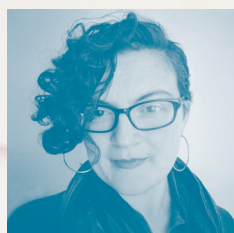


29th Annual Institute on Teaching and Mentoring

# connect build grow




Tips on how to make  
the most of the Institute  
from graduates



October 2022





*“The Institute has been an oasis to many weary graduate students as they progress through the journey from entering a new academic setting to defending a thesis. Non-minority faculty and students sometimes dismiss the unique life challenges that we sometimes encounter. I consider myself lucky to have been a part of its efforts.”*

— Dr. Chris Cornelius, SREB program graduate

# connect build grow

For 29 years, the Institute on Teaching and Mentoring, hosted by the SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program, has prepared underrepresented minority doctoral scholars to enter the professoriate.

The challenges that come with the rigorous studies in pursuit of the Ph.D. are enough on their own. Add the isolating feeling of being the only doctoral candidate of color on campus, or one of the few, and it can be overwhelming.

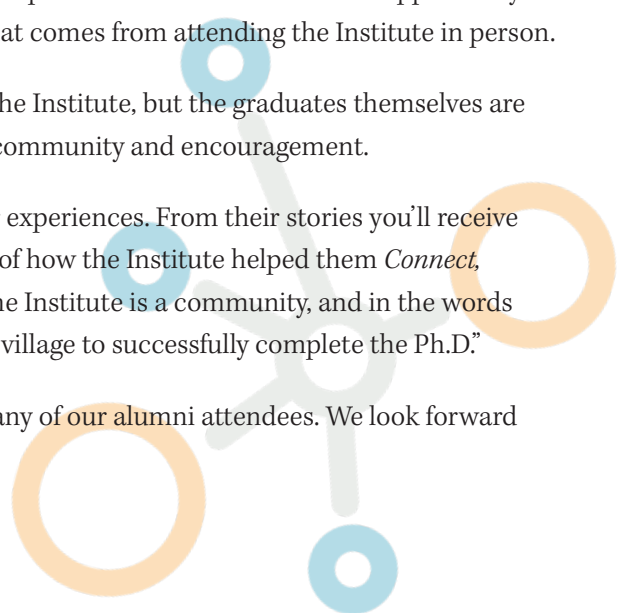
The COVID-19 pandemic forced the Doctoral Scholars Program to cancel the October in-person Institute for two years in a row. Along with our partners at the Sloan Foundation, NASA, Gates, McNair, and other programs with similar missions, we had to pivot to provide support in tangible ways to our scholars. DSP developed a webinar series and other special programming, which included a virtual graduation ceremony in 2020 for DSP and Sloan scholars. We then held a virtual Institute in 2021, and this spring a virtual networking event for current DSP scholars.

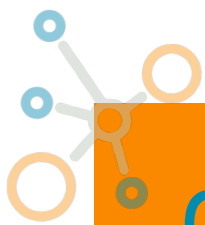
While those offerings did present the opportunity to *Connect, Build, and Grow* — the theme for the 2022 Institute — there are now several cohorts from DSP and our partners who've never had the opportunity to experience the energy and professional development that comes from attending the Institute in person.

Our organizations can tell the history and the mission of the Institute, but the graduates themselves are the best people to tell the stories of triumph, motivation, community and encouragement.

In the pages that follow, six Institute graduates share their experiences. From their stories you'll receive not only words of encouragement, but the understanding of how the Institute helped them *Connect, Build, and Grow* with peers, mentors and opportunities. The Institute is a community, and in the words of SREB graduate Dr. Melvin (Jai) Jackson, "It truly takes a village to successfully complete the Ph.D."

The Institute has been called a "life-changing event" by many of our alumni attendees. We look forward to including you in that number.





connect build grow



*“I feel like I carry the Institute with me and the experience of being an SREB scholar in a lot of the spaces that I go into.”*

## Dr. Miranda Hill

1000th SREB-State Doctoral  
Scholars Program Scholar (2019)

Postdoctoral Scholar-Fellow  
at the Center for AIDS  
Prevention Studies  
University of California,  
San Francisco

Dr. Miranda Hill, the 1000th graduate of the SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program, credits DSP and the Institute with helping her manage expectations so that she feels more resilient.

“I remember a pivotal moment at the Institute when I heard a faculty member of color talk about the challenges she had,” Dr. Hill said. “It was a good reality check for me, to be in that environment and hear people openly talk about racism they’ve experienced and other intersecting forms of oppression and marginalization within [academia]. It really prepared me — when I’ve come up against that, I’ve been able to deal with it in a way that can change the environment.” She says the Institute prepared her to create a toolkit and equip herself with the support systems and resources she needed. For Dr. Hill that included getting a life coach for high-achieving Black women and a therapist with experience with academic stress.

“The Institute made me realize how small the world was,” Dr. Hill said, “to see so many underrepresented minoritized scholars in one place and so many other people that I’d heard about.”

One of those people was Dr. Sula Hood, whom Dr. Hill had met at an NIH training. They later reconnected at the Institute, where they learned they were both SREB scholars. Dr. Hill credits Dr. Hood as an “informal” mentor: “I didn’t feel any power dynamics in place. It was nice to be able to have that type of relationship, especially when you don’t see many faculty of color at your home institution.”



*“Get up, attend the sessions, listen, and take notes. Utilize that network to help yourself to become a better scholar, a better researcher, and a better individual.”*

### **Dr. Melvin (Jai) Jackson**

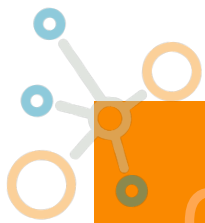
Assistant Vice Provost  
for Faculty Engagement  
Office for Institutional Equity  
and Diversity  
North Carolina State University

Dr. Melvin (Jai) Jackson says his biggest surprise, the first time he attended the Institute, was seeing people who spanned race, ethnicity and gender identity. “I thought this was just for people of color,” Dr. Jackson said. “Then a more experienced scholar said, ‘This conference is for individuals who are underrepresented in their field.’ It took me a minute to realize that underrepresentation looks different depending on the field, and I was excited because this gave me the opportunity to grow some connections.”

He remembers hearing Dr. Abraham speak. “Just the passion that he had for this effort and the purpose of the Institute, I thought, this is amazing. We were there with folks from AGEP, Sloan, and other programs, and it just amazed me to see so many doctoral candidates, students and Ph.D.s in one space.”

Dr. Jackson also took note of the many conversations that flowed freely at the Institute. “You’d hear people talking about molecular biology and quantum physics and then you’d see someone from social sciences jump in. They’re talking about pedagogical strategies of teaching molecular biology to individuals who are first generation and might not have access to this information, and I’m thinking, look at the interdisciplinary opportunities that are spanning from this.”

“As a result of the Institute, I now collaborate with a lot of individuals from various disciplines to talk about how we can better support students, doctoral candidates and junior faculty, and I love it. It has truly helped give me a clear trajectory and direction toward the things that I’m passionate about.”



# connect build grow



*“A resounding message of the Institute is mentoring. You can get mentors from everywhere and get what you need at the time. Ask for help.”*

## Dr. Carrie Diaz Eaton

Associate Professor of Digital and Computational Studies  
Bates College, Lewiston, Maine

Visiting Research Faculty, ICERM@  
Brown University ('22 - '23)

Co-founder and PI of the Institute  
for a Racially Just, Open, and  
Inclusive STEM education (RIOS  
Institute)

Dr. Carrie Diaz Eaton describes herself as a shy person but says that the practice of connecting with other people at the Institute is a good exercise. “Working up the nerve to speak to someone you don’t know, introducing yourself, and trying to figure out how to get yourself in the circle and then exchanging business cards became a norm in practice.” She urges others to “take advantage of these networking opportunities, especially if this is the first in-person conference you’ve attended this year.”

Dr. Diaz Eaton was able to get research funding for a year because “The NIH program officer at the Institute talked about a special supplement available to scholars if their advisor had an NIH award. So you wouldn’t have to teach, just focus on your research, and that’s pretty important.” During the Institute Dr. Diaz Eaton says she received lots of good information, feedback and tips that she was able to use to engage in conversation with the NIH program officer.

When Dr. Diaz Eaton returned to the Institute as a graduate, she said she greatly benefited from the CV review services. “As you move forward in life and your CV changes, you want to make sure it still reflects who you are, where you want to go and what you want to be. I had a really good experience with the person I was matched up with to review my CV. I got a lot of good advice, on everything from typesetting to how to phrase something, and it was awesome. I feel like that made a huge difference in my getting a tenure-track job.”



“While I learned from belonging to the Institute, the greater effort was to try and help others on their journey.”

### Dr. Chris Cornelius

Department Chair,  
Department of Materials  
Science and Engineering  
Iowa State University

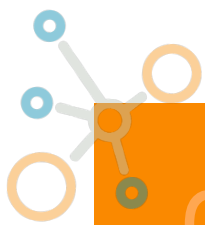
Dr. Chris Cornelius considers himself lucky to have been a part of the SREB-State Doctoral Scholar Program and the Institute’s efforts.

“The Institute has been an oasis to many weary graduate students as they progress from entering a new academic setting to defending a thesis. Non-minority faculty and students sometimes dismiss the unique life challenges that we sometimes encounter,” said Dr. Cornelius, who is a member of the Oneida tribe, which is part of the larger Iroquois Nation.

An early fellow in the Doctoral Scholars Program, Dr. Cornelius participated from 1997-2000. “I came into SREB from its beginning, and the emphasis was on successfully graduating from the program.” While his first step on the post-Institute journey was not a faculty position, he “kept those experiences and later moved into academia.”

“The Institute opened the concept of academia to me as a scientist at Sandia National Laboratories,” said Dr. Cornelius, who also edits the *Journal of Materials Science*.

Dr. Cornelius, who has been nationally recognized for his mentorship of Native American students in STEM, learned a great deal from being a part of the Institute. Yet even then he understood that the greater effort was to try and help others on their journey. “I have pointed to many of the values created by SREB that may not be fully appreciated. I believe mentoring was inherent to its foundation.”



# connect build grow



“SREB is invested in you. All of you.

*Makes us feel comfortable sharing the struggles just as much as the achievements and that’s something special about the Institute.”*

## Dr. Elsa Camargo

Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
Co-Coordinator, Hispanic Serving Graduate Leadership Preparation Graduate Certificate  
University of Texas at Arlington

Dr. Elsa Camargo attended her first Institute as an SREB Dissertation scholar and says the opportunity came at the perfect time. “I got a lot of energy just by visibly seeing so many people of color pursuing these degrees, or who had already completed the path and were there to support people like me. That feeling was something I needed, coming from being at a Predominantly White Institution and in general going through higher education and not having professors who I felt could relate to me beyond just the content we were learning.”

She also found a genuine community that went beyond just peer-to-peer connections. “It wasn’t just about trying to create relationships with other Ph.D. students, but also having conversations with undergraduate students who were thinking about pursuing the Ph.D.,” Dr. Camargo said. “I found the Institute community to be supportive in my progression, but I also understood that we were there to support others.”

The speeches from the graduating scholars were also memorable for Dr. Camargo. “Some graduates said they went from a GED to a Ph.D., or that they were already parents. Those are beautiful, inspirational stories and ones that we don’t hear often because we tend to shut down what happened before, all the hard times.”

“The Ph.D. itself, yes, it’s a great accomplishment, but everything that came right before getting to that point is an accomplishment,” Dr. Camargo said.

“I come from a community that is predominately Mexican and lower social class,” Dr. Camargo said. “For underrepresented groups, we don’t always feel comfortable sharing the personal side and how do we balance it because not all the environments allow you to feel comfortable doing that. That was not the case at the Institute.”



# connect build grow



*“What’s guaranteed to happen is that you will leave the Institute energized and rejuvenated and remotivated to be focused.”*

## Dr. Toyin Ajisafe

Program Officer, National Center  
for Medical Rehabilitation Research  
*Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National  
Institute of Child Health and  
Human Development  
National Institutes of Health

When Dr. Toyin Ajisafe first attended the Institute, he says what blew his mind was “the sheer number of Ph.D.s from underrepresented minority groups all under the same roof, and hearing their stories and struggles, including from people who almost quit. There were people who understood the journey as someone from an underrepresented group, and there were successful faculty who had big grants who were, in many cases, African American or Black. There were students from all over.” He calls it a “great leveler — people from Ivy League schools, people from public universities, and we all got to interact.”

Dr. Ajisafe says the seed of his current role came after hearing a presentation at that meeting from a program officer at the NIH. “It wasn’t until later, the summer of 2020 when George Floyd happened, that I went back to thinking, how might I be able to make an impact beyond what I’m currently doing? Right away I thought of NIH because of that exposure at the Institute.”

Dr. Ajisafe grew up in Nigeria, where he says most people looked like him, so going through the school system he never second-guessed his abilities. “It wasn’t until I came to the U.S. that I started to feel — I didn’t have language for it at the time — what’s called imposter syndrome. My background is in biomechanics, and I would go to conferences and be one of just a couple of Black people. So, I started to have the feeling of maybe I don’t belong here, maybe I’m not good enough. It was through SREB and the Institute that I found the language that helped me come through that.”



# institute statistics (2019)

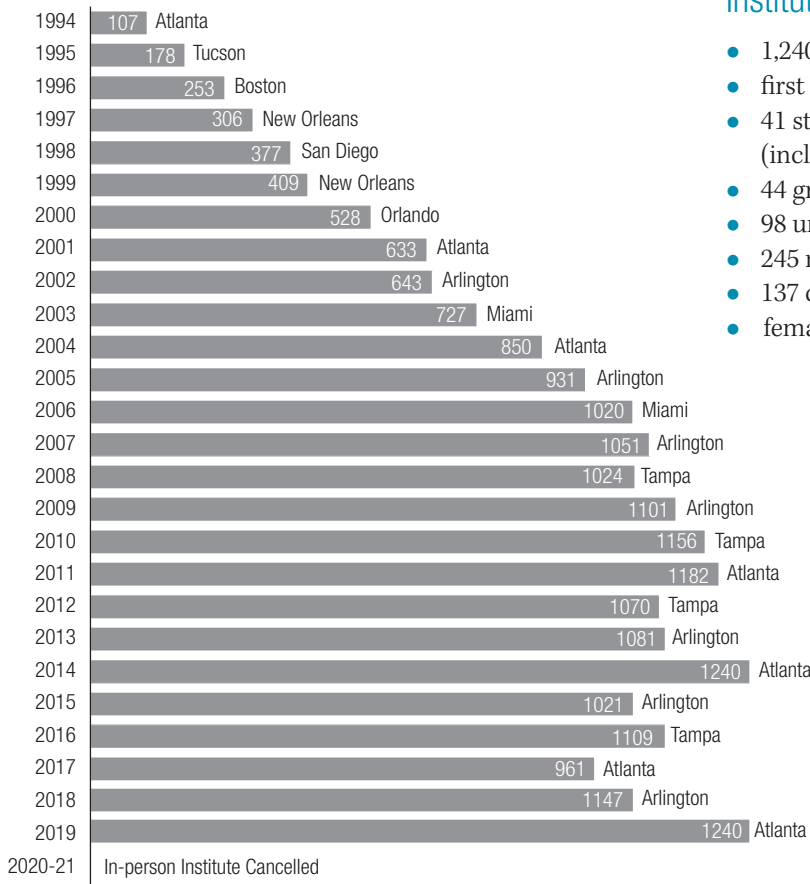
## Race and Ethnicity

- African American - 51%
- Hispanic - 19%
- Caucasian - 11%
- Asian American - 2%
- Native American - 2%
- Other - 4%
- Did not identify - 11%

## Attendance by Discipline

- Business and Management - 3%
- Education - 13%
- Health Professions - 5%
- Humanities - 8%
- Mathematics - 3%
- Science & Technology - 31%
- Engineering - 18%
- Social & Behavioral Sciences - 19%

## Institute Attendance by Year



## Institute Data

- 1,240 attendees
- first time attendee - 51%
- 41 states represented by participants (includes the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico)
- 44 graduates recognized
- 98 universities represented at Recruitment Fair
- 245 recruiter representatives
- 137 disciplines represented
- female - 61%, male - 37%, other - 2%



2019 Institute attendees

The Institute on Teaching and Mentoring is pleased to recognize these partner organizations:

- Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Minority Ph.D. Program
- Gates Millennium Scholars Program
- Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration Office of STEM Engagement
- Monarchs Maximizing Access to Research Careers (M-MARC)
- Southern Regional Education Board

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**SREB.org**

October 2022

