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Timothy Fernandez

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# 2010 Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship Recipients

Timothy Fernandez

If UAB students Tamara Burleson, Atbin Doroodchi, and Shweta Patel had one lesson to share with future undergraduate researchers, it would be the importance of perseverance. “Don’t give up! Whatever your goal is – Don’t take no for an answer! Don’t be disappointed if it doesn’t seem like you’re doing anything. The process is gradual. Don’t give up when you make your first mistake! The best things you learn come from them.” Throughout their research careers, they have achieved high levels of academic merit through their strong work-ethic, self-drive, and perseverance: the qualities that exemplify Goldwater Scholars.

The Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship is given to highly qualified undergraduate researchers who excel in academics and want to pursue a research career in the fields of mathematics, science, engineering, or computer science. For the 2010-2011 academic year, 278 of these scholars, 5 from Alabama, were selected from 1,111 applicants to receive the award, and Tamara, Atbin, and Shweta are the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth UAB undergraduates to be given the prestige. For each of them, the award symbolizes more than just the honor.

Tamara Burleson, a supplementation instructor for Organic Chemistry from Red Bay, Alabama, is a senior pursuing a degree in Chemistry and a minor in Biology. Currently, her career plan is to get her MD/PhD and become a research physician specializing in medical oncology. She is working in the laboratory of

of Yuqing Li, Ph.D., investigating the function of the homolog of *BTBD9* gene in a roundworm *Caenorhabditis elegans*. The *BTBD9* gene has been implicated to be a susceptibility gene for restless legs syndrome and Tourette syndrome. He is pursuing his dual bachelor degrees in Molecular Biology and Mathematics. He hopes to be a trained neurologist with a PhD in Cellular Biology and conduct neurobiology research for the National Institutes of Health or a leading research university specifically on the pathophysiology of movement disorders. For Doroodchi, the Goldwater Scholarship manifested from his own drive and determination. Even though lab work does not produce results every time, he always finds the joy and the ambition to form a new hypothesis. He believes this honor will set off a domino effect to open his future to greater scientific endeavors. Atbin is grateful for the opportunity to work in such cutting-edge research, and he encourages students to apply if they feel eligible.

Shweta Patel, a member of the University Honors Program from Birmingham, Alabama, is a senior in the lab of Trygve Tollefsbol, Ph.D., investigating the role of natural compounds in breast cancer prevention. She is pursuing a degree in Molecular Biology and in the process of applying to medical schools and MD/PhD programs to hopefully pursue a career in academic medicine. Whether in the classroom or one on one instruction, Patel hopes to establish a career epitomizing the mentor/student dynamic. Upon winning this award, she emphasized that the entire journey

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Christopher Willey at UAB’s Radiation Oncology Center and is investigating the links between specific proteins and radiation treatment effectiveness. Since a very young age, the value of hard labor and independence has been instilled in her, and these characteristics translated into the desire for academic research. Tamara says that winning the award still feels surreal, yet she believes that the sincere effort she put into the process was just as rewarding and beneficial. For her, the opportunity to go out and teach herself independently is an experience she will value for the rest of her career.

Atbin Doroodchi, a sophomore in the Science and Technology Honors Program from Birmingham, Alabama, works in the lab

and accomplishments should be regarded as “a group effort – more than just an individual achievement.” For her, the award should be seen as the product of great mentorship, from family to faculty, throughout her entire education.

Undergraduates like Tamara, Atbin, and Shweta add to the prominence that is UAB research. Students with extensive research experience should consider applying for the Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship. It is a prestigious honor, and the opportunities and facilities available here at UAB make students highly competitive. More information can be found at <http://www.act.org/goldwater/> as well as <https://star.uab.edu/bitx/star/live/>.