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Changing the face of STEM: Preparing Students for Research and Outreach

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Recently, Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) was awarded a National Institutes of Health (NIH) Maximizing Access to Research Careers (MARC) grant, intended to prepare URM students for graduate programs in biomedical and/or behavioral fields. This has allowed us to bring high-caliber researchers to NEIU and engage undergraduate and graduate students in their research as well as career pathways. It has also afforded us to do something that we have found essential to attracting and supporting URM students in STEM: engaging in outreach to the community. Our scholars started to mentor elementary and high school students from neighboring communities in the city. NEIU is a public state university located in metropolitan Chicago, IL. As a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), ranked by U.S. News and World Report as the most ethnically diverse university in the Midwest, NEIU embraces diversity and a nontraditional atmosphere. The funding we received has allowed our young scholars to attend research conferences in their area of expertise, present research results, and network with prestigious researchers at neighboring and far-away institutions. However, this alone is not enough to attract them to the STEM disciplines. We understand the desire of URM students to give back to their communities and they must see careers in STEM as a viable path to do so in their future. We also know the importance of offering students from the local community early exposure to science and seeing future scientists from their community talk about research. In this talk, I will share how we have used the MARC grant to prepare our students for careers in STEM and the success that we have seen thus far with our approach.