Closing the gaps

WHAT IS THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP? The “achievement gap” is usually defined as gaps in academic test scores and high school graduation rates between white students and students of color. Gaps persist through college enrollment and graduation, job opportunities, income, health, and more.

WHAT THE U IS DOING

President Eric Kaler’s first “State of the U” address after taking office in 2011, he called on the U to be a leader in achieving educational equity. Here’s what’s happened since.

In 2013, a gift from Carmen and Jim Campbell established the Campbell Leadership Chair, held by Michael Rodriguez, to promote University-wide collaboration in finding interdisciplinary solutions to achievement gaps.

The Educational Equity Resource Center provides access to experts and programs across the U’s campuses.

The College of Education and Human Development is pioneering ways to better prepare teachers, such as giving undergrads hands-on teaching experience in diverse settings early in their degree program.

The University of Minnesota’s College Readiness Consortium created Ramp-Up to Readiness, an advisory program designed to help all students achieve postsecondary success.

Researchers at the U are studying how gaps in preschool development persist throughout a child’s education—and developing tools to better prepare early childhood educators.

In 2015, a gift from Carmen and Jim Campbell established the University of Minnesota’s Ramp-Up to Readiness Leadership Chair, held by Michael Rodriguez, to promote University-wide collaboration in finding interdisciplinary solutions to achievement gaps.

WHAT Does it take to get to that moment when a patient receives a pancreatic cancer drug never before used in modern medicine?

“What we did here with Minnidelide we did at the speed of light,” says Gunda Georg, who directs the College of Pharmacy’s Institute for Therapeutics Discovery and Development. “Going from drug design to clinical trial in just five years is almost unheard of. Ten years is more typical.”

Minnidelide is derived from a perennial Asian vine that’s long been used to treat rheumatoid arthritis and other inflammatory diseases. Scientists at the Masonic Cancer Center, University of Minnesota—funded by the Eugene C. and Gail Y. Sit Chair in Pancreatic and Gastrointestinal Cancer Research, the Dr. Robert and Katherine Goodeale Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund, and the Wellner Family Fund in Pancreatic Cancer Research—discovered that the active compound in the vine stopped pancreatic cancer cell growth in mouse studies.

Enter chemist Georg, holder of the Robert and Gail Sit Chair in Medicinal Chemistry, whose team turned the compound into an injectable drug for human use.

In 2013, oncologist Edward Greeno began enrolling about 30 people who had pancreatic cancer for a Phase 1A clinical trial. “We’ve seen tumors shrink at this early stage, so, yes, I think people should be excited about the potential,” says Greeno, executive medical director of University of Minnesota Health Cancer Care.

Researchers eventually hope to evaluate Minnidelide’s efficacy against brain, breast, prostate, and blood cancers, as well.

NATION WITHIN A NATION

Kate Derickson, 2015-2017 McKnight Land-Grant Professor in the College of Liberal Arts, spent part of last summer collaborating with leaders of the Gullah/Geechee Nation in South Carolina. She and Queen Quet, chiefess and head of state for the nation, held focus groups to learn more about how

...to...