

Ralph Feuer, PhD
Associate Professor
Program Director – SDSU Bridges to Stem
Cell Research Internship Program
<http://www.bio.sdsu.edu/Pub/feuer/index.html>
<http://www.sci.sdsu.edu/scip/>
Office Phone: 619-594-7377
Lab Phone: 619-594-0777
Fax: 619-594-7384



**SAN DIEGO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

**Cell & Molecular Biology Joint Doctoral
Program**
Department of Biology
San Diego State University
5500 Campanile Drive
San Diego, California 92182-4614
USA
rfeuer@sdsu.edu

August 29, 2022

Dear ICOC Board,

As you can imagine, we were disappointed by our mixed review score for our recent COMPASS Training Program submission (with some very high scores – 87 points and very low scores – 70). Based on the comments of some reviewers, I feel that there may have been some confusion in understanding of the contents of our application with one or two of the reviewers. For example, our application never stated that intern applicants must write a proposal at the outset of their research, as implied by one of the reviewer’s criticisms with the comment that “Writing a proposal at the outset of their research is also quite demanding to the point of being unrealistic.” In fact, we emphasized that training students in precisely how to convert their ideas into a concrete achievable scientific plan-of-action was one of the goals of the program and a skill that would be of value for whatever career path they chose. Also, based on the score range in our review, one or two reviewers with low scores affected our overall score substantially (standard deviation of 6). I would note that five of the reviewers felt that our proposed COMPASS Program offered “Exceptional merit and warrants funding, if funds are available”.

Unfortunately, there is no chance to address these misunderstandings of the reviewers in our application, since no revision applications are possible. Because of this, we would like to make our appeal case for our submission with this written plea.

We asked the ICOC Board to consider the potential for impact and value for the greater San Diego community and diverse student body at SDSU a COMPASS Program. As pointed out by the reviewers’ comments, we have demonstrated that our existing BRIDGES and SPARKS Programs “have already been vetted and are familiar to CIRM”. Thirteen out of fifteen reviewers felt, regardless of any confusion and unclearness in the application, “holds the necessary significance and potential for impact”. We assembled a “strong program team with relevant experience”. The Program Director “has extensive experience in stem cell training programs”. And our Advisory Committee “looks strong”. And our partner Sanford Burnham Prebys “has run several successful training programs”.

Please consider the great successes of our existing SDSU Bridges program. Our partnership with Sanford Burnham Prebys (SBP), which has been long-standing in the Bridges program and will now be extended to the COMPASS program, will emphasize and follow the great success of their SPARK program (dedicated to URM high school students) which just ended with their students receiving best presentations and posters in the State! So, both components of our COMPASS program – SDSU and SBP are strong, in addition, to being novel and filling a need

in our region not addressed by most undergraduate schools – a laser-like focus and dedication to educating students from under-represented and disadvantaged backgrounds. SBP not only has a 45 year history of dedication to education (including their novel graduate program which focuses on individualized curricula and emphasizes clinical correlation, bridges to industry, translational research, and La Jolla Mesa-wide collaboration) but has run extremely successful CIRM Training Programs (EDUC4) and SPARK (having received high fundable scores). The COMPASS program would leverage those strengths in addition to the strengths of the SDSU Bridges Program.

I feel that SDSU's past and continued success with the current BRIDGES Program demonstrates our great expertise and track record in training interns from diverse backgrounds. I also make this plea, because the greater San Diego community and the diverse student body found at SDSU would greatly benefit from the COMPASS Training Program and the career opportunities offered by the Program. The San Diego area – indeed, most of Southern California – lacks such a focus on the URM community. After teaching at SDSU and running a research laboratory here for the past 14 years, I recognize that San Diego State University (SDSU) has a large number of talented students from diverse backgrounds who would greatly benefit from the resources available with the COMPASS Program. My laboratory has trained and/or continues to train a total of 16 graduate students (five previous Ph.D. students, 2 current Master's students, 4 students with Masters Degree completed, 4 Ph.D. rotation students, 1 previous Master's student who joined the SDSU Joint Doctoral Program), 17 undergraduate students, and two technicians.

San Diego State University (SDSU) is ranked in Top 30 nationwide for ethnic diversity, according to U.S. News and World Report. SDSU is recognized for its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. About 54 percent of students are of color, the university recognized for our military and veteran program and ranked as a top college for LGBTQ students.

Key Personnel (Ralph Feuer – Program Director; John Mokili – Program Coordinator; Evan Snyder – Key Personnel) we have a track record successfully training interns from diverse backgrounds, as demonstrated by the great success of our existing BRIDGES Program.

Our SDSU BRIDGES Program has supported 118 Trainees from 11/09 through 08/21. Of these interns, 96% have graduated from SDSU with a BS or MS degree. The graduation rate of Trainees is 30% higher than the average graduation rate of the SDSU campus as a whole. Our cohorts have been diverse throughout: 53% of our Trainees came from underrepresented groups and 56% of Trainees who completed the program were women. These results are consistent with the diversity of the SDSU campus as a whole. Our Trainees have had continued success via employment in the stem cell field or other biotechnology related areas. Of the previous Trainees, 34% of Trainees are continuing in the field as research assistants. 32% of previous Trainees have completed or are presently attending graduate school and carrying out world class stem cell research at institutes such as Harvard, MIT and UCSF. Of these, five have returned to the field as research associates. 23% of Trainees completed or continue in programs in medical, dental or pharmacology school and 9% are completing their education, entered a related medical or research area or are pursuing different areas of work. Our recent BRIDGES grant application had the highest score on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

As I am teaching a class of 500 students on Tuesdays, the scheduled date of the ICOC public meeting on August 30th, I would greatly appreciate if I could attend via Zoom.

Please let me know how I can proceed.

Sincerely,



Ralph Feuer



Evan Y. Snyder, M.D., Ph.D., F.A.A.P
Professor, Human Genetics Program; Sanford Children's Health Research Center; Aging, Immunity, & Tumor Microenvironment Program; Center for Genetic Disorders & Aging Research

Sanford Burnham Prebys (SBP) Medical Discovery Institute
Director, Center for Stem Cells & Regenerative Medicine
Director, Stem Cell Research Center & Core

Co-Director, Stem Cell Training Program
Faculty Physician, School of Medicine, University of California-San Diego (UCSD)
Biomedical Sciences Graduate Program, University of California-San Diego (UCSD)

Steering Committee, Medical Scientist Training Program (MSTP)-M.D.-Ph.D. Program,
University of California-San Diego (UCSD)
Scientific Steering Committee, Sanford (San Diego) Consortium for Regenerative Medicine (SCRM)

John Mokili, PhD



Program Coordinator
SDSU Bridges to Stem Cell Research Internship Program