

# **UCLA Postdoctoral Fellowship Training Program in Biobehavioral Research Training for Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic**

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

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### **What is the purpose of this training program?**

To prepare physician and social/behavioral scientists for academic research careers focused on integrated biomedical-biobehavioral approaches to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

### **Who sponsors the fellowship?**

This fellowship program is offered by the Division of Infectious Diseases of the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). It is funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), one of the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), through a T32 funding mechanism.

### **Who is eligible to apply?**

To be eligible for this postdoctoral fellowship, you must be:

- A postdoctoral scholar (completed PhD or MD at the time of fellowship appointment) who is pursuing a subspecialty fellowship in adult or pediatric medicine and seeking training to become an independently funded researcher; and
- A citizen or legal permanent resident of the U.S. at the time of fellowship appointment

### **When does the fellowship begin and how long does it last?**

Applications are accepted in the Fall, and usually due mid-December or early January. The fellowship begins on July 1 of each year. In some cases, an exception can be made to start after July 1.

The fellowship lasts for up to three years. It is possible to complete the fellowship early, and a few of our former fellows have done this (by securing a faculty position prior to the fellowship end date).

### **How many new fellowship slots are available each year?**

There are typically two new fellowship slots available each year.

One slot is open only to MDs who have gone through the formal clinical infectious diseases fellowship in the Division of Infectious Diseases at UCLA. They are selected through the ID Division at UCLA through a standard matching process. Once matched and placed at UCLA, those who express an interest in the global HIV prevention research may be identified for enrollment into this fellowship. As such, we do not accept applications from MDs outside of this mechanism.

The other slot is open to non-MD (e.g., PhD) postdoctoral applicants, whom we recruit directly. The PhD can be in any discipline (psychology, public health, public policy, sociology, anthropology, biological sciences, etc.), as long as the applicant is focused on an academic career in global HIV research.

As two new fellows are added each year and the fellowship lasts for three years, at any point in time there will be a total of six fellows enrolled: two first-year, two second-year, and two third-year fellows.

### **Who directs the fellowship and what is their experience?**

The fellowship program is directed by Jesse Clark, MD, and Pamina Gorbach, MHS, DrPH.

Dr. Clark is Associate Professor-in-Residence of Medicine/Infectious Diseases and Family Medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA (with promotion to Professor-in-Residence pending final approval). Following graduation from UCLA's Infectious Diseases Fellowship in 2008 and this Global HIV Prevention T32 in 2009, he has conducted NIMH-sponsored research on HIV prevention in Latin America and the U.S., including studies of partner notification, treatment, and linkage to care following STI diagnosis, social network approaches to PrEP adherence and uptake among TW in Peru, and integrated biological-behavioral approaches to substance use harm reduction, STI management and HIV prevention among MSM in Los Angeles. He is Medical Director of the UCLA Vine Street Clinic where he has served as IOR in clinical trials of the HPTN, the HVTN, and the CoVPN testing new approaches to HIV and COVID-19 prevention. He is Director of the UCLA South American Program in HIV Prevention Research (SAPHIR), an NIMH-funded R25 program for training young investigators in principles of HIV prevention research in Latin America. (Note that the SAPHIR program is designed for young researchers at a different stage of development than the T32 program, working with clinician-investigators who have not yet begun Post-Doctoral training.) As a mentor, he has advised over 40 trainees over the past 12 years ranging from undergraduate students to junior faculty. He also serves as a mentor or advisor for several T32 graduates currently supported by K-series awards.

Dr. Gorbach is a Professor in the Department of Epidemiology, Fielding School of Public Health and in the Division of Infectious Diseases, David Geffen School of Medicine, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). As a postdoctoral fellow, Dr. Gorbach was supported by a T32 in Infectious Diseases at University of Washington led by Dr. King Holmes – the first non-MD in that program – which served as a model for her own approach to interdisciplinary research training. Dr. Gorbach has been responsible for training NIH funded trainees in HIV/AIDS research in the following categories: Predoctoral level (15); Postdoctoral level and early career level (10); MS or MPH (14). This includes being Chair of 15 completed dissertation committees, primary mentor on 2 K-awards, and co-mentor on another 6 K-awards. She has been a mentor on a previous R36, F-32 and an F-31, demonstrating her experience as a mentor for trainees at multiple levels. Dr. Gorbach has served as the co-mentor for trainees in this program

(Caplan, Li, Okafor), provided data for analyses and is K-mentor for one current trainee/infectious disease fellow, two former PhD trainees and one previous MD trainee.

### **How long has this fellowship existed, and how successful has it been?**

The UCLA Postdoctoral Fellowship Training Program in Global HIV Prevention Research accepted its first fellow in 2007. Alumni have gone on to fill assistant professor positions at UCLA, Johns Hopkins, UC Irvine, UT Southwestern, and Charles R. Drew University. K awards have been funded on topics such as the impact of cannabinoids on inflammation, viral load, and symptoms of distress among persons living with HIV, evaluation of the PrEP cascade in pregnant and breastfeeding women in South Africa, and on microbiome and mucosal immune interactions in the pathogenesis of HIV-1 transmission.

### **What are the goals of the fellowship?**

Original research is the heart of the fellowship, and our efforts are focused on ensuring that fellows successfully transition into independent investigators. In year 1, fellows will design a pilot research protocol and also write the first draft of an initial grant. Data collected and analyzed through this pilot research project can then be used as part of the fellow's application for a NIH K award or similar grant (typically submitted about 18 months into the fellowship) that will take the fellow into a first faculty position. Please note the fellowship is not able to guarantee automatic transition into faculty positions at UCLA, regardless of whether or not a K award is acquired.

Fellows will also have access to large quantitative and qualitative data sets, and will engage in secondary data analyses in order to submit papers for publication.

Coursework for some fellows can include attaining a master's degree (in clinical research, public health, or public policy), or auditing relevant courses to strengthen knowledge and skills in specific areas.

Mentorship is tailored as much as possible to meet the specific needs of each fellow, and includes hands-on mentoring on HIV research design and implementation, research ethics, quantitative and qualitative research methods, grant and proposal writing, protocol development, data analysis, cultural competence, working internationally, budgets, career development, and a host of other key topics in global HIV research.

### **How is the mentorship structured?**

As fellowship Directors, Drs. Clark and Gorbach serve as the primary career mentors for all fellows, ensuring that the overall goals for the fellow are being attained, milestones met, and that progress toward the fellow's career goals are on target.

Depending on the discipline of the fellow and her/his research focus, either Dr. Clark, Dr. Gorbach or another UCLA faculty mentor will serve as the fellow's primary research mentor, overseeing progress on the fellow's research project(s).

In addition to primary mentors, we can help to engage fellows with any number of informal faculty mentors at UCLA and elsewhere, to provide the fellow with a rich and diverse mentorship experience.

Faculty and staff in the Division of Infectious Diseases are also available to work closely with fellows on issues such as IRB applications, scientific writing, budget development and management, understanding university and Federal policies, and other practical matters key to a successful academic research career.

As our fellowship program is relatively small (6 fellows at any one time), mentorship meetings are regular and frequent, and we strive as much as possible to customize the fellows' experience to meet his or her particular needs, so that s/he can move towards and attain research and career goals and become a successful independent academic HIV researcher.

**Will there be opportunities for me to spend time doing research in an international setting? If so, how much time is required in-country?**

Yes. In order to pursue global/international HIV research, fellows must spend some portion of their time working in the country and setting where their research will take place. We work closely with fellows to identify an in-country research partner institution, facilitate introductions and collaborations, and support travel. We also ensure that fellows will have a degree of cultural competence and practical understanding of the setting(s) to which they are traveling and working in.

The amount of time required in-country varies among fellows, depending on the nature of their research, the needs of their partner institutions, and to some degree the preferences of the fellow. Some fellows travel to their in-country research site for a few weeks at a time a few times per year, while others may go less frequently for longer periods. We will work closely with all fellows to determine the best strategy for each individual.

**How will I identify an in-country institution to partner with in conducting my research?**

We work closely with fellows to identify in-country institutions that will be a good fit for the fellows and their research and training needs.

We have existing long-term relationships with institutions in several countries, primarily but not limited to Peru, South Africa, and Malawi. We typically encourage fellows to work with one of our existing partners, as the time it can take for a fellow to forge a new relationship (not to be underestimated) may be prohibitive given the time limitations of the fellowship. Exceptions can sometimes be made if a fellow has a pre-existing, stable relationship with an in-country partner institution, and could "hit the ground running" on a research project without undue delay.

**What resources are available to me as a postdoctoral fellow?**

As an NIH-funded postdoctoral fellow, you will receive a stipend set by NIH, based on your number of years of experience after finishing your doctoral degree. For details, please visit:

<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-14-046.html> (scroll down to the section for postdoctoral fellows).

You will also be eligible for the University of California Postdoctoral Scholar Benefits Plan (PSBP). This comprehensive program offers you medical, dental, vision, life and AD&D insurance, short-term disability insurance and voluntary long-term disability insurance. For more information, please visit: <http://www.garnett-powers.com/postdoc/>

As part of the fellowship package, each fellow will have a budget for each year (funds are administered by the Division of Infectious Diseases at UCLA), to be used to cover the costs of expenses such as coursework, computer equipment and software, travel, conference fees, office supplies, etc. While the specific amount varies somewhat from year to year based on NIH funding, these resources are usually more than adequate to cover necessary expenses. UCLA business and fund managers will work closely with fellows to develop budgets and manage expenses.

Opportunities exist at UCLA to apply for HIV pilot/seed research grants and international travel grants, through bodies such as the UCLA AIDS Institute/UCLA-Charles Drew University (CDU) Center for Aids Research (CFAR). These are competitive grants (typically offered annually) and can be an important way for fellows to launch or supplement international pilot HIV research projects. We work closely with fellows to submit high-quality proposals for these grants.

There are a number of centers and institutes at UCLA that have cores which provide free consultations and support to fellows and junior faculty on a wide variety of research topics and methods, including the [UCLA AIDS Institute/the Center for HIV Identification, Prevention and Treatment Services \(CHIPTS\)](#), the [UCLA-CDU CFAR](#), and [Translation Science Institute \(CTSI\)](#). We are well connected to these centers and can provide easy access to fellows.

### **What is the application process?**

Applications are accepted in the fall of each year (the application deadline is typically in mid-December; please refer to the application form for specific date) for a fellowship slot that will open July 1 of the following year.

The application form gives clear instructions on what application materials must be submitted, including letters of recommendation submitted on your behalf.

Interviews (can either be in person or by phone) are arranged in January with the Fellowship Directors. Once all interviews have been completed, we strive to make final decisions and get back to all applicants as soon as possible, ideally by February.

To request an application form/instructions, please contact Stephanie Buchbinder ([sbuchbinder@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:sbuchbinder@mednet.ucla.edu)). Please do make sure to consult with Ms. Buchbinder prior to submitting your application to ensure you meet the eligibility criteria and have any questions answered.

### **Who can I speak with if I have questions?**

Please email Stephanie Buchbinder (sbuchbinder@mednet.ucla.edu) with any questions. Correspondence can take place via email, or a time can be arranged to speak by phone.

**What are some other related fellowship opportunities?**

The UCLA Center for World Health maintains a set of links on Funding Resources for Global Health Trainees on its website, at: <https://globalhealth.med.ucla.edu/resources/funding-opportunities>.