

PROFESSIONAL GOALS

As an African American male raised on a farm in rural Mississippi, my family's daily survival depended on planning, so at the very least, I am confident in my ability to set goals and plan accordingly. I knew pursuing a Ph.D. would be difficult; however, my worry did not involve being able to complete the lab work as I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the lab during my undergraduate studies. I was more concerned about my academics. While my grades improved throughout my undergraduate career, I still had doubts that I could achieve my goal of a Ph.D. because of the difficulty of the coursework ahead. To my excitement in my first semester of graduate school, I received the highest GPA that I had ever received since graduating from high school almost five years ago. Graduating as a first-generation college student from my rural community, I realized that my foundation of perseverance, adaptability, and being different are the essential qualities that I needed to further develop for success in a graduate program. I was very hesitant about making professional goals for myself because of my fear of coursework, but now, I can say that I am capable, and I do have plans for my future. As a young professional scientist, I have always seen a lack of minorities in the STEM field which is why the Neuroscience Scholars Program is so special. I was nineteen years old when I sat in front of my first African American male teacher. This past year was my first attendance at the SfN annual meeting, and words cannot be placed on how out of place I felt because each day I realized that I was pursuing a career where very few resembled me. My dream is to create a pipeline that increases research exposure and experiences for community college and high school students that come from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds as myself. To do this, I will meet several goals. First, I will strengthen my educational background by continuing to excel in graduate courses. I will write manuscripts and apply for external funding during my Ph.D. training. Upon completion of my Ph.D., I will secure a post-doctoral position that examines the mechanisms and potential treatments of cerebrovascular disorders. My ultimate professional goal is to obtain a position as a PI at an intensive research institution that has undergraduate and graduate students. As a PI, I aspire to be the face that I have rarely seen. With that, I will become a trailblazer for other minorities to follow and showing them that they too are capable of defying odds. It is essential as minorities that we start invading the spaces we were once not welcomed or exposed to, so we can further develop the scientific community into a collection of diverse individuals and I hope to become a part of that cause.

TWO YEAR PLAN

During my first semester of graduate school, I realized my potential as a student and scientist. With my background, I have more to develop in some areas like reading, understanding and writing scientific literature. My first year of graduate school is being devoted to coursework and

developing my reading and writing skills. My mentor, Dr. Nicole Ashpole, along with another professor, Dr. Noa Valcarcel-Ares, are both actively helping me develop my writing skills. I can already see improvement, but the journey is not over. Developing the plan of writing a review of the literature that encompasses my research topic is our plan to develop my writing skills. Additionally, I am currently applying for the University of Mississippi Graduate School Grant and the Graduate Training and Education Center at the University of Mississippi Medical Center which are two opportunities to strengthen my scientific writing. I have also been nominated by my department for a graduate student intensive writing workshop that spans five days. In this workshop, I will be actively working with a teacher and other students specifically on grant and manuscript writing. I will also be applying for the Summer Program in Neuroscience, Excellence and Success (SPINES). I am confident that the SPINES program will provide me with the environment to become proficient at grant writing and communicating science. If chosen as a recipient of the Neuroscience Scholars Program, my first year of the program would consist of finishing my coursework and my qualification examinations. I recently applied for the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and after I complete my foundational coursework in the fall, I will be applying for the additional internal and external funding. This past year, I was fortunate to receive the Trainee Professional Development Award to attend SfN 2019. This conference was truly eye-opening and I plan to continue to attend the annual meeting to present my research. Additionally, I hope to present my research at a smaller conference with a focus on aging and the aging brain, such as the American Aging Association conference. I am honored to be selected as a Southern Regional Education Board Scholar which allows me to attend the annual Institute on Teaching and Mentoring (ITM) sponsored by that program. In the second year of the Neuroscience Scholars program, I will be deep into my dissertation project and hopefully have received funding. Regardless of the funding situation, I will be in the lab full-time working towards completing my project and submitting at least two manuscripts throughout the process. In sum, within the next two and a half years, I hope to gain funding to support my graduate project and my conference travels, as well as make progress towards my writing and research goals. The Neuroscience Scholars Program will not only guarantee participation at the SFN annual meeting, but it will also allow for several other professional development activities while providing a venue for me to not feel out of place as the only minority scientist in the room.