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UC San Diego Faculty Partnerships with HBCUs Help Underrepresented Students Access Graduate School

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UC-HBCU Initiative summer internships and research programs specifically featured in the below story have been postponed until 2021. For additional information in regards to the UC-HBCU faculty grant awarded to Claire Adida, Ph.D., please email cadida@ucsd.edu. For additional information in regards to the UC-HBCU faculty grant awarded to Connor Caffrey, Ph.D., email ccaffrey@health.ucsd.edu.

The University of California San Diego is strengthening its relationship with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to help undergraduates from all backgrounds envision an advanced degree in their future. With the support of the [UC-HBCU Initiative](#), the university has been awarded two separate faculty grants for the 2019 cycle to host summer research programs with the eventual aim of increasing the enrollment of historically underrepresented groups in UC San Diego graduate programs.

Administered by the UC Office of the President, UC-HBCU grants allow UC faculty to introduce HBCU students to the culture of research through funded internships and research programs. This summer at UC San Diego, 2019 grant recipients [Claire Adida](#), Ph.D., [Conor Caffrey](#), Ph.D. and [David Lake](#), Ph.D. will be supervising a cohort of talented undergraduates through educational opportunities that offer a taste of grad school life. Beginning in June, scholars selected from Morehouse College, Spelman College and other HBCUs will be on campus exploring fields ranging from medicine to political science.

“No one should feel like earning a graduate degree at a top-tier research university is unattainable. Historically underrepresented students need to know that this is an accessible and achievable goal,” said Becky Petitt, vice chancellor for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (VC-EDI). “By fostering meaningful relationships with HBCUs, UC San Diego is able to create a vibrant and welcoming environment where all members of our campus community can thrive and reach their full potential.”

Since the UC-HBCU Initiative was launched in 2012, 93 visiting HBCU undergraduates have been hosted at UC San Diego. In fall of 2019, three former program participants began their doctoral studies in Biological Sciences, Chemistry and Biochemistry and Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering. A total of 14 UC-HBCU program participants have gone on to pursue their doctorate at UC San Diego; two have already graduated.

Professors Adida and Lake of UC San Diego's Department of Political Science will be utilizing their UC-HBCU grant to welcome a set of undergraduates to the [UCSD-Spelman-Morehouse Summer Research Program](#). During the seven-week

experience, six students will become research assistants for faculty members within the department, each developing a project and presenting their findings at an end-of-summer conference. Participants will also be integrated into the [Summer Training Academy for Research Success \(STARS\)](#) program, which features hands-on research and learning experiences to prepare students for the next phase of their higher education journey. In addition to mentorship and GRE preparation, the STARS program also incorporates fun social outings, including visits to the San Diego Zoo and the beach.



Professor David Lake



Professor Claire Adida

The experience of being an UC-HBCU scholar helps open the door to professional opportunities that an undergraduate might not have previously considered. “We have introduced a new career opportunity for many of these students,” said Professor Adida. “Most social science undergraduates at HBCUs are thinking only about law school or business school. Many don’t even know that academic research is a possible career, or what it means to get a Ph.D.”

Grant recipient Professor Caffrey of UC San Diego's Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences will be utilizing the funds awarded to partner with North Carolina Central University

(NCCU) and host two summer interns. Working with Professor Alfred Williams of NCCU's Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Caffrey has developed a program where students will research the development of drugs for infectious diseases of poverty. Caffrey's interns will also be integrated within the [UC Scholars Program](#), which is an eight-week summer research experience complete with faculty mentorship and GRE training.

For Professor Caffrey, fostering a valuable network of connections within his research internship program is crucial for student success. "We will have a systematic program of contacts here to engage the students quickly, help them find their feet and allow them to settle in before doing their own thing," said Caffrey.

The connections that current chemistry and biochemistry graduate student Alexia Moore built in 2016 as a visiting scholar from Howard University were instrumental. "The UC-HBCU program allowed me to meet people from all over the country that I still have personal and professional relationships with years later," said Moore. "Professionally, this helped me with applying for fellowships and completing grad applications. The program also allowed me to have connections when I arrived on campus as a graduate student."



Professor Conor Caffrey

Before Howard University alumnus Kevin White Jr. came to campus in 2014 to participate in the UC-HBCU summer program and STARS, he knew nothing about the university itself. "It wasn't until I came that I learned about UC San Diego's impact in the field of neuroscience and I was able to meet mentors invested in my trajectory who could help me with the graduate school application process," he said. "I was also able to view the collaborative and friendly culture of the neuroscience graduate students—a culture that I very much wanted to be a part of." White is currently pursuing a thesis under Professor Gentry Patrick within UC San Diego's Health Sciences Neurograd Program.

To learn more about how the UC System is encouraging faculty to actively engage in collaboration and cooperation with faculty and students at HBCUs, visit the UC-HBCU Initiative website at ucop.edu/uc-hbcu-initiative. The 2020 faculty grant application will remain open for submissions until March 16, 2020; interested faculty can visit the UC-HBCU Initiative website to apply.

MEDIA CONTACT

Amanda Rubalcava, 858-534-3121, arubalcava@ucsd.edu

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