sciences Center (HSC) students. We learned that students engaged in clinical rotations need financial support, as they participate in rural health rotations, to care for the patients in the more isolated areas of New Mexico. A large majority of the rural areas of New Mexico are considered to be health care deserts, and the students who serve these local communities through their clinical rotations help to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the people who live in these areas. GPSA is asking for funds to create the Health Sciences Student Grant and support the travel and lodging expenses of healthcare professional students in rural New Mexico, as the students who travel to these areas are an indispensable resource for the care teams of these respective areas.1

Definition of Rural: The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural areas as all territory outside of defined urbanized areas that can have population densities that range from 1-999 persons per square mile.2

UNM’s HSC students are a crucial resource for healthcare teams across New Mexico, as they supplement healthcare workforce shortages, while on clinical rotation. In more rural areas of the state, the influx of students is a much-needed addition to care teams, as they are able to increase the quality of care and number of caregivers available to the residents of these areas. The experience of working with the patient population in New Mexico’s more rural areas is regarded as an advantageous component of the curriculum of the professional healthcare programs at the HSC because students are able to gain field experience and aid local communities with limited access to healthcare. A major barrier related to clinical experience is the financial implications for the students and the current lack of funding that exists to assist with travel and lodging expenses. In an effort to mitigate the financial burden placed upon students, GPSA is asking for $50,000 to be allocated for the purpose of distributing 50 grants in the amount of $1,000 dollars each, for graduate and professional healthcare student, to accommodate costs associated with traveling and lodging in rural New Mexico.

In the Fall Semester of 2020, a total of 1,082 students were enrolled the medical, pharmacy, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and physician assistant programs of the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center (HSC). The majority of these students are anticipated to engage in clinical rotations across the state within next 4 years. The grant is anticipated to increase the number of HSC students that attend clinical rotations in rural New Mexico.3

Figure 1: Number of UNM HSC Clinical Students Enrolled by Program in Fall 2020

Through our surveying efforts with UNM HSC students, we were able to identify the most common expense range of rural clinical rotations. With a range of $500-750 being the most common cost of attending a rural clinical rotation, a grant of $1,000 will significantly decrease the financial burden placed upon students. For those students that are placed in a rural setting closer to the Albuquerque metro area, this amount is likely to cover the total of travel and lodging as the trends identified in the survey found that the further from the metro students went, the higher the financial burden on the student. The grant would benefit students at UNM’s various professional healthcare programs as they progress.
through their respective professional degrees and gain clinical experience caring for patients, as well as the patients themselves. By investing in this grant, the state legislature can demonstrate its support of the healthcare practitioners and leaders of the future in New Mexico, as well as in the state’s most vulnerable patient population.

This funding is critical for students to select rotation sites that are further from the Albuquerque metro area, which GPSA identified as the main hesitation for selecting rural site, when surveying students enrolled in several different departments. Through the funding of this proposed grant, our organization will be able to encourage the students to select rural rotation sites in the more severe healthcare desert locations across New Mexico. Additionally, by mitigating the costs of attending a rural clinical rotation site, students will have lower student debt when graduating. This will help grow New Mexico’s economy through consumer spending, as students will have to devote less of their income to paying off their loans. By providing the students on UNM’s HSC with funding for their clinical rotations in rural New Mexico, the legislature would be investing in economic future of our state.

The Health Sciences Student Grant would be administered through the same process/cycle as all other GPSA Grants. Grants applications will be anonymously reviewed and scored by three Grant Readers. The Grant Readers will evaluate the applications based on the detailed information provided in Statement of Proposal and the Budget Sheet. For instance: If a student is attending a research conference where they are presenting research, then they need to provide some background information about their degree, research, the conference they are attending, benefits of proposed activity to applicant and the detailed, economical, and well-researched budget of all the potential costs.

The raw scores obtained from the three different readers will be normalized by multiplying by the average of all reader scores and then dividing by the average of the individual reader’s scores. When the difference between the high and low normalized scores for an application exceeds twenty-five points of the total possible score (100 points), two (2) additional readers will evaluate the proposal. From these five (5) normalized scores, the highest and lowest will be dropped, and the three (3) remaining scores will be accepted regardless of the spread between them.

GPSA relies on the support of graduate students in evaluating and scoring the applications. The application will be read and scored by three (3) readers from a different department than the applicant. The scoring process will take 3-4 weeks. Raw scores obtained from reader’s are normalized by using the formula below. The normalized ranking determines who is funded. Applications will be sent for rereads when there are 25-point differences in the highest and lowest normalized scores.

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\frac{[(\text{Raw score}) \times (\text{Group average})]}{\text{Reader average}} = \text{Normalized score}
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**TOTAL ASK: ONE-TIME AMOUNT OF $50,000**

**REFERENCES**

1. A survey was conducted by the Health Sciences Student Council (HSSC), a partner organization of GPSA.
2. [https://hsc.unm.edu/research/ctsc/community-engaged-research-core/rural-health-research-support-network.html](https://hsc.unm.edu/research/ctsc/community-engaged-research-core/rural-health-research-support-network.html)
4. [https://gpsa.unm.edu/funding/grants-funding/grants-scores.html](https://gpsa.unm.edu/funding/grants-funding/grants-scores.html)