

June 13, 2013

## **37 African-American Students Awarded Prestigious UNCF•Merck Science Initiative Scholarships and Fellowships in Biosciences**

WASHINGTON , June 13 /Businesswire/ - The UNCF•MERCK Science Initiative (UMSI)—a partnership of UNCF (the United Negro College Fund) and global health care industry leader Merck--today announced that it would award scholarships and fellowships to 37 of the country's most accomplished and promising African-American undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral students of biological science and engineering.

The new Merck Fellows, the 18<sup>th</sup> class to be selected under the long-running program, have studied at elite private colleges, flagship state universities and historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). They all have stellar academic records and visionary aspirations. A University of Pennsylvania graduate student wants to trace the causes of neurological disorders. A graduate of UNCF member HBCU Tougaloo University is now pursuing M.D. and Ph.D. degrees to study the immune system's role in the creation of tumors. And a senior biology major at the University of Alabama-Birmingham wants to study neurology and conduct research into epilepsy and other neurodegenerative diseases.

"By supporting the UNCF•MERCK Science Initiative, Merck is investing in the next generation of biological science and technology researchers and scholars that we need to be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century," said UNCF president and CEO Michael L. Lomax, PhD. "The UNCF•MERCK Fellows need to invest as well, by mentoring and preparing the generation that comes after them. They must also be passionate advocates for a strong pre-college STEM curriculum and strong science and math teachers to introduce young people to STEM."

"Merck is proud of our long-standing partnership with UNCF," said Kenneth C. Frazier, Merck Chairman and CEO. "As a leading healthcare company deeply committed to innovative R&D, we need to tap into the full range of talent and ideas available. This important initiative helps ensure that outstanding African-American students can play a key role in addressing the significant and growing medical need here in the U.S. and around the world."

Now in its eighteenth year, UMSI is a twenty-year partnership that has supported 663 scholarships and fellowships to 626 promising undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral science students pursuing careers in biomedical research. UMSI also leverages the UNCF-Merck partnership and the talent of UNCF•MERCK Fellows to attract students to STEM subjects-- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics—as early as elementary school to increase the pipeline of qualified African-American STEM students and cultivate minority leadership in the fields that will dominate job growth for the next generation. UNCF member institutions in particular have a strong commitment to this effort, awarding 16 percent of their degrees in STEM disciplines compared to 12 percent for all four- year institutions nationally.

With the U.S. on track to become a majority-minority society, UMSI aims to increase the number of African- American undergraduates studying in STEM disciplines to ensure the country has the leaders it needs in these fields to be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. American undergraduate students tend to select natural science and engineering (NS&E) disciplines as their primary field of study at considerably lower rates than their counterparts in other countries, according to the National Science Board's *Science and Engineering Indicators 2012*. Even though the numbers of African-Americans in the biological sciences is less than 5%, the UMSI attracts more than 90% of African Americans pursuing advanced degrees in biolife sciences.

Merck and UNCF began UMSI in 1995 with a ten-year, \$20 million grant from the Merck Foundation and Merck Research Laboratories. The project was extended in 2006 with an additional \$13 million grant and again in 2011 with an additional investment of \$13.3 million over five years.

The 2013 UNCF•MERCK Fellows receive awards ranging from \$25,000 for undergraduate scholarship recipients to \$92,000 for recipients of postdoctoral fellowships. In addition, the program's alumni have organized the Association of Underrepresented Minority Fellows to facilitate continued professional growth. This network allows UNCF•MERCK Fellows to collaborate in academia, government and the private sector to leverage their wealth of scientific, technical and biomedical knowledge and experience.

Support from the UNCF•MERCK Science Initiative scholarships targets students entering their final undergraduate year, graduate students in their final two-to-three years of dissertation research, and postdoctoral Fellows continuing their research training. African-American students in the life, physical and engineering sciences at American four-year colleges and universities are eligible to apply for the scholarship. In addition to scholarships and fellowships, the UNCF•MERCK awards may include funding for the science departments at the colleges and universities they attend. Undergraduate Fellows receive summer research internships at Merck Research Laboratories, where each Fellow is paired with a Merck mentor who provides valuable research assistance, guidance and support.

"I am grateful for the support of the UNCF•MERCK Fellowship as I continue my journey to become a physician-scientist. Learning more about the many health disparities that exist in our underserved communities motivates me to contribute by providing clinical and scientific solutions to these problems," said Courtney Johnson, an alumna of UNCF member Tougaloo University, a 2013 Fellow and a graduate student in pathobiology at Brown University's Warren Alpert Medical School. "UMSI has come at a critical moment in my career, providing financial resources and mentorship support to assist me in completing my journey. Furthermore, as I am able to successfully advance through my graduate program, I am well positioned to continue to mentor the undergraduate and high school students who work in our labs."

You can learn more about the UNCF•MERCK Science Initiative by visiting <http://umsi.uncf.org/>, or joining our Twitter conversation at #UNCF&MRK.

## About UNCF

UNCF (United Negro College Fund) is the nation's largest and most effective minority education organization. To serve youth, the community and the nation, UNCF supports students' education and development through scholarships and other programs, strengthens its 38 member colleges and universities, and advocates for the importance of minority education and college readiness. Today, UNCF supports more than 60,000 students at over 900 colleges and universities across the country. UNCF administers more than 400 programs, including scholarship, internship and fellowship, mentoring, summer enrichment, and curriculum and faculty development programs. UNCF institutions and other historically black colleges and universities are highly effective, awarding more than 20 percent of African- American baccalaureate degrees. The UNCF logo features the UNCF torch of leadership in education and its widely recognized motto, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."® Learn more at [www.UNCF.org](http://www.UNCF.org).

## About Merck

Today's Merck is a global healthcare leader working to help the world be well. Merck is known as MSD outside the United States and Canada. Through our prescription medicines, vaccines, biologic therapies, and consumer care and animal health products, we work with customers and operate in more than 140 countries to deliver innovative health solutions. We also demonstrate our commitment to increasing access to healthcare through far-reaching policies, programs and partnerships. For more information, visit [www.merck.com](http://www.merck.com) with us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).

## About The Merck Foundation

The Merck Company Foundation is a U.S.-based, private charitable foundation. Established in 1957 by Merck, a global healthcare leader, the Foundation is funded entirely by the company and is Merck's chief source of funding support to qualified non-profit, charitable organizations. Since its inception, The Merck Company Foundation has contributed more than \$700 million to support important initiatives that address societal needs and are consistent with Merck's overall mission to help the world be well. For more information, visit [www.merckgiving.com](http://www.merckgiving.com).

## 2013 UNCF•MERCK SCIENCE INITIATIVE FELLOWS

### *Undergraduate Science Research Scholarship Awards (up to \$25,000 each)*

- **Uzoamaka C. Agubokwu**, Lincoln University of Pennsylvania (Lincoln University, PA)
- **Maurice A. Asouzu**, University of Alabama, Birmingham (Birmingham, AL)
- **Olayode O. Babatunde**, University of Alabama, Birmingham (Birmingham, AL)
- **Akeadra E. Bell**, Elizabeth City State University (Elizabeth City, NC)
- **Gavin Coombs**, High Point University (High Point, NC)
- **Robyn T. Harper**, University of Maryland at College Park (College Park, MD)

- **Rena Ingram**, Fort Valley State University (Fort Valley, GA)
- **Jarvis J. Johnson**, University of Alabama, Birmingham (Birmingham, AL)
- **Kenyaria Noble**, University of South Florida (Tampa, FL)
- **Elizabeth Ogunrinde**, Florida State University (Tallahassee, FL)
- **Uchenna C. Okoro**, University of Maryland Baltimore County (Baltimore, MD)
- **Chinonso Opara**, University of Washington (Seattle, WA)
- **Achaia J. Taltoan**, Kentucky State University (Frankfort, KY)
- **Sarra Z. Tekola**, University of Washington (Seattle, WA)
- **Ezigbobiara N. Umejiego**, Kennesaw State University (Kennesaw, GA)

***Graduate Science Research Dissertation Fellowships (up to \$53,500 each)***

- **Olukemi O. Akintewe**, University of South Florida (Tampa, FL)
- **Omotayo A. Arowojolu**, New York University School of Medicine (New York, NY)
- **Amma Asare**, Weill Cornell Medical College (New York, NY)
- **Tamar Carter**, University of Florida (Gainesville, FL)
- **Wilbert B. Copeland**, University of Washington (Seattle, WA)
- **Chimdimma Esimai**, Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta, GA)
- **Frankie D. Heyward**, University of Alabama, Birmingham (Birmingham, AL)
- **Brian S.R. Johnson**, University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Courtney M. Johnson**, Brown University (Providence, RI)
- **Samuel J. Laurencin**, Drexel University College of Medicine (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Jason McSheene**, Princeton University (Princeton, NJ)
- **Anthony Williams**, University of Miami (Miami, FL)

***Postdoctoral Science research Fellows (up to \$92,000 each)***

- **Ericka L. Anderson, Ph.D.**, University of California, San Diego (La Jolla, CA)
- **Anoklase Ayitou, Ph.D.**, University of California, Los Angeles (Los Angeles, CA)
- **Muyinatu Bell, Ph.D.**, Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, MD)
- **Zufan Debebe, Ph.D.**, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Chapel Hill, NC)
- **Mehabaw G. Derebe, Ph.D.**, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center (Dallas, TX)
- **Faith L. Hall-Glenn, Ph.D.**, University of California, San Francisco (San Francisco, CA)
- **Geoffrey K. Kilili, Ph.D.**, National Institutes of Health (Bethesda, MD)
- **Jeremy M. Lott, Ph.D.**, University of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA)
- **Jennifer L. McLarty, Ph.D.**, University of Alabama, Birmingham (Birmingham, AL)
- **Martin N. Shelon, Ph.D.**, Institute for Systems Biology (Seattle, WA)