

Growing the Clinical Research Workforce Through Summer Internships: The Rudene Mercer Haynes Clinical Trials Office Summer Internship (CTOSI)

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1. Background

Simply put, there are too many jobs and not enough qualified candidates. The clinical research industry has grown exponentially; however, the professionalization of clinical research has not kept pace resulting in high demand for experienced candidates. Recognizing the need to grow the clinical research workforce and cultivate a pipeline of candidates, the newly established Workforce Development Team (WFD) within Massey's Clinical Trials Office (CTO) created a robust onboarding and training program to enhance the understanding of regulations surrounding clinical research for staff and the next generation of healthcare professionals. In doing so, WFD now serves as a representative at career fairs and departmental internships to support the creation of candidate pipelines for hire.

The CTO collaborated with Massey's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Cancer Research Training and Education (CRTEC) offices to develop the Rudene Mercer Haynes Clinical Trials Office Summer Internship (CTOSI). The CTOSI's namesake is a Massey Advisory Board member and works tirelessly to combat cancer health disparities and empower our communities to understand the science and importance of clinical research. As part of the CTOSI outreach initiative, staff from CRTEC and DEI visited multiple institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to educate undergraduates on clinical research as a career pathway.

2. Goals

- Create a diverse candidate pipeline to recruit undergraduates into clinical research entry-level positions
- Help interns develop a foundational understanding of clinical research in academic medicine through customized onboarding, training, and CTOSI curriculum
- Introduce interns to the basics of the Clinical Data Manager (CDM) role and define their delegated responsibilities

3. Solutions and Methods

- Use of multiple recruitment platforms to diversify the applicant pool
- Shorten application to capture specific information to assess qualifications
- Revamp the internship website to attract more applicants
- Provide a stipend to selected applicants based on their undergraduate year
- Have interns present a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis on their internship experience

4. Outcomes

- Applicant demographics: Asian 40 percent, Black or African American 26 percent, White 25 percent, Prefer not to disclose 8 percent, American Indian or Alaska Native 1 percent, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 0 percent
- In 2022, none of the four interns applied for a vacant position; however, one reached out for consideration after graduating in 2023
- In 2023, two of the four interns applied for vacant CDM positions and were subsequently hired

Category: Training, Career Development, and Staff Retention - Completed project

- Compiled feedback from interns to evaluate the overall experience that could impact changes to the CTOSI format

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

- Focus on applicants who are closer to entering the workforce
- Advantage of recruiting an applicant with intern experience
- Earlier release of applications
- Stronger engagement with HBCUs and other colleges
- Work with VCU's Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) to bring awareness to the clinical research profession through their outreach initiatives
- Incorporate Massey's Community, Outreach, and Engagement (COE) team to understand the programs offered and how each supports the other