

# Miller School's Summer Medical Scholars Program Opens Doors for Minority Students Through Virtual Learning

Ashlee J. Sealy and Raymond Bennett are heading for promising careers in medicine, thanks in part to the Miller School's summer Medical Scholars Program, which provides academic enrichment and career exploration for highly motivated underrepresented minority students.



“I am confident I received all the tools I need to succeed and become a future physician-scientist,” said Sealy, a University of Miami junior majoring in chemistry and a Ronald A. Hammond

Scholar and Civic Scholar. “I ended the summer program as a different person than I was when I entered – truly a fulfillment of the UM mission to transform lives.”

This summer, 120 college and high school students participated

virtually in the Medical Scholars Program, according to Nanette Vega, Ed.D., executive director in the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement (ODICE) at the Miller School of Medicine.

“After COVID-19 impacted our ability to meet in person, we reimagined our programs and offered them virtually,” Dr. Vega said. “We remained committed to sharing the power of medicine with future doctors on a virtual platform.”

Fully funded by the Miller School, the seven-week summer initiative included the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) Preparation Program, which helps undergraduates prepare for medical school; and the High School Careers in Medicine Workshop (HSCMW) for Miami-Dade County Public School students who have completed their junior year. Janet Bringuez Sanchez, assistant director of ODICE, facilitated the workshop.

“We provided 77 hours of online instruction, including advising, mock interviews, portfolio reviews and classes on navigating the college and medical school application process, as well as classes on the science of learning,” Dr. Vega said. “In addition, we were able to increase the number of participants because we didn’t have classroom limitations.”

Jaleesa Cooke, a program manager at ODICE, helped create the online platform to provide underrepresented students with virtual learning resources.

## **Virtual connections have an impact**

“This experience helped me realize the powerful impact of virtual connections,” she said. “We were able to build genuine connections with our students, and the results were

overwhelmingly positive.”

As a participant in the MCAT Preparation Program, Sealy said the weekly “Journey to Medicine” workshops with Dr. Vega shed light on the application process and helped build her self-confidence.

“Being among a cohort of students dedicated to a life in medicine further encouraged me to prepare for medical school,” she said.

Another testimonial to the lasting impact of the summer program came from Bennett, a first-year Miller School student who took part in two high school workshop programs as a Miami-Dade student starting in 2013.

“I studied bilateral spinal injuries in the Summer Training in Research Program (STIR) my first summer, and careers in medicine the second year,” he said.

But learning about research was not the only thing Bennett gained from the Medical Scholars Program.

“I also developed an understanding of teamwork, and the importance of individual accountability in those teams,” he said. “It emphasized the importance of hard work and resiliency when facing challenges.”

As an undergraduate student majoring in biology at Andrews University in Michigan, Bennett continued to build his connection to the Miller School, shadowing specialists in infectious disease, neurosurgery and burn medicine.

“These experiences reinforced my desire to become a

neurosurgeon,” he said. “Looking back, the high school summer program helped set me up for success in medical school and my future career as a physician.”

For more information, please visit the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement website at <http://www.diversity.med.miami.edu/>