

First Gates Millennium Scholar for UNC Charlotte

Roshonda Barner has planted herself at UNC Charlotte and is growing in her research at the North Carolina Research Campus. As the University's first Gates Millennium Scholar, Barner is in her first year of study in the Bioinformatics and Computational Biology doctoral program. Arriving from North Carolina A&T where she received her undergraduate degree in applied mathematics, Barner's research looks at how environmental stresses, such as heat and drought, can lead to changes in alternative splicing in the plant *Arabidopsis thaliana*, a mustard like plant commonly used in research.

Currently working in Dr. Ann Loraine's lab at NCRC, Barner is doing one of her two semester rotations before she commits to a particular lab. She spends her time between the two campuses, taking courses at UNC Charlotte then making the 30-mile drive up Interstate 85 to the Plants for Human Health Institute facility in Kannapolis, North Carolina.

"I chose to study bioinformatics at UNC Charlotte because I was attracted to the research being conducted by the Department of Bioinformatics and Genomics and the recent addition of the Ph.D. program in Bioinformatics and Computational Biology" credits Barner. "I feel that bioinformatics research is growing rapidly in the region and I want to be a part of that growth."

"The life sciences will provide the solutions to many of the great challenges of the 21st century, from feeding our population to protecting our environment and our health," says Dr. Lawrence Mays, Chair of the Department of Bioinformatics and Genomics. "At the same time, the science has become far more quantitative. Our program gives students both the domain knowledge and computational skills to make major contributions in this field."

The Gates Millennium Scholars program is funded by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The goal of the program is to help minorities become leaders in underrepresented areas, such as math, science, engineering, computer science, education, and library science.

The University is excited to have a student of Barner's caliber at UNC Charlotte and working in the NCRC cooperative.

"Attracting a Gates Millennium Scholar to one of our doctoral programs is a win for the University," says Dr. Susan Sell, Senior Associate Dean in the Graduate School. "In addition to

demonstrating superb academic qualifications, scholars must exhibit strong leadership potential and be committed to community service.”

“It is an honor to be a Gates Scholar and even more of one to be the first such scholar at UNC Charlotte,” says Barner. “The first thing that I have noticed upon starting my studies at UNC Charlotte is the welcoming atmosphere. This made the transition very smooth for me!”

For additional information on the Gates Millennium Scholars program visit <http://gmsp.org/>