

Profile: Academic programs nurture young researcher

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By Edie Grossfield

As part of its mission to advance biomedical research and science education in the United States, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute considers finding and nurturing a scientific mind like Flavian Brown's a worthy cause.

Brown, 23, is a Carleton College graduate and is completing a one-year fellowship at Mayo Clinic in Rochester through the clinic's Post-Baccalaureate Research Education Program. He is working with Mayo immunology researcher Diane Jelinek



Flavian Brown is pictured in a Mayo Clinic immunology research lab. Brown is nearing the end of a year-long fellowship in Mayo Clinic's Post-Baccalaureate Research Program. He will be attending Harvard University in the fall to pursue a Ph.D. in immunology. Michele Jokinen/Post-Bulletin

Brown has benefited from one HHMI program and is about to benefit from another as he heads to Harvard University to work on a doctorate in immunology.

The young African-American researcher, who grew up poor on the south side of Chicago, received a four-year, full-tuition scholarship to Carleton College in Northfield, Minn., through the Posse Foundation. After further proving himself academically at Carleton, HHMI accepted him into its Exceptional Research Opportunities Program during Brown's sophomore year. EXROP allowed him to work with Harvard researchers for two summers.

The long-term goal of EXROP is to increase the percentage of minority college and university professors, said Peter Bruns, vice president for grants and special programs at HHMI.

"We started EXROP some years ago to find people, frankly, just like Flavian," Bruns said from his office in Chevy Chase, Md. "That is, under-represented minority students and disadvantaged students whom we think would be fantastic members of the professoriat."

Another HHMI program nurtures EXROP students by offering five fellowships per year for graduate studies. Brown recently won one of these Gilliam Fellowships, providing him \$44,000 toward his graduate studies at Harvard.

Bruns said the scientific community needs highly talented minority researchers to attract the best scientific minds.

"I spent 30 years on the faculty at Cornell, and while I was there I noticed, first of all, the students seek out and talk with people with whom they feel comfortable. And there was a real need for high quality, committed, minority faculty," Bruns said. He believes Brown will be one of those professors someday.

Early life experiences lead to current passion

Through research opportunities at Mayo, the University of Iowa and two summers at Harvard, Brown has developed a passion for studying how the body's immune system reacts to cancer. He plans to make this a focus of his graduate studies and his career.

Brown said his love for science, his interest in cancer research and his perseverance developed from growing up in Chicago. He and his three older siblings were raised by his grandmother, who died of liver cancer when Brown was 14.

"There were some tough times I experienced. And through that hardship, I realized that education would create a pathway whereby I could become successful and be able to provide not only for my myself, but for my family — my present family and the family that I may have in the future," he said.