



Alexandra Herndon Receives UNCF/Merck Science Initiative Award

University of Washington junior Alexandra Herndon was in a meeting and just happened to check her email when she received the good news.

Herndon, a chemistry major, received the 2010 UNCF/Merck Science Initiative Award - an honor that includes up to \$25,000 in scholarships, as well the opportunity to take part in two summer research internship positions. The UNCF/Merck Undergraduate Science Research Scholarship Awards are intended to help African American undergraduate students who are interested in science to further their science education and potentially pursue science careers.

Herndon was meeting with Teri Ward, Director of the UW Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity's Initiative for Maximizing Student Diversity (IMSD), when she learned of the award. "I was sitting in Teri's office and I had a lot of questions about something completely different and that (the award) came up," she said. "I actually checked my email because I hadn't checked it in a day or so and it popped up. It was pretty exciting."

UNCF, the Merck Research Laboratories and The Merck Institute for Science Education offer 37 annual awards to outstanding African American students and postdoctoral researchers. Herndon is one of just 15 undergraduates from across the country to receive the honor in 2010.

"I was pretty surprised because I had never applied to something at a national level," Herndon said.

Award recipients are selected based on their grade point average (which must be at least a 3.3), their demonstrated interest in their own scientific education and a career in scientific research, and their ability to perform in a laboratory environment. In addition to the scholarship, Herndon will be paired with a Merck mentor and participate in two different 10-12 week summer internships that will take place at a Merck research facility in either Rahway, N.J., West Point, Penn., or Boston, Mass. The first internship will take place this summer, with the other to take place next summer after graduation.

Herndon, a 2007 graduate of Todd Beamer High School in Federal Way, plans to pursue a MD/Ph.D. program and will look to focus on medicinal chemistry research in her Merck internships.

"It's a really awesome opportunity because I just got involved in research a couple years ago," Herndon said. "The fact that I'm going to be able to go out and see what people do as research for a living and the fact that I will be exposed to this large company known for research, is a pretty amazing opportunity. As far as my future, I'm planning on going into MD/Ph.D. schooling so I think it's going to open me up to more options as to where I can take that. I'm going to be exposed to different research that I'm not used to. It will give me a lot more experience that I can definitely take from."

Herndon's interest in chemistry began in high school and she was first exposed to research due to her involvement in IMSD which made her

want to look for more. "It kind of triggered everything that is happening now," she said.

Last summer, through IMSD, Herndon was connected to a position in an inorganic chemistry lab on campus - the Goldberg Lab - where she will continue to work through June.

"That's what we try to do in IMSD," Ward said. "In the statement on the application we ask students what they are interested in. So based on what they are stating and based on who is available in those areas at the time that we are looking for mentors, often times students are matched directly, like Alex was."

Through her work at the lab, Herndon gets the opportunity to put what she learns in the classroom to practical use.

"Anything with science is always expanding and always growing, especially with chemistry. There is so much you can do with it," Herndon commented with regards to what she likes best about the field. "It gives you such a base level for many different types of research, especially anything explaining something. That's what mainly has triggered me to go that way. I've learned a lot more since then. It's pretty cool in my lab now, I've made things that no one has made before and the fact that people - not only me - but tons of people are doing it shows all the different things you can do in chemistry. I think that's really interesting."

In addition to her regular class load and working at the lab, Herndon still makes time for volunteer efforts. She currently volunteers with the Institute for Simulation and Interprofessional Studies (ISIS) at the UW Medical Center and works with surgery simulations. Previously, she volunteered with the American Red Cross on their first aid response team (FAST). She received training in basic first aid and CPR, and with the team worked at a variety of local events to provide first aid services.

Herndon has also served as a student mentor for the UW's Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity since her sophomore year. "I like it because I feel like I have some advice to give people, especially since you get paired up with other students according to their interest," Herndon said.

With all that she has accomplished and all that lies ahead in her future, it is evident Herndon has some excellent advice to give.

[Click here](#) for more information on the UNCF/Merck Science Initiative scholarship awards.



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