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UM Scholars Make Research A Team Sport

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The University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) and the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) rounded out a summer of research with an event that emphasized the importance of collaboration among health sciences and students pursuing careers in them.

On July 27, students from both universities, taking part in the University of Maryland Scholars Program, gathered in the SMC Campus Center at UMB to present their research through oral and poster presentations at a daylong forum.

UM Scholars is a 10-week educational program that connects students from UMB and UMCP to faculty mentors at the opposite university. The participating students broaden their scope of knowledge by conducting summer research projects designed to tap into the complimentary resources offered at each university. The program comes to a culminating finish with the Student Research Forum.



Netsanet Woldegerima, a UM Scholar and second-year medical student at UMSOM, presents research on the engineering and coding aspects of medical equipment and software.

The annual event is overseen and sponsored by the Office of Student Research, University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM). This year, the UM Scholar presenters were among 111 talented students who had been competitively selected into nine intense, mentored programs including Nathan Schnaper Intern Program in Transitional Cancer Research (NSIP), Summer Program in Obesity, Diabetes & Nutrition Research

Training (SPORT), and University of Maryland Program for Research Initiated by Students and Mentors (PRISM). The students all presented their research findings, which came from innovative projects based in basic, clinical, translational and epidemiological, and humanism research fields.

(View a [photo gallery](#).)

Through this annual forum, these programs, among others, have been brought into a family that allows broader experiences and exposure for the students as well as the sharing of ideas and resources between programs and their directors.

Gregory B. Carey, PhD, associate professor and director of student research and community outreach at UMSOM, launched the UM Scholars Program in 2012 after joining the Office of Student Research. Carey realized that there were many pockets of research happening across the universities during the summer and he wanted to bring them together in one concourse.

“We wanted to emphasize and show how much could be achieved through collaboration and teamwork among both students and professionals and to encourage synergy between programs,” explains Carey.

This dedication to research collaboration continues to grow every year. What began with just two students in 2012 has grown to 26 UM Scholars partaking in research opportunities at both UMB and UMCP. Fourteen undergraduates spent the summer with researchers at UMSOM, two undergraduates worked with researchers at the University of Maryland School of Nursing (UMSON), while 10 UMB students representing UMSOM, UMSON, as well as the schools of law and social work, spent 10 weeks engaged in innovation and enrichment projects at College Park.

The collaboration among health professionals and prospective health professionals is taken a step further with the addition of the annual Student Research Forum, which includes students ranging in education levels from high school to graduate. It perfectly executes Carey’s vision of synergy among programs and paints a new picture for the term, student research.

“When people hear ‘research lab’, they think of one person hunched over a table, but it’s so much more than that,” says **Rena Lapidus, PhD**, associate professor at UMSOM. “Many people play a part in research, it’s a team sport.”

Lapidus has been a mentor at NSIP for the last nine years and she has seen, firsthand, the impact this sense of collaboration and community can have on students interested in pursuing a career in health sciences.

“This really opens their eyes to what they could be doing and other fields they have yet to explore,” says Lapidus. “One of [the scholars] said to me that when she walked into the program she was thinking of being an MD. Now she’s changed her mind and wants to do research.”

Daphine Kwesiga, a UM Scholar and second-year medical student at UMSOM, had an eye-opening experience during her summer research at UMCP. Kwesiga grew up in Uganda where she studied different cancer treatments at the Uganda Cancer Institute. Keeping in the vein of cancer treatment she decided to delve deeper into her medical interests this summer by conducting research on the creation and delivery of prescription drugs to treat ovarian cancer.

Kwesiga tested combinations of chemotherapy with medications to see which one would expose patients to the least amount of toxicity while still responding positively to the cancer treatment. Through her research, Kwesiga realized that treating patients is only one piece of the puzzle. She was amazed at how much time and collaboration it takes to put new prescription drugs on the market, emphasizing how important the sharing of medical research is to her career aspirations and the future of medicine.

“There’s no path ahead for medicine without research,” Kwesiga says. “It’s great that we help patients day-to-day in the clinics, but without research we can’t take medicine to the next level.”

Meanwhile, fellow UM Scholar and second-year medical student **Netsanet Woldegerima** used her summer of research to explore the engineering and coding aspects of medical equipment and software that she affectionately refers to as “the backyard” of medicine. Woldegerima wants to pursue a hands-on specialty like surgery and says UM Scholars allowed her to collaborate with highly skilled researchers at UMCP and gain potentially life-saving skills she never would have learned in her current area of study.

“Now that I know how to use the different programs and software that we use to run simulations, I will be better able to trouble-shoot problems that I may encounter with robotic surgery or anything that involves simulations,” she explains. “I think that will help me in the long run, especially since medical school curriculum doesn’t have anything to do with programming or how to script.”

UM Scholars is a project under the umbrella of the [University of Maryland Strategic Partnership: MPowering the State](#) (*MPower*). Now in its seventh year, *MPower*’s goal is to leverage the strengths and missions of the two universities to strengthen Maryland’s innovation economy, advance interdisciplinary research, create opportunities for students, and solve important problems for the people of Maryland and the nation.

Adrienne Arthur, CPSM, director of operations and communications for *MPower*, explains that the program helps students find connections between specialties and professions which in turn opens the door to new opportunities that will help shape their career paths.

“UM Scholars is about pushing the boundaries and testing the interests [the students] have,” says Arthur. “When a student sees the value in the opposite of what they were initially thinking, then that too is a success.”