

# BSCCP

IN TOUCH WITH

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE CAREERS PROGRAM

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## Getting Into Medical School: The Honest-to-Goodness Truth

By George Ruiz, M.D.

I remember opening the letter. It was frightfully thin, bordering on anorexic. "Congratulations!", it started. That was all I wanted to hear. I was on my way to becoming a doctor.

Although my resolve to attend medical school was unwavering, the path was not always clearly marked. I learned a couple of things along the way, however, and would like to share them with you. I call them my 10 points of reference; lighthouses to guide you through.

1. Choose a major you are genuinely interested in. "Will medical schools take me more seriously if I am a science major?" is a favorite question. The answer is no. Medical schools will take you more seriously, however, if you are a better student. So choose something you are passionate about. Passion about a subject often leads to curiosity, which inevitably leads to discovery (through reading) and ultimately leads to better grades that can only help you get into the medical school of your choice.

2. Cultivate interests outside of the classroom. As you can imagine, medicine is not just about books and facts, it's about people. Explore your environment and find something you like to do that doesn't necessarily involve a chalkboard and problem sets. Other interests serve not only to ground you during some of college's most trying moments,

but can also make you a broader, more interesting candidate.

3. Study for the MCATs. You are right, the MCATs are not the be-all, end-all of medical school admission, but they are important. Do not underestimate them. They are often the only way medical schools have to judge your performance against that of other students. Study for them aggressively. As the test format is constantly changing, ask your friends (preferably the ones who did well) how to best prepare and make it a priority. Also, do not wait for the last possible date to take the test (like I did), as this will inevitably amplify your stress level.

4. Choose your letter writers wisely. Always go with people who know you well and can speak about you from the heart.

5. Apply to a broad range of schools to maximize your chances.

6. Do not be the applicant as well as the selection committee! Your job is to apply. Do not deem yourself unworthy of being an applicant. Send your stuff to the best, and let the chips fall where they may.

7. BE ON TIME. All medical schools have STRICT application deadlines. There is no shame in



**George Ruiz, M.D.**

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## Student Profile: Ricardo M. Zayas

Ricardo M. Zayas, a neurobiologist who expects to receive his Ph.D. in Biology from Tufts University this year, attended his first BSCP conference in 1992 when he was an undergraduate at Fairfield



**Ricardo Zayas**

University in Connecticut. The Puerto Rico native, who had come to the United States to study, says "I had never met other scientists when I was growing up. Meeting minority scientists at the [BSCP]

conference was very inspirational. [The conference] definitely influenced my decision to pursue a career in science."

After graduating from college, Zayas spent a year teaching science and math to inner-city high school students in Detroit through a vol-

unteer program that he likens to the Peace Corps. At the time, though he knew he wanted to do something in the sciences, Zayas says he was not sure whether he wanted to go to medical school or pursue a career in research.

When his teaching stint ended, Zayas took a job in an endocrinology laboratory at Wayne State University in Detroit, where he conducted diabetes-related research. Having decided to remain in the research field, he moved to Boston in 1996 and began graduate school at Boston University before transferring to Tufts.

In Boston, Zayas reestablished his BSCP connections, attending the BSCP Biomedical Science Careers Student Conference in 1998, 2000 and 2002 as a student, panelist and speaker. In 1998, he also won a Hope Scholarship; and he was a member of the New England Science Symposium 2002 Planning Committee.

Zayas' long-term goal is to teach and conduct research in a university setting, though he expresses a strong interest in the biotechnology field as well. His work at Tufts has focused on investigating the physiological role of nitric oxide (gas) signaling in the nervous system. While he says he is motivated primarily by his interest in the science, Zayas is also excited by the possibility of human application of his research several years down the road.

Once he has completed his doctoral work, Zayas and his wife Pamela Conner, a nurse practitioner, will move to Illinois, where he will continue his research in a post-doctoral program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Though he has thought of moving back to Puerto Rico, Zayas concedes that there are far more opportunities for him in the United States. For now, he says, he and his wife are "going with the flow of things." ♦

## 2002 Evening of Hope Scholarship Winners



**2002 Scholarship Winners**

The following students received \$5,000 Hope Scholarships (\$2,500 per year for two years) at the 2002 Evening of Hope last spring:

- *Jason Badrinarain*, University of Massachusetts at Boston
- *Sarah A. Bentil*, University of Vermont
- *Rogette Esteve*, Boston Latin School
- *Natalie Etienne*, Tufts University
- *J. Angelo Green*, Ph.D. candidate, University of Massachusetts at Amherst
- *Hector F. Martinez-Wilson*, M.D./Ph.D. candidate, Tufts University School of Medicine
- *Vanessa Toney*, M.D./Ph.D. candidate, Brown University School of Medicine

### Getting Into Medical School continued from page 1

being denied admission based on merit. There is great shame in being denied admission because your application fell at the bottom of the "postmarked-late" pile.

8. Make your personal statement personal. Use the space to paint a self-portrait. Don't be afraid to make it truly you. You will never be wrong to make it

"personal." You will always be wrong if you make it "impersonal." Who you are should pour off the page.

9. Do not be intimidated at the interview. Wear your best suit and light the room up. It is not only a chance for the school to get to know you, but for you to see what the school has to offer.

10. Never be discouraged. Live long enough to make you pre-med

dean realize that you are the exception to the rule.

*George Ruiz, M.D., is a graduate of Brown University and The Albert Einstein College of Medicine. He is currently a second year cardiology fellow at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. This is the first of a two-part series. In the next issue of In Touch with BSCP, George will address "Getting into Residency."* ♦

## Kerry M. Wong, M.D.

Nearly 15 years ago, Kerry Wong, M.D., saw a poster in the halls of her Queens, N.Y., high school that asked, "Do you want to get into



**Kerry Wong, M.D.**

a highly respected profession?" The poster featured a picture of a doctor and a nurse in the background, with a pharmacist in the foreground. "That did it for me,"

Wong recalls with a laugh. "I decided to become a pharmacist."

In 1992, when she was an undergraduate in Northeastern University's pharmacy program, Wong attended the first BSCP Biomedical Careers Student Conference. "I was in the fourth year of a five-year program, and I was starting to think about graduate school," she says. More specifically, she was considering medical school. "The conference definitely influ-

enced my decision to apply to medical school," she says. "It was great to see lots of minority students and mentors in the biomedical sciences."

Throughout her education, training and professional life, Wong has remained actively involved with BSCP. She attended the 1994 conference as a student panelist, counseling undergraduates at the conference who were applying to medical school. And this year, she returned as an advisor. "I think it's a great program," she says. "I like that it doesn't focus on just one discipline but encompasses medicine, clinical sciences and the allied health professions."

Wong received a B.S. in Pharmacy from Northeastern in June 1993 and became a licensed pharmacist in August. The next month she enrolled in Harvard Medical School. For the first two years of medical school, Wong worked part time as a pharmacist. By her third year, when she began working in

hospitals, there was little time for anything else.

"While I was in medical school, I felt like I was missing the pharmacist in me," Wong says. "I thought it would be nice to do both," practice medicine and work as a pharmacist. And now she is doing just that.

In July, Wong, who became a board-certified dermatologist in 2001, took a job as Quality Management Pharmacist at Boston Medical Center, where she works four days a week. She also joined the dermatology practice of Jay L. Cohen, M.D., P.C., where she works one day a week.

At Boston Medical Center, Wong is in charge of medicine safety for the hospital pharmacy. "I am dealing with issues and concerns that are common to pharmacists and M.D.s," she says. By combining this with her work as a physician, Wong is "bringing together both worlds in a way I had envisioned for myself." ♦

## Scholarship Opportunities: Incentive Scholarship

The Biomedical Science Careers Program has established the Incentive Scholarship for high school students, particularly underrepresented minority students seriously interested in pursuing a career in biomedical, biotechnology and science-related fields such as medicine, chemistry, physics, biology, nursing, dentistry, pharmacy, biomedical engineering, physical therapy, computer science, public health or environmental science. Robert Simmons, vice president and director of operations at Boston Home Infusion, is the scholarship sponsor.

The scholarship, worth a total of \$2,500, to be used toward a college education, can only be used for educational expenses (e.g., tuition, books, supplies, housing and technology equipment such as a computer). Scholarship recipients must maintain a B-minus grade-point average or better throughout sophomore year to accumulate \$500; throughout the junior year to accumulate an additional \$750; and throughout senior year to accumulate another \$1,250.

If a student's grade-point average falls below B-minus during the junior year, the student will not receive the \$750. If it improves to a B-minus or better during the senior year, the student will be eligible to receive \$1,250. If a student does not maintain a B-minus average or better as a sophomore and a junior, he or she will not be eligible to remain in the program. If the student does not enter college within two years of finishing high school, the money will not be awarded. ♦

## Upcoming Events

### Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Academic Support Network Meeting *Saturday, October 5, 2002*

The New England Board of Higher Education's Excellence Through Diversity Initiative invites high school, college and graduate students to participate in the 11th Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Academic Support Network Meeting on Saturday, October 5, 2002, from 7:15 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass. For more information, visit [www.nebhe.org/sciencenetwork.html](http://www.nebhe.org/sciencenetwork.html) or contact NEBHE at 617-357-9620 or [sciencenetwork@nebhe.org](mailto:sciencenetwork@nebhe.org).

### Career Development Series *Thursday, October 17, 2002*

"NIH Funding Opportunities: Intramural and Extramural Programs"

- Intramural training programs: post-doctoral, research fellowship and intramural tracks
- Extramural grants and awards
- Loan repayment programs
- Research supplements for underrepresented minorities

The Career Development Series is designed for physicians in post-doctoral training, residents, fellows and junior faculty. The session, "NIH Funding Opportunities: Intramural and Extramural Programs," will take place at the Longwood Galleria Conference Center on Thursday, October 17, 2002, from 3:30 to 6:00 p.m., followed by dinner and networking with the presenters. Preregistration is required. To register, call the Massachusetts Medical Society at 800-843-6356. For further information, contact Lise D. Kaye, Biomedical Science Careers Program, at [lise\\_kaye@hms.harvard.edu](mailto:lise_kaye@hms.harvard.edu) or 617-432-0552.

The Career Development Series is cosponsored by the Office for Diversity and Community Partnership (Minority Faculty

Development Program) at Harvard Medical School, the Office of Minority and Student Affairs at Tufts University School of Medicine, the Office of the Associate Vice Chancellor at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the Office of Minority Affairs at Boston University School of Medicine, the Massachusetts Medical Society and the Biomedical Science Careers Program.

### Skills Workshops for College and High School Students *Saturday, November 16, 2002*

The Biomedical Science Careers Program and the Minority Faculty Development Program at Harvard Medical School will be offering "Skills Workshops for College and High School Students" on Saturday, November 16, 2002. Preregistration is required, and early registration is recommended since space is limited. To request an application, or for more information, contact Lise D. Kaye at [lise\\_kaye@hms.harvard.edu](mailto:lise_kaye@hms.harvard.edu) or 617-432-0552. The application deadline is October 31, 2002. There is no registration fee for this program.

The objective of the workshops is to provide students, particularly African-American, Hispanic-American and American Indian/Alaska Native students, with concrete information on the skills needed for success in their academic career. Some of the topics

covered: Application Process for Medical and Graduate Schools, Application Process for College, Interviewing Skills, Resume Writing and Financial Aid.

### New England Science Symposium *Friday, March 7, 2003*

The Biomedical Science Careers Program and the Minority Faculty Development Program at Harvard Medical School will hold the second annual "New England Science Symposium" on Friday, March 7, 2003, at the Longwood Galleria Conference Center.

The aim of the symposium is to encourage minority medical, graduate and college students (particularly African-American, Hispanic-American and American Indian/Alaska Native), involved in biomedical and health-related research to share their work through oral presentations or poster session and to exchange ideas to further their career and development.

Abstracts should be submitted by December 2, 2002. The abstract should include the name of the author(s), the title, the institution and a statement summarizing the work being presented (not to exceed 400 words). All abstracts will be reviewed and applicants notified of their acceptance in January 2003. For further information, please contact Lise D. Kaye at [lise\\_kaye@hms.harvard.edu](mailto:lise_kaye@hms.harvard.edu) or 617-432-0552. ♦

## ATTENTION ALL STUDENTS

Please send us your e-mail address and any new permanent or campus addresses:

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