

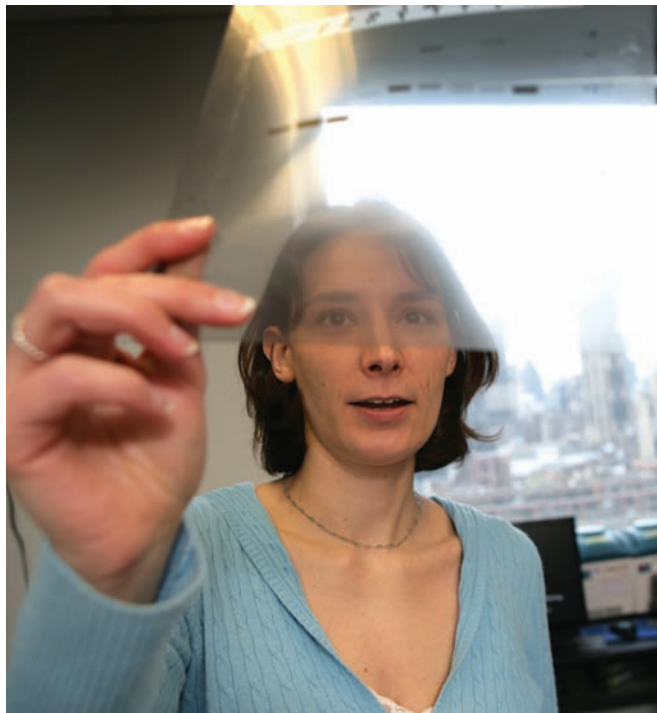
## Numbers Up

Recruitment efforts enrich the pool of prospective PhDs

**T**his year, almost 700 prospective students applied to the PhD programs at the Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences, reflecting a 50 percent increase in applications from just four years ago. Under the leadership of Dean David P. Hajjar, PhD, enrollment has also doubled over the past ten years. Randi B. Silver, PhD, the associate dean of the Graduate School, says a number of new recruiting initiatives have helped to get out the word about the School and its seven doctoral programs. “We’ve been reaching out by hosting an open house each fall for students from the tri-state (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut) area, introducing students from other parts of the country to the School through our summer programs, and enlisting our current students as ambassadors who talk with prospective students at recruiting events,” says Silver. “Over time, these efforts have made a difference.”

The Graduate School’s admissions process identifies undergraduates with strong science backgrounds by seeking students with high GPAs and asking colleagues at other institutions, including the Cornell campus in Ithaca, for recommendations. They send out personalized letters and encourage the students to explore the Graduate School’s website, which was re-launched in 2009 with an updated design and more user-friendly navigation.

Several of the new initiatives are aimed at encouraging more underrepresented minority students to apply. Along with Francoise Freyre, the assistant dean, Silver makes presentations about the School to science undergrads at the campuses of the City University of New York (CUNY). For example, they speak to students in the Minority Access to Research Careers program—an NIH-funded honors program that helps prepare students interested in



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Grad student life: Kelly Yule, who works in the Sloan-Kettering lab of molecular biologist Prasad Jallepali, MD, PhD

biomedical research to apply to graduate school—at the City College of New York, Hunter College, and Brooklyn College. Freyre and Silver also attend the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students, where they meet with potential applicants from across the country. “We talk with students who may not have considered a doctorate and make them aware of our programs,” says Silver. “That has increased our applicant pool as well.”

For more than a decade, the Graduate School has offered a ten-week summer internship program for underserved students who have excelled in their sophomore or junior years in college. Participants in the program, called Summer Access, conduct basic research in labs at the Medical College or Graduate School and attend lectures, workshops, and journal club meetings.

Over the past few years, the program has increasingly focused on recruiting and selecting students who are interested in pursuing a PhD rather than an MD, and as a result more Summer Access alums have been applying to the Graduate School. The Tri-Institutional MD-PhD program hosts a similar summer program called “Gateways to the Laboratory” for underrepresented minority and disadvantaged college students who are interested in pursuing the dual degree.

When speaking with prospective students at recruiting events, members of the admissions team describe the unique partnerships the Graduate School has with neighboring institutions and point out that PhD candidates are free to work with any faculty member affiliated with the School, including those at the Sloan-Kettering Institute, the Rockefeller University, and Hospital for Special Surgery. “There’s an openness and flexibility here that’s a real draw for students,” says Silver. “If they’re interested in stem cell

research or angiogenesis or neurological diseases, there’s more than one lab for them to choose from.” For Jeffrey Russ, a second-year MD-PhD student, that was a key reason he chose the Tri-Institutional Program. “Because of the collaboration with nearby institutions and all the opportunities to talk with their faculty members at lectures and other events, you are exposed to so many more ideas and research approaches,” says Russ.

Silver says that the Graduate School aims to recruit more students from other countries and is exploring the possibility of creating new programs or events that would introduce them to the School. In November, her team traveled to India in an effort to develop relationships with outstanding universities there. “We want to identify top students who are interested in biomedical research,” she says, “wherever they may be.”

— Jen Uscher