

JANUARY 31, 2008

Five Students Pursue Research Careers with Gilliam Fellowships

Silvia Caballero, Shoa Clarke, Alejandra Figueroa-Clarevega, Daniel Gilmer, and Betty Mbom are not your average twenty-somethings. Their paths through life have already taken them to Africa and Central and South America; to disaster relief efforts, clinics, and leading research labs. They have helped create support networks for minority students, studied tropical diseases at the Pan-American Health Organization, and investigated how HIV suppresses the immune system. Along the way, they have each developed a common passion: a desire to improve their world through science.

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute has selected these five young scientists as recipients of this year's Gilliam Fellowships for Advanced Study. The competitive fellowships, offered to outstanding students from groups underrepresented in the sciences or from disadvantaged backgrounds, provide full support for up to five years of study toward a Ph.D. in the sciences. The students will use the fellowships to gain the knowledge and experience they need to address some of the world's health care challenges as researchers and physician-scientists.

"We have chosen five remarkable students as Gilliam fellows this year; we are lucky to have them in the HHMI family."

- Peter J. Bruns

One of the fellows, Shoa Clarke, has already begun an M.D./Ph.D. program at Stanford University. Others anticipate entering a Ph.D. program in 2008 or 2009.

"We have chosen five remarkable students as Gilliam fellows this year; we are lucky to have them in the HHMI family," said Peter J. Bruns, vice

president for grants and special programs at HHMI. “These recipients have already accomplished much; the five-year fellowships should help them build on the talent and scientific curiosity that they have already demonstrated.”

With the Gilliam fellowships, HHMI aims to increase diversity among science professors. To help the fellows bring their diverse backgrounds and experiences to bear on the questions that scientists will confront in coming years, the Institute is committed to enriching their graduate experiences in a variety of ways. In addition to receiving full financial support, fellows will attend meetings with other HHMI scientists and receive professional development mentoring and additional support as they launch their academic careers.

The first Gilliam fellowships were awarded in 2005. The fellowships are named for the late James H. Gilliam Jr., a charter Trustee of HHMI who spent his life fostering excellence and diversity in education and science. HHMI is currently supporting 17 Gilliam fellows in addition to this year's awardees.

“Throughout his life and as an HHMI trustee, Jim Gilliam was committed to encouraging underrepresented minority students to pursue careers in science,” said HHMI President Thomas R. Cech. “The Gilliam fellowships are an ideal way for the Institute to honor him and continue that effort.”

The Gilliam fellowships build on HHMI's Exceptional Research Opportunities Program (EXROP), which provides talented undergraduates from disadvantaged backgrounds with summer research experiences in the labs of HHMI investigators and HHMI professors. Since EXROP began in 2003, HHMI has supported 242 students in the labs of 111 HHMI scientists. Past participants in EXROP are eligible to apply for Gilliam fellowships. This year, HHMI received 23 applications from former EXROP students for the fellowships.

The five winners of the 2008 Gilliam fellowships for Advanced Study and their undergraduate institutions are:

- **Silvia Caballero**

Hunter College of the City University of New York New York,
New York

- **Lee (Shoa) Clarke**

Cornell University Ithaca, New York

- **Alejandra Figueroa-Clarevega**

Washington University in St. Louis St. Louis, Missouri

- **Daniel Gilmer**

Howard University Washington, DC

- **Bertrade (Betty) Mbom**

Carnegie Mellon University Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania