

## The Steps Toward Academic Research Fellowship Program at the University of North Texas Health Science Center

The Steps Towards Academic Research (STAR) Fellowship Program began as a way to give faculty from minority serving institutions interested in health disparity research greater access to professional development activities, said Harlan Jones, co-director of the STAR program. The program gives 10 faculty members training on developing research questions, building a proposal, working with a mentor, and writing a grant application. The university also agreed to provide two grants for STAR fellows. Since its inception ten years ago, the STAR program has received a National Research Mentoring Network grant, allowing it to expand to other health disparity centers across the U.S.

The curriculum for STAR participants includes sessions on grant writing, literature searches, using technology, and mock grant review. Jones added that the program helps participants identify alternative sources of funding and talk about basic translation of research. A key part of the program is mentor selection, where participants are paired with a mentor based on their research interests.

The overriding goal of providing professional development through the program has been to address the unmet need for more diversity in biomedical research. In expanding the STAR program, consideration was given to how best to provide grant writing, academic, and collaborative skills to participants, as well as how to keep the momentum of the program consistent as it grew.

The program has three functional cores: mentorship and networking, mentor training, and professional development. It has a year-long schedule that provides both on-site training and distance learning to accommodate the needs of participants. The STAR program also brings back successful participants to share their experiences and lessons with current trainees.