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**First Howard University Student Receives Prestigious
Howard Hughes Medical Institute Fellowship**

Daniel Gilmer Among Five Young Scientists Selected Nationwide as Gilliam Fellow

Washington, D.C., February 4, 2008 – The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) has selected Howard University senior Daniel Gilmer as one of five recipients nationwide for the 2008 Gilliam Fellowships for Advanced Studies. He is the first Howard student so honored.

The competitive fellowships, offered to outstanding students from groups underrepresented in the sciences or from disadvantaged backgrounds, provide full support for up to five years of study toward a Ph.D. in the sciences. The students will use the fellowships to gain the knowledge and experience they need to address some of the world's health care challenges as researchers and physician-scientists.

“We have chosen five remarkable students as Gilliam fellows this year; we are lucky to have them in the HHMI family,” said Peter J. Bruns, vice president for grants and special programs at HHMI. “These recipients have already accomplished much; the five-year fellowships should help them build on the talent and scientific curiosity that they have already demonstrated.”

With the Gilliam fellowships, HHMI aims to increase diversity among science professors. To help the fellows bring their diverse backgrounds and experiences to bear on the questions that scientists will confront in coming years, the Institute is committed to enriching their graduate experiences in a variety of ways. In addition to receiving full financial support, fellows will attend meetings with other HHMI scientists and receive professional development mentoring and additional support as they launch their academic careers.

The first Gilliam fellowships were awarded in 2005; named for the late James H. Gilliam Jr., a charter Trustee of HHMI who spent his life fostering excellence and diversity in education and science. HHMI is currently supporting 17 Gilliam fellows in addition to this year's awardees.

“Throughout his life and as an HHMI trustee, Jim Gilliam was committed to encouraging underrepresented minority students to pursue careers in science,” said HHMI President Thomas R. Cech. “The Gilliam fellowships are an ideal way for the Institute to honor him and continue that effort.”

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The Gilliam fellowships build on HHMI's Exceptional Research Opportunities Program (EXROP), which provides talented undergraduates from disadvantaged backgrounds with summer research experiences in the labs of HHMI investigators and HHMI professors. Since EXROP began in 2003, HHMI has supported 242 students in the labs of 111 HHMI scientists. Past participants in EXROP are eligible to apply for Gilliam fellowships. This year, HHMI received 23 applications from former EXROP students for the fellowships.

The remaining four winners of the 2008 Gilliam fellowships for Advanced Study are from Hunter College of the City University of New York, Cornell University, Washington University in St. Louis and Carnegie Mellon University. They, along with Gilmer, have developed a common passion: a desire to improve their world through science.

About Daniel Gilmer (courtesy HHMI):

Becoming a physician seemed the obvious track for Daniel Gilmer when he began his studies at Howard University in Washington, D.C., in 2004. "I knew I enjoyed biology, and also community service," he said. "I figured bringing the two together—that would be medicine."

But positive research experiences as an undergraduate convinced him to change that goal. He realized, he said, that investigating fundamental molecular interactions within living cells might help people even more than clinical treatment. "A doctor can help one person at a time," said Gilmer, "but a researcher can help 10,000 people with a single discovery." And so, even though he'd already taken the Medical College Admission Test and written an application essay for M.D./Ph.D. programs, Gilmer dropped the idea of medical school in favor of a Ph.D. in biochemistry.

For Gilmer, who grew up in the suburbs outside Orlando, Florida, community service has always been a part of life. During high school he volunteered for Habitat for Humanity, worked on food and clothing drives for his church, and in 2002 traveled to Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa for missionary work.

Gilmer returned to South Africa on a church mission in 2005, and said his travels convinced him of the "intense need" for more research to help treat the life-threatening diseases that haunt underdeveloped nations. He became determined to obtain an M.D./Ph.D. to prepare him to contribute to that effort.

As a junior, Gilmer began working with Winston Anderson, an HHMI professor at Howard, to investigate the effects of silver nanoparticles on human cancer cells. Silver is known to kill bacteria, and Gilmer's work in the bio-nanotechnology laboratory focused on exploring possible new avenues for pharmaceuticals. "He has the determination to confront difficult academic problems," said Anderson. "He could not be a better student, or a better person."

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After his first year working with Anderson, in summer 2007 Gilmer traveled to MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to participate in HHMI's Exceptional Research Opportunities Program (EXROP), which provides talented undergraduates from disadvantaged backgrounds with summer research experiences in the labs of HHMI investigators and HHMI professors. At MIT, he spent 10 weeks in HHMI professor Catherine Drennan's x-ray crystallography lab, determining the structures of nickel-binding proteins in bacteria.

Gilmer's summer in Drennan's state-of-the-art lab proved formative. He discarded hundreds of malformed crystals before getting it right, and through the project's ups and downs he became "captivated by the process" of science as much as with the product. It was toward the end of that summer that he set aside the M.D./Ph.D. program applications he'd been preparing for months and decided to focus on a Ph.D. alone.

Gilmer is currently the president of the Howard Hughes Medical Research Scholars Program at Howard University, which gives students supported by Anderson's HHMI professor award the opportunity to present their research, visit other research institutions, and listen to guest lectures from notable researchers. Gilmer, who is currently applying to Ph.D. programs, said that organizing and motivating his peers has been good training for his goal of becoming a principal investigator. Once he gets there, he will focus his research on creating new, targeted drugs to improve the lives of people in underserved communities. "I want my research to have a human impact," he said.

Howard University is a private, research university that is comprised of 12 schools and colleges. Founded in 1867, students pursue studies in more than 120 areas leading to undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees. Since 1998, the University has produced two Rhodes Scholars, a Truman Scholar, a Marshall Scholar, 19 Fulbright Scholars and 11 Pickering Fellows. Howard also produces more on-campus African-American Ph.D. recipients than any other university in the United States. For more information on Howard University, call 202-238-2330, or visit the University's Web site at www.Howard.edu.

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