

UH-Downtown's Vicky Estrera Brings Home the Bacon

A Million NIH Dollars are Earmarked to Support MARC Scholar Program at UHD

(Houston, Texas, June 2, 2007) Dr. Vicky Estrera, Scholars Academy Director at UH-Downtown, has succeeded in cracking a new and very big nut - the National Institutes of Health (NIH). UHD science students will reap the benefit.

Estrera, principal investigator, was awarded a NIH/National Institute of General Medical Sciences grant paying \$192,890 per year for the next five years (almost one million dollars!) to support a Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC) Undergraduate Student Training in Academic Research (U-STAR) Scholar Program housed at UHD with special programs at the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (GSBS) at the University of Texas Health Science Center Houston.

"This grant is important," says Estrera. "It is UHD's first NIH grant, and there is no other MARC grant in Houston - and only three others in Texas. Not only that, but only around 8% of NIH applications are funded, so this is flag-waving, confetti-throwing achievement."

The three main goals of the MARC U-STAR Scholars Program at UHD are the training of qualified pre-doctoral underrepresented minority students, the entrance of these students into strong biomedical doctoral programs, and the strengthening of UHD's biomedical science course curriculum and research training environment.

To get into the MARC program, students take a biomedical laboratory course which is developed and delivered through grant funds. The grant also provides stipends for faculty research on campus to attract students to research. With \$10,000 stipends and funding for travel and research, MARC scholars will engage in undergraduate biomedical research at various undergraduate and graduate schools across the country, take a GRE preparation course, and present at yearly conferences. They will attend the pre-doctoral research program held at UHD and then a summer undergraduate research program at six possible programs across country (UH, UT Houston's GSBS, TAMU, Baylor College of Medicine, Case Western Reserve, or UC at Berkeley). At the end of the grant period, 15 scholars will have entered top-quality biomedical sciences graduate programs.

This new NIH grant underscores the creative thinking and go-get-it attitude at **UHD's Department of Natural Sciences**. Kudos!

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**Dr. Estrera Wins
Coveted NIH
Pre-Doctorate
Grant**

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