



Photo by Leslie Kahan Photography

# ENRICHED OPPORTUNITIES

## for Hispanic Students Entering the Health Professions

**T**hrough a convergence of educational technology, student need and donor generosity, Mercy College is providing Hispanic students with a wider range of options for developing key skills in anatomy and physiology — areas of study that have become a point of entry into the most demanding, and in-demand, degree programs leading to careers in all health professions.

Mercy is the largest private federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in New York State. With a population of Hispanic students that grows larger every year, the College has been focusing on meeting the needs of students

entering the health and science fields. Among other benefits, this special attention on Hispanic students in the health sciences positions Mercy as a leader in addressing the persistent shortage of bilingual health care workers needed to serve Spanish-speaking patients.

In September, when the U.S. Department of Education awarded Mercy more than half a million dollars in federal funding to expand and enrich programs for Hispanic students seeking careers in the health sciences. Designed to open doors for under-served students enrolled in HSIs like Mercy, the funding will impact a wide array of existing and newly created support programs at the College.

The new grant, commonly referred to as Title V, has awarded Mercy with \$599,881 to develop and implement a project called Advancing Curricular Change to Enhance Student Success, or ACCESS. Title V spans five years during which Mercy's academic offerings, program quality and institutional stability will make unprecedented gains.

José Herrera, Ph.D., Mercy's provost and vice president of academic affairs, said, "The new funding dovetails with Mercy's existing student support programs, creating an environment that enables more students from diverse backgrounds to enter professions that need them more than ever before."

Heading the ACCESS project is Joan Togliola, Ph.D., OTR, FAOTA, dean of the School of Health and Natural Sciences. "Our aim is twofold: improving outcomes in Mercy's A&P course [Anatomy and Physiology 1] and increasing the number of nursing training slots to meet the region's pressing need for nurses," she said. As an HSI in good standing, Mercy will use the new funding to continue meeting and developing new goals that support Hispanic students on a broader scale.

The first phase began in the fall with staffing Mercy's structured learning support program for Anatomy and Physiology, a gateway course for learning first principles required for later courses in the health sciences. Various supports for the course, which is notoriously taxing, will be made more accessible to students with work and family responsibilities. Plans are underway for a summer "A&P boot camp" for nursing students, a 15-hour intensive focusing on study skills, and an array of mentorship and team building initiatives that will focus heavily on the most important skills needed to master the course material. By next fall, the project will ramp up further by adding a weekend nursing program.

The grant also provides for the purchase of four new Anatomage digital tables, the gold standard

for teaching A&P and other health science courses, along with additional high-tech tools, models and equipment. These tables provide students with state-of-the-art tools for medical anatomy education. Thanks to a generous donation from Alberto Vitale, H.D. '09, a former College Trustee and his wife Gioietta, the School of Health and Natural Sciences has been teaching students via the Anatomage table since 2019. These additional tables will ensure that more students across more campuses will be able to benefit from this unparalleled technology.

The Anatomage digital table technology, a virtual library of human and animal anatomy, allows many more students to access the hands-on experiences necessary for success in a wide array of degree programs leading to health careers, from nursing and physical therapy to research and the veterinary sciences.

Next up, a redesign of the anatomy lab will facilitate blended learning and inquiry-based learning that will incorporate the latest technology. While the lab's footprint will not change, the space will be redesigned to accommodate the new technology and the need for social

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distancing.

To ensure these improvements directly aid Hispanic students and build diversity, the grant includes bilingual support and a ramped-up mentoring program, augmented by the College’s affiliation with a local chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses. “With working nurses as role models and mentors, our Hispanic students will have more opportunities for networking and other forms of support,” said Toglia.

“The result will be a more racially diverse core of practitioners to meet the needs of patients and other people who come from under-represented backgrounds.”

Strengthened academic programs, better outcomes, cutting-edge technology that puts Mercy on a par with larger research universities, increased retention and on-time graduation rates — these are the immediate benefits Mercy will reap from the new funding. But, as Herrera pointed out, there is an even bigger picture at stake.

“Mercy’s mission is to provide opportunities for all students to transform their lives. The goals of the Title V grant contribute to the high-quality learning experiences that are most transformative, so it’s in line with our mission,” said Herrera. “By going the extra step — ensuring true diversity in the most rewarding and in-demand professions, providing access to students who are ethnically diverse, and doing so within a supportive, inclusive environment — Mercy is positioned to meet the needs of all people everywhere.”

