



Diversity Advisory Council

Outstanding UMB Staff Award

UMB CURE Scholars Program

Princaya Sanders used to dream of being a professional wrestler. Now, she has her heart set on anesthesiology. Shakeer Franklin was a disruptive, inattentive middle school student. Now, he plans to be a psychotherapist. Nicholas Knight aspired to be an NFL football player. Now he sees a career in health care.

These are just three of the lives that have been changed by the UMB CURE Scholars Program, which for three years has been taking young people from West Baltimore with an interest in science and molding them into future health care workers and researchers through hands-on workshops, lab experiences, and mentorship.

The UMB CURE Scholars Program's central leadership team will receive the Outstanding UMB Staff Award as part of the University's Black History Month celebration on Feb. 1.

When informed of the program's selection of this award, executive director Robin Saunders, EdD, MS, noted, "This program is truly a labor of love for all of us on the central leadership team. I am honored to work with a team of committed professionals who work tirelessly to positively impact and transform the lives of young West Baltimore students and their families.

"I am amazed at the progress of our scholars who were often overlooked and perhaps even written off due to the socio-economic status of their neighborhoods. This program demonstrates that when students have opportunities and high expectations, they can rise to immeasurable heights."



Launched in October 2015, the program has grown to include 80 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders, not to mention the nearly 200 mentors from UMB schools recruited by CURE staff members. The UMB CURE Scholars are the youngest ever to participate in the National Cancer Institute's Continuing Umbrella of Research Experiences (CURE) national program. With the first cohort of UMB CURE middle schoolers entering high school in fall 2018, their improved grades, including math and reading scores, and stellar school attendance becomes all the more important.

After school on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, the scholars are transported to the Baltimore City Community College Life Sciences Institute at the University of Maryland BioPark for their training with mentors. On Saturdays, they meet at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy to take part in A Bridge to Academic Excellence, where they receive tutoring.

The UMB Writing Center also has held workshops to help prepare the students for the college application process. Field trips have included museums, mechanical engineering labs, pharmacy and dental school, anatomy class, planetary presentations. Summer camps have exposed the scholars to new discoveries as well.

"I think it's amazing," said sixth-grade scholar Jazire Faw. "Last week we dissected a sheep's eye, and I thought that was really cool."

By enhancing that love of science from groups under-represented in the biomedical and health care workforces, UMB hopes to create a pipeline that will see the scholars through college into rewarding careers — breaking the cycle of poverty so prevalent in West Baltimore.

"We've established that in these students we've got talent to spare, but now we have to make the opportunity," UMB President Jay A. Perman, MD, said on Saturday, Oct. 14, as the third cohort of CURE scholars slipped on the program's signature white laboratory coats.

“We have to dismantle the barriers that separate our young people from their potential and from their purpose. We have to give these students what they need to rise, because I’ve seen them rise, and it’s beautiful to watch.”

Each year at UMB’s Black History Month celebration the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diversity Recognition Awards are presented for individual and/or group achievements in the areas of diversity and inclusiveness. The recipients serve as models of the ideals epitomized by the life and work of Dr. King.

Saunders is proud the UMB CURE Scholars Program is taking its place among former outstanding staff recipients.

“We are thrilled to be recognized for our challenging and complex, yet rewarding work,” she said. “We are grateful to have been selected for this prestigious award named after a great man who gave his life to improve conditions for people who, like our scholars, are often overlooked, forgotten, and perhaps even written off. This award is a blessing and we greatly appreciate this acknowledgment on behalf of the many mentors, faculty, staff, and partners who support our important work, our amazing scholars, and our comprehensive program.”

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