

A Major Catalyst for Undergraduate Enrichment

By Robin Heffler

Babatunde Akinloye, a UCLA sophomore majoring in Afro-American studies, regularly returns to his South Central Los Angeles neighborhood and tells high school students how they too can strive for admission to UCLA and other colleges.

“My transition to UCLA was not as rough as for others, so I want to help those who were not as fortunate as I am in finding scholarships and supportive family resources,” said Akinloye, the recipient of a Wasserman Blue and Gold Scholarship that funded much of his undergraduate education.

“The Wasserman Blue and Gold Scholarship has alleviated much of my fiscal needs, and the counseling provided through the program has also been very beneficial,” said Akinloye. “My advisor, Angela Deaver Campbell (director of the Scholarship Resource Center), meets with me to monitor my academic performance. It helps that I’m not just navigating through UCLA on my own.”

Akinloye, who wants to use his degree to create films that represent the African-American experience, is one of 40 undergraduates in the Wasserman Blue and Gold Program, which helps bring to UCLA students from high schools that traditionally sent few students to the campus. This is one of several scholarship programs made possible by a gift from Lew and Edie Wasserman, establishing the largest endowment for undergraduate support at UCLA. In total, the Wasserman Fund provides \$5,000 scholarships to 120 students each year.

Benefactors of UCLA since the 1960s, the Wasserman family stipulated that recipients show both financial need and academic merit. Judith L. Smith, dean and vice provost for undergraduate education, fulfilled the Wassermans’ wishes by designing a program that addresses the several types of student needs.

“The Wasserman scholarships motivate and reward students who participate in academic enrichment activities,” said Smith. “On average, those who are eligible need about \$6,000 a year beyond what they receive from federal and state grants. If they don’t get it, they have to work or take out a loan. With a

A gift from Lew and Edie Wasserman supports more than 100 undergraduate students each year.

Wasserman scholarship they can really focus on education without worrying about finding a job or accumulating too many loans.”

Under the plan developed by Smith, who heads the College’s Division of Undergraduate Education, three scholarship programs were developed. The first was for students who complete their community college education as honors students. These students are eligible to apply for a Wasserman scholarship under the Transfer Alliance Program (TAP). Each year, 20 students receive these two-year awards for their junior and senior years at UCLA. In addition, 10 community college students from underrepresented high schools receive TAP Blue and Gold scholarships.

The largest group of awards is for 50 Wasserman Research Scholars, who are completing a senior thesis or an equivalent project in their academic field as part of the College undergraduate research program.

Tria Marie Ellison, for example, is a senior anthropology major and Wasserman Research Scholar. Her senior project is titled “Let the Lions Speak: The Story of Madi History Told through Craft Traditions in Northern Uganda.” Her work is part of a larger project in which a 19th-century fort in Uganda is being excavated for a range of linguistic, political and historical information.

“The Madi were displaced twice in the 1800s and once in the 1970s,” said Ellison, who has volunteered on several research projects for the history department and the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology (*for more on the Cotsen Institute, see page 4*).

“This research is important because we see people getting displaced from their homelands all the time,” said Ellison. “If we can understand the process, maybe we can change the politics and learn how to integrate the groups.”

Being a Wasserman Scholar allowed Ellison to concentrate on her research rather than searching for funds to support it. While she has been unable to travel to the excavation site because of political instability in Uganda, she hopes to get there next winter when she is in graduate school.

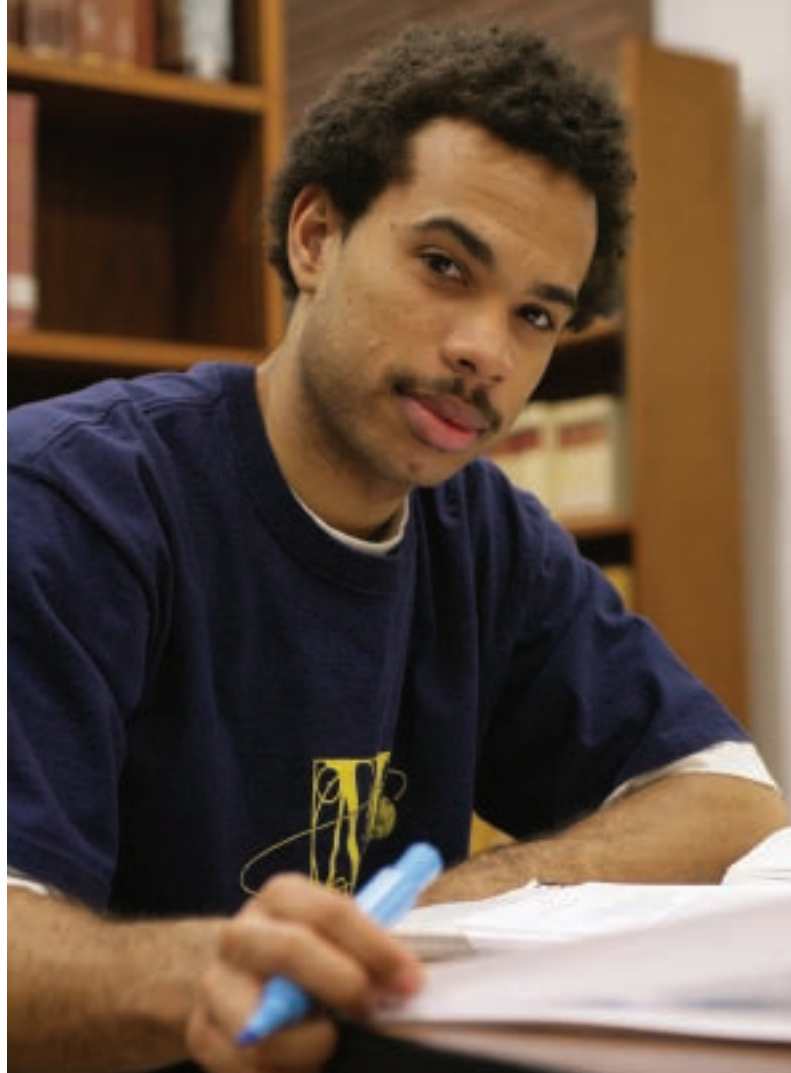
Ellison also credits the scholarship with helping her get into graduate school.

“Being a Wasserman scholar is a prestigious honor that I think influenced my acceptance to graduate school,” said Ellison, who in the fall will attend the University of Wisconsin to work toward a doctorate in anthropology. “I believe the reason I was accepted is that I have been doing so much research and went to field school in Panama, where I learned how to locate, set up and excavate a field site.”

Jeanne L. Perry, associate adjunct professor of molecular, cell, and developmental biology, sees the impact of the Wasserman Research Scholarships on students she mentors.

“It frees up their minds to think about a research problem, and take the time to design and carry out experiments,” Perry said. “The Wasserman scholars tend to be the best of my students.”

Elaine Lee and Grace Chang, two of Perry’s current students who are both Wasserman scholars, have each identified proteins in the genes of tuberculosis bacteria that are required for the bacteria to thrive. Lee and Chang are working on how these genes operate to see how the bacteria can be destroyed without




Undergraduate Aaron Allen conducts research on race and identity, with an emphasis on multiracial issues. Allen’s work is supported by a Wasserman Research Scholarship. He also serves as a tutor in the university’s Academic Advancement Program, and volunteers to tutor incarcerated teens.

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harming the human host, so that researchers can develop drugs to treat them.

“The Wasserman scholarships reward and facilitate undergraduate participation at so many levels—in research, teacher preparation, honors courses and civic projects,” said Smith. “Through the Wasserman scholarships we can encourage students to engage in academic programs that really enhance their experience at UCLA—both in their classroom work and in research.”

The Wasserman Scholarship Fund was established in 1998—an early leadership gift in Campaign UCLA from Lew and Edie Wasserman. In shaping the gift, the Wassermans were inspired by the letters they already received each year from UCLA students whose scholarships and fellowships were funded by the couple’s earlier gifts.

“A common thread goes through all these letters,” said Edie Wasserman. “They say, ‘we couldn’t have gone to school without you.’” 

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