

Mental Health Research Grants for Tenure-Track Assistant Professors in Texas Evaluation Summary Report

Between 2009 and 2013, the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health awarded \$893,527 to 54 tenure-track assistant professors across Texas through the Mental Health Research Grants for Tenure-Track Assistant Professors program. Grants have been made to 17 different institutions across the state, with 11 institutions having two or more awards since the inception of the program. The goals of this initiative are to increase the pool of junior faculty conducting quality mental health research and to encourage the sharing of research findings with other researchers, policy makers and service providers through presentations at state and national conferences. Tenure-track assistant professors in disciplines including psychology, educational psychology, counseling psychology, clinical psychology, human development, behavioral health, social work, medicine, pharmacology, neuroscience, nursing, public health, law and public policy were eligible to apply. While the initiative has always coupled a workforce development component with a focus on research, over the past two years there has been an increased focus on applicants who can make a contribution to the field of mental health through their scholarship. It is the foundation's experience that applicants from high or very high research activity institutions typically have had the preparation needed to be most successful in carrying out the goals of the grant, and therefore the foundation has increasingly focused on funding applicants from such institutions. In order to assess the current outcomes of this initiative, the foundation surveyed 43 grantees from 2009-2012 in June, 2013. The survey yielded a 67 percent response rate (n=29).

KEY FINDINGS

PERSISTING IN ACADEMIA. Coupled with the general workforce focus of the grant is the more specific goal of workforce retention. It has become more challenging than ever for professors to obtain tenure. Together with the long standing expectation that junior faculty in the social and behavioral sciences publish academic articles, there is an increased focus on obtaining grants. Thus far, 10 responding awardees reported that they have achieved tenure since receiving the grant and another five shared that their materials were under review.

The number of individuals obtaining tenure was also researched through an internet search of faculty webpages, and indeed 10 of the awardees (out of all 54) had "associate professor" titles. No information was collected at the time of grant application or through the survey about where in the tenure process the applicants were situated when they received the award. Of the 29 faculty who responded to the survey, only one reported having left academia and only one reported having left the state of Texas. The above mentioned internet search corroborated the survey findings, with only one of the 54 professors not having an accessible faculty website listing. Therefore it appears that the awardees are persisting in these challenging positions.

DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS. Directly related to the ability to persist in the academy and earn tenure is the ability to generate academic publications. At the time of the survey, nine responding awardees reported having 16 manuscripts based on their Hogg Foundation funded projects that were either published, in press or accepted for publication. The evaluation also indicated that in addition to publishing their studies, awardees are disseminating mental health research findings into the professional field through conference presentations and consultation. Seventy-nine percent of respondents reported having presented at a state or national conference. Seventeen percent of responding awardees have been asked to consult with an outside agency regarding their research funded by the foundation. These outside agencies include: the U.S. Census Bureau, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Justice, Texas Council of Family Violence and the Veterans Administration. Funding specifically designated for presenting at conferences was added to the grant funding in the second year of the program.

COMMITMENT TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY. The foundation has long had a commitment to building a culturally diverse and culturally competent mental health workforce. Survey data reflects that the grant program is reaching a fairly diverse group of scholars, with 46 percent of responding professors identifying as persons of color and 68 percent as women. Women make up only 41 percent of tenure-track faculty at doctoral degree granting institutions and only 26



percent of tenured faculty at these universities.¹ Men of color make up only eight percent, and women of color two percent, of tenured, full professors at U.S. private and public (combined) research universities.² Awardees' manuscripts appear to be advancing the foundation's interest in culturally competent practice. According to the Surgeon General's 2001 report on mental health care disparities, there is a need for more research about "the prevalence, perception, course, detection, and treatment of mental illness in racial and ethnic minority populations."³ Assessment of the awardees' project topics revealed that 32 percent of awardees utilized the grant for research on culturally informed mental health care. More than any other theme, awardees' research had this focus in common, with titles such as, "Contributing factors of depressive symptoms among elderly Korean Immigrants in Texas,"⁴ and "The relationship between anxiety symptom clusters and diabetes in Hispanics versus non-Hispanics: A Project FRONTIER Study."⁵ Many of the conferences at which grantees presented had a focus on services to diverse populations. These conferences included the National Institutes of Health Summit on the Science of Eliminating Health Disparities, The National Latina/o Psychological Association and the Transcultural Nursing Society Annual Meeting.

LEVERAGING GRANT FUNDS. The impact of the Hogg awards appears to have had a ripple effect for many respondents, with 38 percent having leveraged the Hogg Foundation grants to obtain other funding, thus further advancing the impact of this program. Three grantees listed a total of more than \$1 million in subsequent funding and one grantee listed \$1.5 million in anticipated funding from a pending proposal. In addition, individual grantees mentioned various other positive incidental outcomes from their Hogg awards, including being able to expand the scope of their research, recruit and provide incentives to participants from hard-to-engage populations, develop project management skills and enable graduate students to complete theses. One grantee reported developing a new program as a result of Hogg-funded research.

LESSONS LEARNED

In addition to the survey findings above, there are a number of lessons learned that have emerged from the foundation program officer's reflections on the administration of this grant program. As junior faculty, some of the awardees have had little experience with grant-funded projects prior to receiving the Hogg award. It has been important, therefore, to review the statement of agreement with the awardees and discuss how the funds may be utilized. It has been helpful to communicate with awardees about the process of reallocating unspent funds as the grant term nears its end. In general, it has been important to maintain open communication about significant programmatic changes. Unforeseen changes that emerged mid-grant cycle included, for example, Institutional Review Board (IRB) issues and changes in professional status. The foundation has also learned that it is best to offer this grant on a term longer than one year to accommodate the time awardees need for the conference presentation proposal process.

"This grant truly has been a crucial springboard for my career.... It has enabled me to stay on the career course I planned and use my training to help patients with mental illnesses despite current national funding limitations."

—Hogg research grant recipient

CONCLUSION

While it may be difficult to measure whether the grant program's original goal of increasing the pool of junior faculty conducting quality mental health research (i.e. are more junior faculty engaged in this type of research in Texas?) has been met, it

does appear that some successes are emerging. Roughly a quarter of the assistant professors funded in the first four years of the grant have earned tenure, and almost as many have articles accepted for publication. Along with those who have achieved tenure, many are persisting in academia in the challenging role of junior faculty. Many are disseminating their findings through presenting at a range of national conferences and consulting with national agencies about their work. The awardees also appear to be leveraging the foundation's support to gain additional grants to further their work. The lessons learned emphasize the need for ongoing open communication with awardees throughout the course of the grant, which serves to ensure the success of awardees and help the program achieve its goals. The findings indicate that awardees are not only advancing their own scholarship and careers via the awards, but are doing important work to advance the field as a whole.



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THE HOGG FOUNDATION'S MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH GRANTS FOR TENURE-TRACK ASSISTANT PROFESSORS IN TEXAS

The Hogg Foundation is committed to advancing quality academic research in mental health while also supporting the careers of promising junior faculty in Texas. In the current climate of budget cuts and discussions of faculty productivity, tenure-track assistant professors at research-oriented institutions are under immense pressure to publish and, now more than ever, to secure grants. Pursuing grants in addition to the normal academic work of teaching, research and publishing can be a daunting task. The Hogg Foundation's mental health research grants can serve as seed grants for some faculty, helping them to be more competitive when going after large federal grants.

Research projects may focus on any aspect of mental health including promotion, prevention, early intervention, treatment or workforce-related concerns. The foundation is especially interested in research that has implications for underserved communities in the area of mental health or that addresses or includes the participation of recipients of mental health services and their families in the planning and implementation of mental health services, research, policy or education. Grants also include funding for the presentation of research findings at state and national conferences and meetings.

For a list of past Mental Health Research Grant recipients, go to: <http://ow.ly/r184A>.