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## Redressing the balance

**T**he figures are all too familiar. In the United States, African Americans and Hispanics together make up only 4.5% of scientists with a PhD in the biological sciences, and 6% of practising physicians. These numbers have been historically resistant to change. But summer research programmes that put minority students into labs with mentors may help to turn the tide.

One such programme pairs up researchers from Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons with minority undergraduates from Hunter College in New York City. The 16 students are spending ten weeks in the lab with their mentors. Apart from doing research, they will be trained in research design and analysis, and will be exposed to scientific literature through journal clubs. They will also meet minority members who have been successful in science and business — Cecil Pickett, president of Schering-Plough Research Institute in Kenilworth, New Jersey, will this week visit the students. Pickett has been named as one of *Fortune's* 'most powerful black executives'.

Although the mentoring programme is small and only began last year, it is already showing signs of making an impact. Several of last summer's class have been accepted at medical schools and on graduate science programmes. The remainder are continuing their undergraduate education at Hunter.

To change the statistics of minority representation, more such programmes are needed. Ideally, they would include high-school students, or even younger potential scientists. They would encompass all disciplines and bring in scientists from a variety of professional backgrounds. Exposing students to a range of scientists who are excited about their work and able to communicate the career possibilities is the best way to interest students in science, regardless of either group's ethnicity.

**Paul Smaglik**  
*Naturejobs* editor



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