The following is a guest column from Vicki Simonsmeier, Discipline Coordinator for Speech-Language Pathology in the URLEND program. She is also a faculty fellow at the CPD. USU, as one of the principal sites of the Utah Regional Leadership in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (URLEND) grant, was chosen to participate in a Diversity Collaborative. It was sponsored by Maternal and Child Health, the grant agency for the URLEND program. Our goal was to create a non-traditional pipeline to increase the number of trainees from diverse backgrounds in URLEND programs. Utah Regional Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities is one of 30 LEND interdisciplinary training programs across the nation. It is a joint effort of the University of Utah School of Medicine-Department of Pediatrics, Utah State University’s CPD, and the Utah Department of Health’s Bureau for Children with Special Health Care Needs. It’s co-directed by Judith Holt At USU the URLEND program already had ties to Multicultural Student Services (MSS) through Juan Carlos Vazquez, a faculty member in URLEND. Mr. Vazquez knows intimately the information that a first generation college student and their family needs in making a decision to enter a university training program. Additionally, Mr. Sam Curley, the head of the Native American Student program within the MSS has agreed to share information about the URLEND program during his recruitment work with students. All USU recruiters agreed to share information about the URLEND program; to further this effort, URLEND is developing an informational flyer to include in all USU recruitment packets.

Another effort undertaken to accomplish our diversity goals was through the Nutrition and Food Science program at USU. The USU program uses video technology to provide supervision to Dietitian students during their clinical placements. Dr. Nedra Christensen, URLEND faculty member, made contact with the University of New Mexico and New Mexico State in order to set up cooperative agreements so that Spanish – speaking nutrition students requiring supervision during their placements would be enrolled at USU. The students will be supervised via distance technology in order that they might complete their requirements and become certified dietitians. These diverse students will be eligible as URLEND trainees and will increase the number of diverse dietitians in the field once they complete this supervised training.

The collaborative resulted in new community relationships. One of those is the Health Career Opportunities Programs (HCOP) at Weber State University in Ogden. Dr. Judith Holt made contact with Ms. Christy Jones, the director of HCOP. The relationship between
HCOP and USU resulted in 30 youth from diverse backgrounds attending 2 days of experiential learning in URLEND disciplines on the USU campus. This is a relationship which will continue and will be expanded over the coming years.

Through the collaborative, alliances were also made at Diné College, a Navajo public institution of higher education in Tsaile, Arizona. Since residents of Utah who are Navajo can attend Diné, a meeting was held with faculty and staff there to discuss their curriculum and how we could share information about health care careers with their students. This developing relationship has fostered the development of introductory videotapes and lectures to be shared with students on the Diné campus.

URLEND has incorporated the Diversity Collaborative goals within the goals of the URLEND program to achieve the goal of increasing the numbers of trainees from diverse backgrounds within all of our partner states.