

## White Coat Ceremony Welcomes Minority Students into Scientific Community

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*MCC and RIT collaborate on second year of the Rochester Biomedical Experience*

**ROCHESTER** - Promoting minority participation in biomedical fields is the goal of the Rochester Biomedical Experience. Now in its second year, the collaboration between Monroe Community College and Rochester Institute of Technology seeks to build on its success.

Today, the program's second cohort of nine students received personalized white lab coats in a ceremony at MCC's Warshof Conference Center, R. Thomas Flynn Campus Center. The ceremony symbolically marked the following students' passage from high school students to biomedical scholars: Bakari McAllister, The Aquinas Institute of Rochester; Mohamed Mohamed, East High School; Anil More, Thomas Jefferson High School; Brianca Parker, Wilson Magnet High School; Brenda Ramos, Wilson Magnet High School; Mayra Rodriguez, East High School; Jocelyn Santiago, East High School; LaShay Sewell, School of Applied Technology at Edison; and Beniam Yeataihe, School Without Walls.

The event included remarks from college dignitaries and Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks. Tom Smith, professor of chemistry at RIT, served as keynote speaker and shared his personal experiences with the new scholars.

The Rochester Biomedical Experience is funded by a \$624,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health as part of the Bridges to the Baccalaureate program. Participants will complete their associate degree at MCC and then transfer to RIT to finish their bachelor's degree in a biomedical field. The program serves as a pipeline for talented students who otherwise may not have the opportunity to obtain a bachelor's degree. RIT and MCC work together to recruit qualified high school seniors for the program and co-host a five-week summer program, Summer Exploration in Biomedical Sciences, for incoming biomedical scholars using the facilities of both campuses. The summer course includes classroom training, lab work and hands-on interaction with students and faculty. The white coat ceremony marks the official start of the program.

Throughout their tenure at MCC, the biomedical scholars will receive guidance and instruction from RIT faculty and advisors and will participate in joint summer research projects with faculty from both campuses following their first and second years at MCC. Students will also receive a stipend through the program to help cover expenses. Five of the students who started the program last year are currently conducting summer research projects with RIT professors. The success of these students will influence future cohorts who participate in the Biomedical Experience.

"For most of these young people it really is an uphill battle, yet a small, strong group of students completed the first year, and we're proud of them and their accomplishments," says Douglas Merrill, professor of biological sciences at RIT and director of the Center for Bioscience Education and Technology. "This summer we will spend more time concentrating on areas of college preparation to help the students overcome challenges and transition into their freshman year at MCC. Peer-on-peer mentoring also will be an important part of the program as it progresses and will help students adjust."

According to MCC Vice President Janet Glocker supporting student success is paramount. "The promising students who participate in the Rochester Biomedical Experience have the opportunity to become leaders in biomedicine. Most importantly, they will serve as role models to others who, through their example, will find the courage and determination to also pursue biomedical careers and make a

significant impact on health care nationwide.”

Minority groups remain disproportionately underrepresented within the ranks of health care professionals. Studies strongly suggest an increase in diversity among health professionals will lead to improved access to health care for minorities, greater patient choice and more focus on diseases that predominantly affect minorities