Dean Puliafito stated in a memo to faculty, staff and students. “To ensure an intellectually stimulating environment, the Keck School of Medicine recognizes the need to support, encourage and facilitate diversity and inclusion in all aspects of academic life. This includes training medical and graduate students, improving the working environment for staff, enriching the research environment and, finally, recruiting top residents and faculty.”

The cabinet will be led by Henri Ford, MD, MHA, vice dean of medical education. “Diversity has always been part of the intrinsic fabric of the Keck School of Medicine of USC; it is a vital core of our DNA and that of the entire Trojan family,” he said. “The Dean's Diversity Cabinet is designed to embrace, promote and champion diversity throughout the Health Sciences Campus.”

The Keck School has a long-established reputation for providing students and staff with support and resources to explore race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and gender identification.

Joyce Richey, PhD, chief diversity officer and assistant dean of educational affairs, has been instrumental in the establishment of many programs at the Keck School that work to support an inclusive environment. According to Richey, keeping the lines of communication open between administration and faculty, staff and students is a top priority.

“We are being very proactive and taking these matters quite seriously,” she said. “We want to make sure that our students, faculty and staff are well informed, and that they feel comfortable engaging in necessary and important discussions about diversity with peers and others. We want everyone to feel valued and respected here — attaining these goals will ensure a campus environment that welcomes and embraces diversity and inclusivity.”

Other members of the cabinet are:
- Ite Laird-Offringa, PhD, associate dean of graduate affairs
- Larry Opas, MD, associate dean of graduate medical education
- Jeffrey Upperman, MD, associate dean of faculty diversity
- Suzanne Palmer, MD, president of the Keck Faculty Council

Med-COR: Encouraging the next generation of students

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to help their parents understand Med-COR and the process of applying to colleges and medical schools.

Over time, Med-COR has proven successful in sending its graduates to major universities. Most of them major in biomedical sciences and many go on to medical, dental, pharmacy and nursing schools across the country.

“Med-COR supports, motivates and prepares disadvantaged and underrepresented students to be competitively eligible for admission to college and ultimately a career in the health professions,” said Joyce Richey, PhD, chief diversity officer and assistant dean of educational affairs at the Keck School and program director for Med-COR. Richey added that 100 percent of Med-COR's students graduate from high school and attend college. Their average SAT scores are far above both the national and LAUSD student averages. “We are certainly making an impact.”
of which include metabolic diseases, oncology, cardiovascular, neuroscience, immunology and stem cell.

“The program has created a powerful national recruitment network among participants. Many of the students come from historically black colleges and universities, such as Xavier, Spelman and Morehouse, as well as Ivy League institutions such as Harvard and Cornell. They all return to their home institutions, encouraging classmates to apply to the program, or the Keck School in general, because of their incredible experiences over the summer,” Richey said.

Another Rutgers recruit is Djani Robertson. He was a 2014 program participant and is currently a first-year medical student at the Keck School. He says not all of the benefits were from working in the lab, where his research involved children with congenital adrenal hypoplasia.

“I enjoyed the whole program, because even though we did research most of the day, we still got to network with other physicians, and they had students talk to us about what medical school is like,” Robertson said.

It’s not just students who benefit, Richey said, noting that 80 percent of mentors have been with the program from the beginning.

“These students are highly motivated,” said Richard Watanabe, PhD, professor, preventive medicine, physiology and biophysics, who has been a mentor every summer since 2011. “It’s been a real pleasure to interact with them. You get the sense they have a real sense of responsibility and purpose, which makes mentoring them that much more satisfying.”

Watanabe feels kinship with Bridging the Gaps participants.

“I feel my own personal journey parallels many of the students in this program,” he said. “I like to think that if my participation in the program helps to bring one additional underrepresented minority student to USC or helps others get into programs at other institutions, then it was worth my time and investment.”

Ite Laird-Offringa, associate dean of graduate studies at USC and another mentor who has been with Bridging the Gaps since its inception, has similar feelings.

“[I] get tremendous satisfaction from the growth I see in our summer interns, with respect to knowledge they gain, the joy they experience in the lab setting and the expanded vision they will take back to their universities as they continue their studies,” Laird-Offringa said.

For Arientyl, the dream is almost realized. Soon enough, she’ll be working as a third-year medical student at Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center.

“I am excited for third-year, to spend time in County, to spend time in other hospitals, and just learn what the actual parts of being a physician are,” Arientyl said.
Dean leads new diversity initiative at Keck School

The importance of diversity to college campuses has been in the media spotlight recently, but the Keck School of Medicine of USC has led this arena for more than 40 years.

In an effort to continue this momentum, Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, MD, MBA, has recently announced the formation of the Keck School of Medicine Dean’s Diversity Cabinet. This cabinet, composed of six members of the Keck School faculty, will focus on enhancing recruitment and retention of students, faculty, residents and staff, and on creating a supportive and culturally sensitive campus environment.

“The quality of education, scholarship and patient care is enhanced when it is informed by the perspectives of a diverse community,”

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Keck School reflects USC’s overall commitment to diversity

The Keck School’s new Dean's Diversity Cabinet and the numerous outreach programs at the Keck School are an integral part of a larger effort by USC to promote diversity and inclusion on larger scale. In a recent memo to USC students, faculty and staff, Provost Michael Quick, PhD, noted that the university continues to show a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

"From its inception, USC has shown a bold commitment to diversity and inclusion, and in leading the way toward greater access and opportunity for all," he wrote. “That commitment reflects our desire to enrich learning by embracing a broad range of ideas and perspectives, our moral support for the cause of social justice, and our realization, in today’s increasingly global context, that the more diverse the community, the greater its potential for economic and cultural prosperity.”

Keck School professor of urology Larissa Rodriguez, MD, who also serves as associate provost, has been tapped by Provost Quick to be a member of the team that oversees and coordinates USC’s diversity and inclusion efforts.
For underrepresented students who dream of being doctors, ‘Keck is where you want to be’

Attending medical school can seem like a pipe dream for many students, but the Bridging the Gaps Summer Research Program at the Keck School of Medicine of USC can turn that dream into a reality for students from underrepresented groups.

“The program was created to address the under representation of minority students within medicine and the biological sciences and with hopes of attracting them to Keck,” said program director Joyce Richey, PhD, chief diversity officer and assistant dean of educational affairs.

In the four years since the program began, 71 undergraduate students have participated. To date, more than half of those students have applied to the Keck School and 17 applicants have been accepted. Alumni of the summer program are now part of the greater Trojan family and many are enrolled in the MD, PhD and Global Medicine programs.

“The program was created to address the under representation of minority students within medicine and the biological sciences and with hopes of attracting them to Keck.”

– Joyce Richey, PhD
Program Director

In addition to the Keck School students, 95 percent of Bridging the Gaps participants overall have been successful in gaining acceptance and matriculating in their desired medical or graduate programs at other prestigious institutions such as Columbia and Yale.

Bridging the Gaps runs for eight weeks during the summer in the laboratories of Keck School faculty members who also serve as mentors for the students. During this time, the students work on research projects alongside their mentors. In addition to lab research, students have the opportunity to witness the impact of the diseases they are studying while shadowing faculty physicians. The program embraces a true bench-to-bedside model.

One program participant, Vanessa Arientyl, studied how oxytocin affected social behavior in mice. “It was nice learning how to really build a project from the beginning. I got to learn how research really works, collect the data and present it,” recalled Arientyl, who is now a second-year medical student at the Keck School.

Arientyl is one of six Keck School medical students from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. “We have created a pipeline with Rutgers; each year we’ve had two students from Rutgers,” Richey said with a smile. “It had been difficult to pull students from back east here, and now, with this particular institution, it’s almost an unwritten goal: ‘Keck is where you want to be.’”

Bridging the Gaps students attend weekly seminars that benefit not only their current research, but also their futures in the medical field. Students conduct research in a variety of disciplines, some

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On many Saturdays, a group of students from several high schools in Los Angeles who are participants in Med-COR meet for tutoring in math, science, English and SAT preparation. They also learn strategies for taking notes and tests and learn about applying for college.

But the best part of the Saturday sessions, according to Mickali Thompson, was getting to meet Henri Ford, MD, MHA, professor of surgery and vice dean of medical education at the Keck School of Medicine of USC. He was anxious to hear Ford talk about his work as a pediatric cardiologist because that is the career path he hopes to follow.

“He talked about performing surgery in Haiti and that was very inspiring to me,” said Thompson, a junior at Francisco Bravo Medical Magnet High School.

These Saturday sessions are meant to give the participants in Med-COR — which stands for MEDical Counseling, Organizing and Recruiting — academic enrichment and to inspire them to pursue a career in the health professions. In addition to classwork, they also get the opportunity to meet with top medical professionals like Ford as well as medical students from the Keck School.

Launched in 1970, Med-COR was originally created as a partnership between the Keck School of Medicine of USC and Los Angeles Unified School District. It was designed to address the fact that minority students, and especially those from high schools surrounding the university, were underrepresented among the student body at the medical school and in other health-related programs.

The program currently serves four medical magnet high schools, including Francisco Bravo Medical Magnet High School and Orthopaedic Hospital Medical Magnet High School. Select students can now spend six weeks in the summer doing a work-study internship at Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center or Keck Hospital of USC. Med-COR also brings their families in for parent meetings. These workshops are
Keck School honors long history of diversity

The Keck School has a long-established reputation for providing students and staff with support and resources to explore race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and gender identification. Founded in 1968, the Office of Diversity at the Keck School of Medicine has developed numerous programs to strengthen the climate of the Keck School for underrepresented students, faculty and staff.

Programs such as Bridging the Gaps, Med-COR and the Latino Medical Student Association all encourage under-represented undergraduates and high school students to find avenues into the school and flourish once they arrive. There are also numerous other outreach programs at the Keck School, including programs that target community youth — helping them physically, mentally and emotionally, and even setting them on the path to a promising career.

Althea Alexander, assistant dean of student diversity for the Keck School focusing on alumni relations, points out that these ideas and actions can trickle down to individuals that then go out and change the world.

Alexander, a member of the Office of Diversity since its founding, recalled a former medical student, Ava Avalos, MD, ’00, who went on to earn a Harvard fellowship after her time at the Keck School.

“I am so proud of her,” Alexander said. “Two years ago she established an AIDS clinic in Botswana with the help of the Clinton Foundation.”

Avalos also serves as a committee member for the Botswana Ministry of Health.

Avalos is just one example of the countless number of Keck School alumni of underrepresented communities who are now doctors and scientists making the world a better place. Through active efforts such as the new diversity cabinet and programs already in place, the Keck School will continue to improve access, inclusion and diversity so future students can benefit themselves and continue to change the lives of others.

AAMC’s Nivet to deliver address to Keck School

Marc A. Nivet, EdD, MBA, chief diversity officer of the Association of American Medical Colleges, will speak at the Keck School of Medicine of USC on Wednesday, Feb. 17.

At the AAMC, Nivet provides strategic vision and programmatic leadership on issues surrounding community engagement, workforce and student diversity and health equity at universities, medical schools and teaching hospitals across the United States and Canada. He has spent more than 20 years in academic medicine developing creative program initiatives and innovative solutions that have helped universities and their academic health centers accelerate efforts to realize their mission of excellence in research, education and patient care.

Nivet is a fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine and a former president of the National Association of Medical Minority Educators. He currently serves the academic medicine community on a variety of boards and commissions. He is a member of the NIH National Institute of General Medical Sciences Council (NIGMS), Health Resources and Services Administration Bureau of Health Professions National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Medical College Roundtable and is an advisor to the Educational Training Service Policy Evaluation and Research Council. He is a trustee of both the Arnold P. Gold Foundation and the Massachusetts General Hospital Institute of the Health Professions.