



# Launching the future biomedical Ph.D.s

By Jaden Austin (English '18)

Kennesaw State University's Peach State Bridges to the Doctorate Program, a project funded by the National Institutes of Health, is preparing the next generation of biomedical doctors. The program does so by bridging the gap between education and finances. Jonathan McMurry, associate vice president for research and professor of biochemistry, is the program director.

The program allows a select few individuals the opportunity to obtain their doctorates while completing individual scientific studies. Every year four individuals are chosen to become a part of the program. The class of 2020 recipients include Brandon Stewart, Janasha Goffigan-Holmes, Ofumere Omokhodion and Krista Barbour. Even though the students are a part of the same program, their individual career goals and personal objectives vary.

Stewart is from Gray, Georgia. His current goals include earning his doctorate and pursuing a career in pharmaceutical medicine. Through Stewart's studies, he hopes to better comprehend neurological disorders, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and Huntington's diseases. Stewart said he wants to learn how such disorders "interact with normal neurons' development and potentially find targets for therapeutics against those diseases."

Goffigan-Holmes is originally from Boston, Massachusetts. She plans to earn her Ph.D. in either developmental neurology or neuroscience. After graduation, Goffigan-Holmes wants to further her career by working in either government or private practice where she hopes to continue her research on how trauma and/or stress experienced at critical stages in one's development affect their neurological and behavioral norms.

"I hope my research will influence medical practices, pharmaceuticals and social and mental health professionals to better assist them in developing better practices and treatments," she said.



Omokhodion was raised in Nigeria and wants to further her career as a researcher at a research university. Through the Peach State Bridges to the Doctorate program, Omokhodion wants to study the biometrics of genetics and genomic editing techniques. The genetic research includes testing and studying DNA strands such as inherited traits found in an individual's heritage and family gene pool. Omokhodion hopes that her research helps "improve the world and our understanding of it."

Barbour was born in the Eastern Caribbean island of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. She is currently experimenting with various diseases, such as yeast infections and other fungal diseases using cell-penetrating peptides linked to protein cargos. She believes the program is a stepping-stone, allowing her to enter a Ph.D. program in biomedical sciences. Ultimately her dream is to become a medical science liaison.

Many of the participants agreed that the Peach State Bridges to the Doctorate program has elevated their academic experiences. They are able to develop their research skills while advancing their professional goals. The opportunity will not only change their own lives, but also make a change in the lives of others through their research.