

Caltech, UCSD School of Medicine Create Medical Scholars Program to Train Future Academic Physicians

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High school seniors looking for a futuristic way of studying medicine may want to take note. Beginning next year, six newly admitted freshmen at the California Institute of Technology will also be offered early admission to the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine, pending completion of their Caltech degrees as "medical scholars."

The launch of this new program corresponds with a new report released by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) advocating stepped-up efforts to educate clinician-researchers who are able to "propel scientific advances into better diagnostics, treatments and preventatives of disease" ("*Promoting Translational and Clinical Science: The Critical Role of Medical Schools and Teaching Hospitals*," AAMC Task Force II on Clinical Research)

According to David Baltimore, president of Caltech, the new program will allow the institute to "tap into an elite pool of students" and to be more directly involved in the training of physicians with especially strong backgrounds in research.

"Many of our top students with interests in biology, bioengineering, biophysics, and chemistry have always intended to apply to medical school once they leave Caltech," said Baltimore. "This joint program with UCSD will allow the two institutions to select an outstanding group of students who are at the top academically and are committed to helping others."

"This partnership with Caltech will help us identify promising individuals with the potential to become leaders and innovators in medicine and life sciences. This will help fill the need for physicians who can not only deliver care, but improve health through basic and clinical research," said Marye Anne Fox, chancellor of UC San Diego.

The first students admitted in the fall of 2007 will be selected in the course of the regular undergraduate admissions process at Caltech, and will also be further screened and approved by the UCSD School of Medicine. Typical medical scholars will have been involved in biomedical research and/or clinical endeavors at the high school level, and, like all other students at Caltech and the UCSD School of Medicine will have excellent grades and test scores.

Once the medical scholars have graduated from Caltech, they will each be matriculated at the UCSD School of Medicine, provided they have maintained good academic standing. Any Caltech major will be acceptable for matriculation at the medical school.

During the students' undergraduate years at Caltech, UCSD faculty will be involved in programming special seminars and lectures to introduce them to a range of subjects that are part of the medical school experience.

Paul Patterson, the Biaggini Professor of Biological Sciences at Caltech, says the new program will serve two large purposes.

"We think it will give us access to the very high quality pool of biology undergraduates who may currently be going elsewhere because they think Caltech is too difficult or too oriented to the physical sciences," he said. "But also, the training will be different from the standard training premeds get at other schools because of the rigorous undergraduate program in the physical sciences and mathematics, and the wide opportunities here for research. So this will be good for medical research as well."

Judith Swain, M.D., dean for translational medicine at the UC San Diego School of Medicine, echoes these comments. The program is modeled after UCSD's Medical Scholars program, which identifies 12 first-year undergraduates at UC San Diego who are guaranteed admission to the UCSD medical school provided they maintain good academic standing and have competitive grades and test scores. Support and tracking are provided for the students as they complete their undergraduate studies.

"By getting to these students early and introducing them to the broad variety of careers available to them in medicine and research, we cultivate a strong pool of individuals interested in becoming basic and clinical researchers, innovative clinicians, scholars and teachers -- tomorrow's medical leaders," she said. "These are the type of people who contribute to our understanding of the pathological and genetic basis of disease, and go on to develop new treatments and diagnostic technologies. In addition, having this opportunity to matriculate outstanding students who will have completed Caltech's science and mathematics curriculum will enrich our medical school student body."

"Our experience at UCSD is that the Medical Scholars program allows students the opportunity to explore scholarly pursuits, without the anxieties so many premedical students have about restricting their curricular and extracurricular activities to those thought to be most appealing to medical school admissions committees," added Carolyn Kelly, M.D., associate dean, admissions and student life, UCSD School of Medicine.

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