The Voelcker Biomedical Research Academy: An innovative program to train the next generation of biomedical researchers.
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Introduction

The Voelcker Biomedical Research Academy (VBRA) provides a unique opportunity for outstanding high school students from the San Antonio area to improve their scientific knowledge and undertake biomedical research at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

The unique and distinctive nature of the VBRA stems from the programmatic design of longitudinal research-based activities associated with a strong curriculum. The Academy engages high school students in sustained educational and hands-on research activities for 3 years, and includes a collegiate component for alumni of the program. This approach recognizes the importance of mentoring students at an early age as they prepare for a career in the biomedical fields.

The VBRA directly reflects the vision of the Max and Minnie Tomerlin Voelcker Fund to sustain education, training, and research in the San Antonio area. Since 2009, the VBRA has created a framework for a broad and lasting network of relationships between scientists, trainees and staff of the Health Science Center, high school educators, VBRA scholars, alumni and their families.

Conclusions

1. Large number of applications and inquiries suggest a high interest in and need for science enrichment and career exploration programs.
2. Engagement in the VBRA program results in successful high school completion and collegiate acceptance into 4-year universities.
3. Participation in VBRA enhances an interest in science and the pursuit of STEM careers.
4. Support and track alumni to confirm post-collegiate entry into professional programs or STEM career fields.
5. Increase College Connection offerings to support VBRA alumni.
6. Enhance networking opportunities to form strong alumni network.
7. Share best practices to establish VBRA as a model program for the state and nationwide.
8. Secure additional funding sources to support program growth.

Future Directions

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