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HHMI Awards First Gilliam Graduate Fellowships

The late James H. Gilliam Jr., a charter Trustee of Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), spent a lifetime fostering diversity and opportunity in education and science. Now six talented graduate students with diverse backgrounds will carry on in his name.

HHMI today announced the recipients of its first Gilliam Fellowships: Imran Babar from Minnesota; Meisha Bynoe from St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Luis León and Alexander Red Eagle from California; Naira Rezende from Brazil; and Nancy Van Prooyen from Colorado and Arkansas. Created by HHMI to honor Gilliam's legacy, the fellowships provide support for Ph.D. studies in the life sciences to disadvantaged students including underrepresented minorities who participated in HHMI's Exceptional Research Opportunities (EXROP) undergraduate summer research program.

"Jim Gilliam devoted a long career of public service to expanding opportunities for the disadvantaged."

— **Thomas R. Cech**

For the past two summers, EXROP has placed a group of these outstanding minority and disadvantaged undergraduates in labs of HHMI investigators and professors. Their research projects ranged from identification of the cells in which lung cancer originates to investigation of the mechanism by which the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) establishes and sustains latent infection in cells.

"Jim Gilliam devoted a long career of public service to expanding opportunities in science for the disadvantaged," said HHMI President Thomas R. Cech. "He led by example. It is fitting that we honor him by providing research opportunities, mentorship, and financial aid to promising young people to pursue careers in biomedical science."

Gilliam, who was 58 when he died in 2003, was chief counsel at Knickerbocker LLC, a private investment firm. A longtime resident of Wilmington, Delaware, he served as Secretary of Community Affairs and Economic Development to Delaware Governor Pierre S. du Pont IV. He was

executive vice president and general counsel at Beneficial Finance Corporation before joining Knickerbocker.

Gilliam served as a trustee of the National Geographic Society and the Delaware Community Foundation, and for many years, he chaired Delaware's Judicial Nominating Commission. Gilliam was an alumnus of Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland, where he and his wife, Linda, established a \$1.5 million fine arts endowment in honor of his father, James H. Gilliam Sr. on his father's 80th birthday in 2000.

Gilliam's wife, Linda J. Gilliam, and his father, James H. Gilliam Sr. are scheduled to attend a ceremony to present the fellowships today at HHMI headquarters in Chevy Chase, Maryland. The Gilliam Fellows were selected from a pool of 84 EXROP students who were eligible to apply.

Imran Babar is a Native American/Asian who earned a degree in biology at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. He did his EXROP research with HHMI investigator Tyler Jacks at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, working to discover the role of stem cells in lung tumor formation. He will carry out graduate study in molecular, cellular and developmental biology at Yale University. Meisha Bynoe was born and raised in the West Indies and earned a bachelor's degree in biology and music at MIT. She conducted research in the lab of HHMI investigator Richard Locksley at the University of California, San Francisco, where she helped develop assays to identify certain macrophages or immune system cells. She will enter Yale University's graduate program in microbiology this fall. Luis León, who is Hispanic, supported himself while earning a bachelor's degree in biochemistry at the University of Washington. He did EXROP research in HHMI investigator Robert Siliciano's lab at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he investigated how immune cells transcribe the HIV-1 virus, which causes AIDS, during the virus's asymptomatic latent phase. He has completed his first year of graduate studies in immunology at Harvard University. Alexander Red Eagle, a Native American, graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles, with a bachelor's degree in biochemistry. He is currently a medical student in Stanford University's Medical Scientist Training Program and will defer his Gilliam Fellowship until 2006, when he enters the Ph.D. part of his training. He conducted EXROP research in the Yale University lab of HHMI investigator Arthur Horwich, studying a protein that, when misfolded, can lead to congestive heart failure or neurodegenerative disorders. Naira Rezende, who earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Hunter College, is from Belo Horizonte, Brazil. She did summer research in HHMI investigator David Schatz's lab at Yale University School of Medicine, where she worked to inhibit or over-express DNA repair genes involved in developing immune system memory. This fall, she will enter a Ph.D. program in biochemistry, cell and molecular biology at the Joan and Sanford I. Weill Medical College of Cornell University. Nancy Van Prooyen, who grew up in Arkansas and Colorado, earned a bachelor's degree in biochemistry and molecular biology at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. She performed her EXROP research in the lab of HHMI investigator and Nobel laureate Eric Kandel at Columbia University College of Physicians and

Surgeons, where she studied kinesin, a molecular motor protein. Van Prooyen has completed her first year as a graduate student at The Johns Hopkins University.

This summer, 57 more EXROP students, many from groups underrepresented in the sciences, will conduct research in the labs of 38 HHMI investigators and seven HHMI professors at 21 different institutions.

"EXROP is helping to level the playing field by providing minority and disadvantaged students with opportunities they might otherwise not have to conduct research in the labs of some of the top scientists in the country," said Peter J. Bruns, HHMI vice president for grants and special programs.

The new EXROP participants will be eligible to apply for future Gilliam Fellowships. HHMI will award up to five Gilliam Fellowships annually for up to five years of study toward a Ph.D.