

UC San Diego

# UC San Diego News Center

---

By Erika Johnson

Dec 03, 2020



*Black Alumni Scholars visit the UC San Diego Career Services Center to discover experiential learning opportunities such as internships, study abroad and working in a faculty laboratory. All photos taken prior to the pandemic.*

## **Richard and Rita Atkinson Donate \$150,000 to Boost Scholarships for Black Students**

**Additional donors match gift for a total of \$300,000 in support the UC San Diego Black Alumni Scholarship Fund at The San Diego Foundation**

Former University of California President and UC San Diego Chancellor Richard C. Atkinson and his wife, Rita, have contributed \$150,000 to the UC San Diego Black Alumni Scholarship Fund at The San Diego Foundation (TSDF). This external fund independently supports the academic success of Black students at UC San Diego. Their generous gift has been matched by friends and colleagues, doubling the impact. The donation sets into motion the public launch of an initiative aiming to raise \$9.5 million for the Black Alumni Scholarship Fund Endowment which would significantly increase the number of scholarships awarded each year.

The scholarship program was established in 1983 by the UC San Diego Black Alumni Council and transferred to TSDf in 1998 due to Proposition 209. By providing direct financial support and academic enrichment opportunities, the council seeks to encourage admitted Black students to attend UC San Diego as well as to support their academic success and increase graduation rates.

The program complements UC San Diego's campuswide [Black Academic Excellence Initiative](#), first introduced by Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla and Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Becky Petitt in 2016. An important goal of the program is to improve access, inclusion and support of Black students at UC San Diego. Led by the Office for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, the program operates in partnership with a diverse committee of undergraduate and graduate students, staff, faculty and alumni situated at varying levels in the university.

"These generous contributions, inspired by Rita and Richard Atkinson's lead gift, strengthen our efforts to welcome more Black students and support their academic goals at UC San Diego," said Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Becky Petitt. "The external scholarship endowment will ensure opportunity persists for years to come."

## Supporting social change agents

The Black Alumni Scholarship at TSDf is designed to continue to assist in increasing the acceptance of offers of admission of Black students at UC San Diego and prepare them for graduate school and professional careers. Over the last five years, approximately 20 scholarships have been awarded directly by TSDf to first year admitted students. The \$2,500 awards are renewed annually for up to four years.

"In our country, disparities in educational opportunities for Black Americans have existed for hundreds of years," said Manuelita Brown, chair of the Black Alumni Scholarship Fund. "Unfortunately, it will take more than my lifetime to remedy this circumstance. Creating an external scholarship endowment is a proven way to ensure that funds are available in support of achieving equity at UC San Diego."

Scholarships are awarded to admitted Black students who are committed to social engagement and want to make a difference in their communities. As part of the program, scholars are matched with UC San Diego alumni mentors who share tips about academic and career paths as well as engaging in experiential learning opportunities such as research, internships and study abroad.



*Black Alumni Scholarships are awarded to admitted Black students who are committed to social engagement and want to make a difference in their communities.*

In addition, the program connects scholars with a network of resources such as the Black Resource Center's Student Success Institute and learning communities as well as tutoring at the Teaching and Learning Commons.

For 2020 alumna Caitlan Johnson, the TSDF Black Alumni Scholarship Program helped her secure an undergraduate research position that led to a rewarding career after graduation.

"Alongside the financial support that the scholarship gave me, the thing that I am most grateful for is the UC San Diego lab experience that helped me land my dream job right after graduating," explained Johnson, who was offered a position as an undergraduate in Professor Michael Burkart's biochemistry laboratory after a meet-and-greet event. "Research experience can be hard to get for undergraduates, and I wouldn't have even started seeking out lab experience as a freshman had it not been for the push from the program."



*The San Diego Foundation scholarship is designed to help increase the acceptance of offers of admission of Black students at UC San Diego and prepare them for graduate school and professional careers.*

### **Philanthropy makes a difference**

Since 2002, more than \$802,000 in TSDF scholarships has been awarded to more than 350 students studying engineering, mathematics and science or arts, humanities and social sciences.

"The endowment initiative seeks to quadruple the number of high-performing, service-oriented scholars at UC San Diego over the next five

years," explained Ed Spriggs, co-chair of the TSDF Black Alumni Scholarship Fund. "Endowment growth will lead to transformational change in our community, with more outstanding Black graduates engaged in the sciences, engineering, education, business, government and community and nonprofit leadership positions. Our combined efforts now will make a difference for generations to come."

For UC San Diego alumna and 2013 scholarship recipient Shunya Wade, the program enabled her to pursue law school and make a difference in the community.

"The TSDF Black Alumni Scholarship has meant a great deal to me because it offset student fees and helped me avoid student loans," she said. "My alumni mentor also inspired me to think about a career in law and the rights of indigenous people, and I am now fulfilling that dream." Wade earned a law degree at UC Irvine and is now practicing law in Los Angeles while serving as an inter-tribal youth counselor and legal consultant to the Mayan leaders in Belize.

In addition to the lead \$150,000 donation from Rita and Richard Atkinson, numerous donors contributed to match the gift at TSDF, including Joan and Irwin Jacobs; Richard Attiyeh; Mae W. Brown; Marjorie Caserio; Peter Cowhey; Ann and Bob Dynes; Peter Gourevitch; Cecil Lytle; Hugh

Mehan; Edward Spriggs; Mary Lindenstein Walshock; and Joseph W. Watson.

These awards are more than just financial support. They enable talented Black students to become thoughtful scholars and socially engaged graduates who will go on to achieve careers in science, education, business, arts and public service.

For those who would like to learn more about the UC San Diego Black Academic Excellence Initiative, please contact John Jacinto Duca at [jduca@ucsd.edu](mailto:jduca@ucsd.edu). To contribute to the UC San Diego Black Alumni Scholarship Fund, please visit [The San Diego Foundation website](#).

Keep up with campus news by subscribing to *This Week @ UC San Diego*