

Summer Program in Quantitative Sciences Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH)



The 2009 Summer Program in Quantitative Sciences student group, (HSPH). Photo by Catherine Haskell, Diversity Program Coordinator, Department of Biostatistics, Harvard School of Public Health.

The Summer Program in Quantitative Sciences at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) is designed to attract mathematically talented students from underrepresented minority groups to consider graduate school and careers in biostatistics and public health. Since the program's start in 1994 153 students have participated and 20 have enrolled in HSPH for graduate school. The program receives funding from the National Institutes of Health.

Each year, between 6 and 12 minority students have participated in the program, and it is also open to students from other groups underrepresented in graduate education in public health, such as first-generation college students, low-income college students, and handicapped students. An essential element of the program's success is its small size, which permits the development of personal connections with all of the students. Lasting four weeks, the program includes an introductory course in biostatistics and statistical computing that meets each day for lectures and computer labs; typically the course is taught by a minority statistician who is a student in the HSPH Biostatistics Department. There is an afternoon lecture series on epidemiology, health and social behavior, environmental health, and current research in biostatistics. In addition, students engage in small group research projects that are based on studies being conducted by scientists at HSPH or at the Harvard Medical School.

Career development sessions bring students together with faculty and career advisors to discuss the importance of the GRE examination, tips for applying to graduate school, and issues specific to minority students. Participants also take a practice GRE test. Field trips to such places as the genotyping facility at the Channing Laboratory of Brigham and Women's Hospital expose the students to the vast array of research activities and educational options relating to biostatistics.

Of the 131 program participants known to have received their undergraduate degrees, at least 87 (66 percent) have completed graduate degrees or gone on to pursue graduate studies, at least 67 (51 percent) have pursued graduate study related to health or medical school, and 40 (31 percent) have gone on to pursue graduate training in statistics or biostatistics. Currently, two students are in graduate programs at the Harvard School of Public Health, and 20 have received either Masters or Doctorate degrees at the HSPH.

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