

Biographies for Bridges Scholars

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Cherishe Cumma

Luci Devoy:

Luci DeVoy is an Indigenous student born and raised on her home reservation in rural Michigan. She is currently pursuing a degree in the STEM field to address the disparities that face women and transgender patients of color face when pursuing healthcare, specifically in maternal-fetal medicine. Luci worked during the Fall 2018 semester with Professor Seto on the research project "Comparative Analysis of Fecal Microbes in Turtles". Her research this past semester has centered on differential microbiomes found in turtle digestive systems. This semester has afforded me the opportunity to experience a small look into the field of research and development. Luci is very thankful for such a unique opportunity to be a research assistant at this point in her education. When not in school Luci is active in American Indian Community House programming and other LGBTQIA Events in NYC including being on the planning committee for this year's World Pride March.

Samantha Lee:

Samantha Lee is a scholar who strongly believes everyone deserves healthcare whether they are coming from the low-income background, immigrants, current residents, or people who are not receiving the right care. Samantha hopes to one day to help people and influence people to stop hate crimes, stop discriminating people by race, we deserve to be treated equally whether by race, social class if they're poor, rich, gay, straight, etc. She has a very strong passion for medicine and believes that healthcare is very important for everyone. Samantha hopes to be successful not just for herself but for people who are in need to have access to medical care not just in states but around the world. Samantha currently works as a Medical Assistant and is trying to pursue a career as a Physician Assistant. During the Fall 2018 semester, Samantha worked with Professor Sodeinde on the research project "Barcoding and sequencing of DNA extracted from the scales of *Phataginus tricuspidis* from Nigerian locations". Samantha acknowledges the role that her current occupation played in preparing her for this research opportunity. She currently works patients from various backgrounds, who have many different health ailments. The experiences she has with her patients influences her current occupational interests. Besides from her goal of becoming a Physician Assistant she also wants an opportunity to work with a non-profit health care organization. Samantha ultimately wants to use her platform to be a good influence on people and especially for the future generation.

Mariam Kamara:

Mariam Kamara is currently a student at New York City College of Technology. Mariam is originally from Guinea and migrated to the United States five years ago as a non-native English speaker. Now, her resilience and hard work drives her to reach her goal of graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and to get her Masters degree in Public Health. Mariam has always wondered why people behave the way they do and believes it has something to do with our Psychology. She believes that Psychology is a study that helps one gain insight into the function of the brain and understand how human behaviors are formed. Mariam's research project with Professor Almond called "Exercise, Smoking, and Weight Maintenance: Exploring and Confirming Factorial Structure of Decisional Balance Measures on Diverse Samples" in the Fall semester of 2018 directly aligned with her interests in Psychology. Not only did she get to work with a professor who is an expert in her field of interest but she also was afforded the opportunity to learn more about Psychology as a whole. Mariam's research on exploring and confirming factorial structure with Professor Almond on diverse samples has benefited her greatly and helped her realize her love for the field of Psychology.

Willnely Scroggins:

Willnely Scroggins is a Latina from the South Bronx, working to prove statistics wrong. She is currently pursuing her associates in Liberal Arts and Arts at New York City College of Technology. After completing her Associate's degree she will then pursue her bachelors for Psychology at another university. A lot of her interests in research include research on the underprivileged as well as minorities (mostly leaning towards women). Her research on the foster care systems and child neglect helped her in her research project "Exercise, Smoking, and Weight Maintenance: Exploring and Confirming Factorial Structure of Decisional Balance Measures on Diverse Samples" which she conducted with Professor Almond. Her research, as well as her prior interests, have driven her to pursue a job in social work, so she can continue her research on health. At the beginning of Willnely's college career, she tried to force a health career on herself, but she knew that her passion has always been Psychology. Willnely is interested in pursuing a Masters in Social Work and is even considering becoming an esthetician as well. Willnely feels that the Bridges program is and will play an integral role in her success. In her opinion, she feels that getting into a career with no support is challenging, and she is eternally grateful to have a mentor like Professor Almond guiding her towards the steps she has to take to have a career.

Leah Pierre-Louis:

Leah Pierre-Louis came to the United States at the age of eleven from Haiti. Today she is happy to be a citizen because she has been afforded so many opportunities. Leah feels that if she was not able to migrate to the United States, she would not have been able to accomplish half of the goals as a college student. Currently, Leah attends New York City College of Technology and is

majoring in Liberal Arts and Sciences. In the future, Leah intends on majoring in Biology. Leah's current research "Examining the Effects of Oxidative Stress on Tetrahymena Calpains" which she conducts with Professor Alcendor helps her delve deeper into the field of Biology and explore her passions even more. Leah never knew that she would be so interested in learning about the human body. However, after joining the Bridges to Baccalaureate program her research experience strengthened her interest in Biology even further. Today Leah still feels that she is constantly learning more about herself and her interests with the help of others around her. At this moment Leah is unsure about the career that she would like to pursue after graduating college, but she does know she would like to enter the health care field so that she can fulfill her passion of helping others as well as developing/discovering new medicine to cure diseases.

Kalei Graham-Crowther:

Kalei Graham-Crowther was born and raised in East New York, Brooklyn by a single mother of 4. Growing up her mother always made sure that she received everything she ever needed and wanted. Kalei attributes her success to the motivation and love that she received from her mother and believes her mother is the reason she is currently a Liberal Arts & Sciences Major. Kalei plans on transferring to Brooklyn College to finish her studies in Biological Sciences. Currently, Kalei's research project along with Professor Alcendor is Examining the Effects of Oxidative Stress on Calpain in Tetrahymena Thermophila". Kalei never thought she would be interested in such a topic, but she feels that through more research there just might be a bigger understanding to certain pathological diseases in humans and how they're created and even how to prevent them. Through further research, Kalei also feels that she can analyze Calpains on a wider spectrum because the full research on Calpains is not as extensive as she believes it should be. Kalei's passion is to serve others through any work that she does is very important to her. Kalei believes leadership is not just being in charge but it's about having humility and serving others. In the long run, after Kalei receives her degree in Biology, she plans on either becoming a Physician Assistant or going to Medical School to become either an OBGYN or Pediatrician. Kalei is not too sure where she is headed but she knows that Biology will always be in the picture.

Lisbeth Amberina Peralta Minaya:

Lisbeth Amberina Peralta Minaya was born in the Dominican Republic where she lived up until the age of 4. She grew up in Sunnyside, Queens and was raised by her grandmother. Lisbeth's grandmother influenced her to always work hard for what she believes in and pushed her to always be involved in her academics. When she was in third grade her teacher told her mom it would be impossible for her to be proficient in her math class due to her struggles with Mathematics. The teacher gave her the opportunity to take one exam that would allow her to pass the class. Lisbeth remembers rewriting and practicing so that she could get a passing grade. Lisbeth ended up with such a good grade that she got into the Honors Mathematics program the

following year. Through this experience, Lisbeth learned she could do anything she put her mind to and worked hard for.

Throughout high school, Lisbeth enjoyed Mathematics and Science classes. Due to the fact that she was interested in these subjects, she decided to continue exploring the Science and Mathematics field. In Fall 2018 Lisbeth had the opportunity to work with Professor Sodeinde on the research project “Barcoding and sequencing of DNA extracted from the pyrgomorphid grasshopper, *Zonocerus variegatus* “ In the short period of time she worked with her mentor, she realized how interesting it is to actually work in a science lab and learn something new every day. Lisbeth strongly believes in health, medicine, and science. She believes that after she gets her degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences, she will continue her education. Lisbeth believes in science and all the possibilities that it can do to make this world a better place.

Yamilet Cruz:

Yamilet Cruz is 18 years old and completing her first semester at New York City College of Technology. Her parents and both of her sisters were born and raised in the Dominican Republic. Yamilet was born shortly after her family arrived in the United States. Yamilet’s parents come from a small city in the Dominican Republic and never got the opportunity to study and gain the education they would have liked to. Yamilet’s Mother and Father had a limited educational background. For this reason, education has always been enforced in Yamilet’s household. The main reason why Yamilet’s parents decided to migrate to the United States was to give her and her sisters a chance to get a better education and be successful in their chosen careers. Yamilet’s parents have always pushed their children to do well and motivated them to finish school. They believed that getting an education is very important and it’s something that nobody can take away from you. Coming into New York City College of Technology, Yamilet had no idea what she wanted to major in, all she knew was that she wanted to do something that involved working with children. She recently decided that she wanted to study psychology when she took her first psychology class. Yamilet realized that she really enjoyed learning about all the different concepts in Psychology. Yamilet’s interest in Psychology helped her with her research project “Exercise, Smoking, and Weight Maintenance: Exploring and Confirming Factorial Structure of Decisional Balance Measures on Diverse Samples” which she conducted with Professor Almond. Yamilet is certain that Psychology would be a great career choice because she loves working with people and helping them in any way that she can. The main reason why Yamilet decided to pursue the Bridges to Baccalaureate Program is that she knew that it would be an amazing opportunity that would open many doors for her in the future. Yamilet looks forward to working with the other members of the program. Overall, Yamilet believes that being in the Bridges Program will be a great experience that she could use to help further her career in Psychology.

Diana Benitez:

Diana Benitez is of Hispanic descent but is a New York City native. Diana was born in Brooklyn to two amazing parents. She was raised to admire the arts, beginning with dance. She then learned to draw and write poems and short stories. Diana also had a great admiration for absorbing as much knowledge as she could in school. The class that she found to be difficult during her pre-college education in Science. Diana held a closed mind; thinking that science was just overly complex and uninteresting. After years of being out of a classroom setting, and having two children, Diana decided it was time to start the journey to a promising career. Wanting to obtain a career in the medical field, Diana decided to enroll in college to pursue a degree in Biomedical Sciences. As Diana attended classes, she began learning about different organisms and how life “works”. With each lesson, she became more intrigued and excited to learn more. Diana’s research project “Examining the Effects of Oxidative Stress on Tetrahymena Calpains” which she conducted with Professor Alcendor helped expand her knowledge of Biology. Although Diana faced challenged adapting to the college and research environment, she feels that all the hard work will be beneficial to her in the future. Diana is eager to continue her journey of learning and mastering aspects of Biomedical Sciences. She hopes to get the chance to use her research experience to study neurological disorders such as Syringomyelia and learn more about how symptoms are triggered in the victims of disorders like the one mentioned above. Diana is thankful to be a part of the Bridges program and to have the opportunity to work alongside great mentors and her fellow scholars. Diana looks forward to furthering experiences and opportunities and appreciate the Bridges program for being an amazing stepping stone in her life.