

Program Direction

Program Director: The Program Director is Robert J. Desnick, Ph.D., M.D., Professor of Human Genetics and Pediatrics, Chairman of the Department of Human Genetics, and Director of the new Institute for Genomic Sciences. Dr. Desnick is responsible for the day-to-day direction of the program and for administration of the training activities. Dr. Desnick also coordinates the weekly Journal Club, Seminar Series, and our recently instituted monthly MRDD Seminar Series, which provide core activities for this training program and facilitate continuous interaction between all of the trainees and faculty. Additionally, Dr. Desnick organizes monthly research presentations by our trainees and will sponsor an Institution-wide MRDD Research Day and Retreat at which presentations and posters by students, fellows and faculty are presented. In particular, the research studies of the trainees will be showcased during this symposium to serve as models for our staff and fellows and to recruit first year "flexible entry" predoctoral students to our training program in MRDD.

Associate Program Director: Since 1993, Dr. Edward H. Schuchman, who is Professor and Vice Chair for Research in the Department of Human Genetics and a member of the Institute for Gene Therapy and Molecular Medicine, has served as Associate Program Director. Dr. Schuchman is called upon frequently to provide guidance, counseling, and encouragement to our predoctoral and postdoctoral trainees. Dr. Schuchman also helps with decisions about the choice of laboratory rotations and/or preceptors for predoctoral trainees, and assists with career choices for postdoctoral trainees. He is also Co-Director of the Graduate School interdisciplinary training program in Genetics and Genomic Sciences (see below). He meets quarterly with the Program Director to review new directions and policies, to consider new programmatic components, and to review the operations of the core laboratories. Final decisions concerning program content, acceptance of new trainees and preceptors, and new training directions are made by the Program Director in consultation with the Associate Program Director, Clinical Associate Program Directors, and with the Internal and Advisory Committee members.

Clinical Associate Program Directors: Drs. Judith Willner and Margaret McGovern serve as the Clinical Associate Program Directors and are responsible for the clinical, clinical laboratory, and clinical research training activities of the M.D. postdoctoral fellows. During the first year of this program, the M.D. postdoctoral trainees devote about 80% of their effort to clinically-related activities. Specifically, they are exposed to a wide variety of patients with MRDD due to genetic, developmental or teratogenic etiologies. Drs. Willner and McGovern supervise their clinical training in the diagnosis, management and counseling of these disorders. Dr. Willner is primarily responsible for directing the clinical training of the M.D. fellows, and Dr. McGovern oversees their training during the clinical laboratory rotations. In addition, they serve as liaisons for clinical activities with the faculty in neurology, psychiatry, obstetrics/gynecology (reproductive genetics) and other medical specialties. They also supervise trainee involvement with patient follow-up or clinically-related research projects in the second and third-years of the M.D. postdoctoral training program, in conjunction with other expert clinical faculty members.

Administrative Structure: Dr. Desnick has appointed an Internal Advisory Committee composed of scientists and physician/scientists from various departments at Mount Sinai who have interests and expertise relevant to the theme of "Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities" (Table 4). The function of the Internal Advisory Committee is to provide overall guidance on the organization of the training program, to evaluate the predoctoral and postdoctoral applicants on an annual basis, to assist in the selection of new trainees and their distribution among Preceptors, to identify new preceptors, to suggest new recruitment strategies (particularly

for underrepresented minorities, see below), and to evaluate the ongoing activities of the training program and the performance of current trainees. In addition, every six months the Program Director, Associate Program Directors and appropriate participating faculty review the progress of each predoctoral student and postdoctoral fellow (Ph.D. or M.D.). The predoctoral review is in the framework of a presentation by the students to their respective Graduate School Advisory Committees, which are composed of three faculty members and meet with each student three times a year. For each postdoctoral fellow, a formal presentation of the last six months progress is presented, followed by a frank discussion of problems, if any. Corrective actions are taken if necessary. We also have formed an External Advisory Committee to review the training program on an annual basis and to provide outside experience and continuous expert advice on program direction and enhancement. The External Advisory Committee members are Mark L. Batshaw, MD, PhD, Professor and Chairman of Pediatrics, Children's National Medical Center, Washington D.C.; Edward R. B. McCabe, MD, PhD Professor and Executive Chairman of Pediatrics, UCLA; and Stephen T. Warren, PhD, Professor and Chairman, and Howard Hughes Investigator, Department of Human Genetics, Emory University School of Medicine.

Program Faculty:

During the past four years of the current award, and in concert with the rapid development and expansion of new Centers and Institutes at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, new faculty have been recruited to the training grant faculty who have expertise in the areas of developmental neurobiology (e.g., Drs. Andrew Bergemann, Monte Buchsbaum, Luz Claudio, Dan Felsenfeld, Mitchell Goldfarb and Andrea Gore), gene therapy (e.g., Drs. Savio Woo, R. Michael Linden, and Hans Snoeck), stem cell biology (e.g., Drs. Gordon Keller and Margaret Baron), positional cloning/complex traits (e.g., Drs. John Martignetti and George Diaz), inborn errors (e.g., Dr. Melissa Wasserstein), prenatal genetics (e.g., Dr. Keith Eddleman), and molecular cytogenetics (e.g., Drs. Brynn Levy and Peter Warburton).