

From: "Gross, Louis J" <lgross@tennessee.edu>
Date: Monday, July 5, 2021 at 12:27 PM
To: "Zomchick, John P" <zomchick@utk.edu>, "Thompson, Dixie Lee" <dixielee@utk.edu>
Cc: "Schussler, Elisabeth Ellen" <eschussl@utk.edu>, "Spurgeon, Shawn Lamont" <sspurgeo@utk.edu>, "Kelly, Diane" <dianek@utk.edu>, "Gross, Louis J" <lgross@tennessee.edu>
Subject: Re: [DDDHLIST] SEC Emerging Scholars Program

John and Dixie,

Thanks to both of you for your responses. I appreciate the fact that this initiative arose from the SEC and that UTK has joined in efforts as a means to provide another opportunity for graduate students. I continue to encourage UTK to step up though to provide a more complete implementation plan to meet our strategic goals to enhance opportunities for our students to interact with a more diverse (in all senses of the word) and outstanding faculty. I and the Senate stand ready to assist in developing such an implementation plan.

Stay well,
Lou

--

Louis J. Gross (he, him, his)
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of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and Mathematics
Director Emeritus, National Institute for Mathematical and Biological Synthesis (NIMBioS.org)
Director, The Institute for Environmental Modeling
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President, 2006-2007, 2021-2022, UTK Faculty Senate
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<http://lgross.utk.edu/>

From: "Zomchick, John P" <zomchick@utk.edu>
Date: Friday, July 2, 2021 at 7:52 AM

To: "Gross, Louis J" <lgross@tennessee.edu>, "Thompson, Dixie Lee" <dixielee@utk.edu>

Cc: "Schussler, Elisabeth Ellen" <eschussl@utk.edu>, "Spurgeon, Shawn Lamont" <sspurgeo@utk.edu>, "Kelly, Diane" <dianek@utk.edu>

Subject: Re: [DDDHLIST] SEC Emerging Scholars Program

Lou (and others),

Thanks for these observations.

I agree with your point about postdocs. It's something that Dixie has worked on before and has been in discussion with Deb Crawford about restarting.

Please allow me to provide a little context. This is an SEC program, like the SEC Academic Leadership Development Program, SEC Faculty Travel Program, and others. It is administered by the SECU. It was formulated by a subcommittee of the SEC Provosts (I wasn't a member), then given to the SEC ALDP liaisons (Diane Kelly is our rep) to refine details and implement. The SEC provides modest funding with the member institutions committing to the rest. You can read more about it here: <https://www.theseecu.com/news/sec-provosts-establish-emerging-scholars-program-for-future-faculty/>.

We are joining with all other 13 SEC schools to provide a weekend of professional development opportunities for PhDs and postdocs and an opportunity for them to network. The program was inspired by the SREB Institute on Teaching and Mentoring (<https://instituteonteachingandmentoring.org/>). There will also be recruitment fairs at the weekend event.

I believe that this could be a valuable experience for the students

who participate and a help to us to recruit more diverse applicant pools for our searches.

In short, I ask that you consider this small step in light of a "both ... and" approach as we continue to pursue the ideas that you have presented.

Best regards,
John

[SEC Provosts Establish Emerging Scholars Program for Future Faculty - SECU | SECU](#)

The SEC Provosts have established an emerging scholars program to aid in preparing future faculty members designed to provide professional development and networking opportunities for current doctoral students and a limited number of postdoctoral researchersContinue reading »

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From: Gross, Louis J <lgross@tennessee.edu>
Sent: Friday, July 2, 2021 12:26 AM
To: Thompson, Dixie Lee <dixielee@utk.edu>
Cc: Schussler, Elisabeth Ellen <eschussl@utk.edu>; Spurgeon, Shawn Lamont <sspurgeo@utk.edu>; Zomchick, John P <zomchick@utk.edu>; Kelly, Diane <dianek@utk.edu>
Subject: Re: [DDDHLIST] SEC Emerging Scholars Program

Dixie,

Thanks for the response and explanation. I certainly never meant to imply that you, Dr. Kelly and Dr. Zomchick are not faculty members. However I do need to push back and point out that in the spirit of shared governance, a broader array of faculty members who are not in primarily administrative roles could have assisted in ameliorating some of the concerns that I expressed as well as some others. I suggest that the goal of attracting high-quality potential faculty within the SEC, as laudable as it may seem to be, is simply not going to work unless there are formal programs with postdocs available that include transition to faculty lines. This was one of the points I made to the Chancellor when I served on the Advisory Board (point #2 in my article "Moving more than the Needle: Prioritizing UTK efforts towards Inclusive Excellence" posted at <http://lgross.utk.edu/Senate/MovingMoreThanTheNeedle.pdf>).

The vast majority of graduate students at SEC schools, no matter how outstanding their record, are simply not going to be hired into any faculty lines at these institutions without postdoc experience. In STEM fields (and I expect most every other) it really means that for the fraction of graduate students who wish to pursue an academic career at an R1

institution what matters is getting a postdoc at a premier institution. Success at that means highly focused networking in the limited time grad students have. I suspect faculty would indeed encourage their students with academic career goals to participate in the program the SEC has developed if it was clear there were a reasonable set of opportunities for postdoc support in top programs across the SEC. Without that, though some students may indeed find the learning opportunities available in this program of interest, it has little chance of enhancing the quality and diversity of faculty at SEC institutions. If UTK really wished to “outcompete” other SEC schools, advertising a large set of postdoc opportunities across diverse disciplines to the participants in this Emerging Scholar’s program would be one way to do it. Maybe some of the other SEC schools are already implementing such a scheme.

Regarding successful transitioning to positions in academia, there has generally been little guidance available to grad students on issues unrelated to their academic discipline but important to success in academic careers. So I developed and taught a seminar course on this last term – full details including all my slides are posted at <http://lgross.utk.edu/eeb504Spring2021.html> These materials may be helpful to those participating in the program.

Stay well,
Lou

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From: "Thompson, Dixie Lee" <dixielee@utk.edu>
Date: Thursday, July 1, 2021 at 4:35 PM
To: "Gross, Louis J" <lgross@tennessee.edu>
Cc: "Schussler, Elisabeth Ellen" <eschussl@utk.edu>,
"Spurgeon, Shawn Lamont" <sspurgeo@utk.edu>, "Zomchick,
John P" <zomchick@utk.edu>, "Kelly, Diane" <dianek@utk.edu>
Subject: FW: [DDDHLIST] SEC Emerging Scholars Program

Hi Lou

The SEC Emerging Scholars Program was an idea that came from the SEC Provosts, and it's my understanding they have been brainstorming about this for a couple of years. They wanted a program to assist with the recruitment of historically underrepresented faculty. The idea is to bring doctoral students from the SEC schools together, provide them with networking and mentoring, and let them know about faculty opportunities within the SEC. The ultimate hope is that some of them remain in the SEC member schools when they enter into the faculty ranks.

You'll note that the application/nomination prompts for the student and for the faculty member do not ask for the student to self-identify, nor does it ask the nominator to provide demographic information about the student. Banner contains demographic information that can be used by the selection committee as the cohort is chosen. So there is no need, nor is there any expectation, for any self-identification, unless the person chooses to provide such information.

Dr. Diane Kelly, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, is the UTK representative on the group putting this program together. Dr. Kelly is a tenured, full professor. She has been the person working with other SEC colleagues as this program has been crafted. As Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School, one of my roles in this program is to assist with soliciting students to take advantage of this important opportunity. I am tenured, full professor. So, to answer your question – Yes, faculty members were involved in helping to launch this program. Neither Diane nor I gave up our tenured status, faculty appointment, or

our passion for educating students when we accepted administrative appointments.

There are others involved in this as well. Dr. Ernest Brothers from the Graduate School and Dr. Javiette Samuel from the Office of Diversity and Engagement have been key in our early discussions. Both have worked alongside Diane and me during the early planning phases. We are in the process of putting together the selection committee that will have faculty members as well as staff from administrative offices. The charge placed before each school is to provide a cohort that is “diverse relative to demographics (e.g., year in program, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) and discipline.” We will provide information from our student information system that will assist the selection committee with creating a diverse cohort.

In the meantime, Dr. Brothers and I are putting together the year-long, on-campus training, mentoring and networking program that these students will participate in. Ernest and I have run a smaller, but similar, program for URM for the past 5 years. I am tremendously excited for the potential of this program.

Diane Kelly is working to identify faculty members from UTK who will be a part of the 2-day, online workshop that will be held in September for all of the SEC Emerging Scholars. That will be a wonderful chance for UTK faculty members to network with these young scholars.

I am hopeful that faculty will encourage their students to apply for this program. Sometimes a word of encouragement from a mentor is just the thing that opens a student’s eyes to possibilities. It is my hope that all faculty, not just the Faculty Senate, will embrace this program for the potential that it brings to our students and to our campus as a whole.

Sincerely,
Dixie

Dixie L. Thompson, Ph.D.

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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From: Dean of the Graduate School <gradschooldean@utk.edu>
Date: Thursday, July 1, 2021 at 12:27 PM
To: "Thompson, Dixie Lee" <dixielee@utk.edu>
Subject: FW: [DDDHLIST] SEC Emerging Scholars Program

FYI

From: Gross, Louis J <lgross@tennessee.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, June 30, 2021 8:55 PM
To: Dean of the Graduate School <gradschooldean@utk.edu>
Cc: Gross, Louis J <lgross@tennessee.edu>; Schussler, Elisabeth Ellen <eschussl@utk.edu>; Spurgeon, Shawn Lamont <sspurgeo@utk.edu>
Subject: Re: [DDDHLIST] SEC Emerging Scholars Program

Dean Thompson,

I am responding to this in my role as Faculty Senate President. I wish to be sure faculty are clear on the program expectations. The notice clearly states this "is an opportunity for historically underrepresented minority doctoral students who have an expressed interest in securing faculty appointments in higher education. The year-long program will include a workshop meant to encourage top scholars, particularly those from historically underrepresented groups, to seek out employment and mentorship within the SEC member universities." The application requirements say nothing about "historically underrepresented minority" status. So my assumption is that this

program is open to all students and that the selection criteria do not involve any aspect of the student's status as a member of a historically underrepresented minority, but is based only on the scholarly capabilities of the student as a potential faculty member.

The application does not request information on a student's status as a member of a historically underrepresented minority. This can place a faculty member in the highly uncomfortable position of deciding whether they should point out that a student self-identifies in a historically underrepresented minority. Additionally, the faculty member's statement is provided by the student, so the student is aware of how they are being described by the faculty member. There is an additional issue associated with the underlying assumption in this program that those from historically underrepresented minority groups "particularly" benefit from a program such as this in order to advance to be considered for SEC faculty positions.

I'd be interested in knowing who on the UTK faculty were involved in setting this program up. As it is, I find the above issues make this program quite problematic. Perhaps Past-President Spurgeon and President-Elect Schussler will have other comments, but my intention is to ask the Graduate Council to consider this program and the concerns I expressed during this year.

Stay well,
Lou

--

Louis J. Gross (he, him, his)
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Professor
of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and Mathematics
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Director, The Institute for Environmental Modeling
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From: Deans Directors Department Heads
<DDDHLIST@LISTSERV.UTK.EDU> on behalf of Dean of the
Graduate School <[000000e4715dda4b-dmarc-
request@LISTSERV.UTK.EDU](mailto:000000e4715dda4b-dmarc-request@LISTSERV.UTK.EDU)>

Reply-To: Dean of the Graduate School
<gradschooldean@utk.edu>

Date: Wednesday, June 30, 2021 at 5:28 PM

To: "DDDHLIST@LISTSERV.UTK.EDU"
<DDDHLIST@LISTSERV.UTK.EDU>

Subject: [DDDHLIST] SEC Emerging Scholars Program

Dear Colleagues

The purpose of this message is to alert you to a new initiative by the SEC (Southeastern Conference) member schools. The SEC Emerging Scholars Program will give doctoral students from historically underrepresented groups opportunities to learn more about faculty positions across the SEC.

This yearlong mentoring and networking opportunity will focus on professional development for those interested in becoming faculty members. This competitive program will include a two-day online workshop hosted by the SEC member schools, as well as professional development activities throughout the 2021-2022 school year. See the attached call for applications for more details.

Please share information about this exciting and potentially transformational opportunity. A personal note of

encouragement from you to graduate students inviting them to apply could potentially change their professional trajectory, so be sure to share. If you have questions, send them to gradschool@utk.edu.

Sincerely,

Dixie L. Thompson, Ph.D.
Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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