

Expanding the Commitment to

Equity & Diversity Inclusion

The Institute's initiatives for equity, diversity, and inclusion are creating new programs that address how EDI can be more integral to every level of the Institute's work.

"We are constantly reevaluating, reflecting, and reimagining how we can build a stronger sense of community based on EDI principles. We can't just rest on our past success—we need to keep looking forward and say: what can we do now to be even better?"

LYNN K. GORDON, MD, PHD

When **Emmanuel Williams**, a student at Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, came to UCLA in the summer of 2021 to conduct research on the relationship between glaucoma and exposure to steroids, the experience was the beginning of a new direction in education for the undergraduate.

"This was my first hands-on opportunity for research—it was challenging, but it opened my eyes to issues in science I hadn't been aware of," says Mr. Williams, a biology major.

Mr. Williams's studies at UCLA were made possible by funding from a program coordinated by a partnership between the University of California and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) to increase the number of African Americans in research. The grant was secured by **Jie J. Zheng, PhD**, professor of ophthalmology, **Sophie X. Deng, MD, PhD**, Joan and Jerome Snyder Chair in Cornea Diseases, and **JoAnn S. Roberts, PhD**, a postdoctoral fellow. In summer 2021, undergraduate students **Matthew Dye** and **Chelsea Thomas**, in addition to Emmanuel Williams, came to the Stein Eye Institute to work on original research in the laboratories of Drs. Zheng and Deng.

The UC-HBCU program is one of a broad range of initiatives that are integral to the university's expanding programs of "EDI" (equity, diversity, and inclusion)—an initiative that is expanding Stein Eye's already-extensive involvement in the issues of access in America.

"The UCLA Stein Eye Institute's reputation as a premier research and teaching institute is built on recruiting, retaining, and supporting outstanding faculty, residents, and staff from diverse backgrounds," says **Bartly J. Mondino, MD**, director of the Stein Eye Institute and chair of the Department of Ophthalmology. "Our goal is to build even stronger commitments to those ideals."

A heritage of inclusion

The current drive for new EDI initiatives has evolved after more than a half-century of involvement in diversity as a foundation of health care as a human right. Building on that philosophy is a thriving university-wide program to strengthen the core values of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion as inseparable goals in health care, research, education, recruitment, and community engagement.

Although UCLA has been readdressing these issues of diversity for several years, the need to expand EDI at every level of the university was underscored more recently by the dual crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and social protests across the nation after the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in the spring of 2020.

“UCLA has always been a leader in creating a climate of diversity,” says **Lynn K. Gordon, MD, PhD**, professor of ophthalmology emeritus and the first senior associate dean of equity and diversity inclusion in UCLA’s David Geffen School of Medicine. “Before the pandemic and before Mr. Floyd’s death, we had already been working with campus organizations about the need for developing more targeted efforts in EDI. The spread of the pandemic and the civic unrest were pivotal milestones that amplified the need for enriching those plans.”

“Diversity and inclusion are linked directly to our institutional goals of excellence for health care, research, education, and community engagement,” Dr. Gordon says. “Our goal is leadership in eliminating health care disparities while delivering high-quality patient care, and building an inclusive environment for our faculty, staff, and residents, as we serve the diverse communities around us.”

EyeEDI: new programs to build on previous commitments

To accomplish those objectives, units across UCLA have been creating a host of new EDI initiatives.

At the Stein Eye Institute, these projects are developed by EyeEDI, a committee of faculty, residents, and staff, directed by Dr. Deng.

“Diversity, equity, and inclusion are foundational principles that are central to the fulfillment of the Institute’s mission,” says Dr. Deng. “The EyeEDI Committee

is developing strategies that complement the existing diversity initiatives within the School of Medicine to build a community in the Institute that is equally diverse and inclusive.”

Five years of new milestones

The early results of the committee’s work have produced a five-year plan of programs that will increase the Institute’s engagement in its EDI commitment. Three priorities are:

- ▶ Creating a more inclusive climate and an increasingly diverse corps of residents and faculty;
- ▶ Modifying existing mentorship programs to better tailor the needs of trainees, junior faculty, and underrepresented minorities; and
- ▶ Improving the existing process to provide everyone in the Institute with equitable opportunity for growth.

“The idea is to make inclusion and equity integral to everything we do,” says Dr. Deng. “Our plans are aggressive, and we are looking at the broadest questions of how EDI can be more integral to every level of the Institute’s work.”

Emmanuel Williams investigates steroid-induced glaucoma at Stein Eye. His research poster on this topic won first place in the UCLA UC-HBCU Neuroscience Track 2021 Summer Program.



MISSION STATEMENT

The Department of Ophthalmology at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA strives for excellence in the areas of patient care, education, research, and community engagement. The core values of equity, diversity, and inclusion are integral to these goals; we will treat all individuals with dignity, humility, and respect. We strive to create a culture that supports a diverse and inclusive department, which ensures every member of our department an equitable opportunity for success, and ensures all patients equitable access to high quality health care.

EyeEDI COMMITTEE

Administration

Sophie Deng, MD, PhD, *Chair*

Trashon Fearington, *Acting CAO and Clinical Director*

Executive Committee

Anne Coleman, MD, PhD

Lynn Gordon, MD

Bartly Mondino, MD

Alfredo Sadun, MD, PhD

Faculty and Physician Affairs

Gavin Bahadur, MD

Laura Bonelli, MD

Joseph Caprioli, MD

JoAnn Giaconi, MD

Gad Heilweil, MD

Monica Khitri, MD

Mitra Nejad, MD

Kouros Nouri-Mahdavi, MD

Stacy Pineles, MD

Peter Quiros, MD

Roxana Radu, MD

Alfredo Sadun, MD, PhD

Steven Schwartz, MD

Irena Tsui, MD

Federico Velez, MD

Education

Ken Kitayama, MD

Maltish Lorenzo, MD

Eunice Ng

Andres Parra, MD

Staff Affairs

Eduardo Araujo

Joselyne Franco Kerr

Peter Lopez

Yolanda McNair

Jessica Stolyarskaya



Through the UC-HBCU partnership, undergraduate students Emmanuel Williams, Chelsea Thomas, and Matthew Dye came to UCLA and contributed to original research in the laboratories of Drs. Sophie Deng and Jie Zheng.

An emphasis on access to care

The Institute's efforts for EDI also extend into the role of Stein Eye services in the community.

"Our EDI agenda is expanding on issues that UCLA health care had taken on for years: working to improve medical care for the segments of the population that are underserved, less healthy, and have much higher percentages of chronic illness and conditions that are purely a function of lack of access," says Dr. Deng.

Such plans for EDI are crucial to increasing the number of doctors who originally came from underserved communities, and who often return for their medical practices.

"The data show that doctors tend to return to and treat patients in the communities where they came from," says Dr. Deng. "So it is vital to build even more aggressive programs to train ophthalmologists from underserved communities, which will have a significant impact on increasing access to eye care."

A stronger sense of community

With many EDI programs unfolding and short-term projects already in place, the Institute's goals for EDI are evolving quickly. But the process is—and will always be—an ongoing challenge.

"We are constantly reevaluating, reflecting, and reimagining how we can build a stronger sense of community based on EDI principles," says Dr. Gordon. "We can't just rest on our past success—we need to keep looking forward and say: what can we do now to be even better?"

For more information about equity, diversity, and inclusion programs at the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine and the Stein Eye Institute, visit: medschool.ucla.edu/equity-diversity-inclusion.

EDI Programs

The nurturing of equity, diversity, and inclusion are supported by several programs at the Stein Eye Institute, among them:

- ▶ **American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring (MOM) Program**—The MOM program provided funding for UCLA students **Jose Armando Guerrero** and **Karla Murillo** to attend the November 2021 American Academy of Ophthalmology annual meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana.
- ▶ **UC-HBCU Vision Science Summer Research Grant Program, Principal Investigator, Jie J. Zheng, PhD**—University of California campuses partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities to increase the representation of African Americans in graduate and professional schools by bringing undergraduate students to Stein Eye to participate in the research experience.
- ▶ **EyeEDI and Grand Rounds**—Twice yearly, Stein Eye hosts Grand Rounds with guest presentations on EDI-related issues. The first, in March 2021, featured **Keith Carter, MD**, past president of the American University Professors of Ophthalmology and the American Academy of Ophthalmology, discussing the AAO's Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring Program. The second, in November 2021, showcased **Janine Clayton, MD**, associate director for research on women's health at the National Institutes of Health, presenting on how gender and diversity influence eye health.

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SOPHIE X. DENG, MD, PHD

“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhuman.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in health care—especially in eye care—are vividly emphasized in a study authored by **Dr. Samuel Masket**, UCLA Department of Ophthalmology clinical professor and volunteer faculty member, with contributions from faculty colleagues **Drs. Lynn Gordon** and **Stacy L. Pineles**, and Stein Eye residents, **Drs. Anh Pham**, **Andrea Yonge**, and **Andres Parra**.

The study, *Impact of Race and Inequities in Eye and Health Care*, published in the May 19, 2021, issue of the American Academy of Ophthalmology newsletter *Scope*, highlights the problems of blindness and public health—issues especially impactful in underrepresented populations and underserved regions. For example, diabetes, a primary contributor to blindness, is twice as likely to occur in the African American

population compared to whites. African Americans reported a higher incidence of diabetes-related vision loss compared to whites from 2016 to 2017 (among whites, vision loss declined during that period).

Hispanics have the greatest incidence of vision impairment. African Americans reported the highest per capita overall rate of blindness and visual impairment of all racial groups in children and adolescents.

The medical issues are compounded by less access to care and fewer clinicians of color—a disparity that spills over into eye care practitioners: The data reported that approximately 6 percent of ophthalmologists in the U.S. are from underrepresented populations—one-fifth of the 31 percent of the U.S. population that is from minority groups.

One solution to supporting community eye care can be found in the Institute's ongoing mission of supporting increased recruiting of underrepresented faculty and residents: growing numbers of minority practitioners improve access to eye care in underserved communities, because recent history shows that these physicians are likely to practice in those communities.

“Access to care improves,” noted the report, “when the physician community reflects the local population at large. Recruiting more underrepresented minority medical students to the field of ophthalmology and supporting those already in residency programs will help start to decrease health care disparities and inequities in the U.S.”

[Read the full study at: aao.org/senior-ophthalmologists/scope.](https://aao.org/senior-ophthalmologists/scope)