

January 15, 2010

Louis W. Sullivan, MD
Chairman
The Alliance of Virginia and Nebraska
2201 W. Broad Street, Suite 201
Richmond, VA 23220-2022

Dear Dr. Sullivan:

This report summarizes the activities of Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in 2008-09 as a partnering institution with the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance. During the summer of 2009, the remaining funds (\$1,000) from the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance were used to offset the \$4,000 stipend given to Ana Dunn. Ana, a junior at VCU, was given the stipend for her participation in the 10-week Dental Student Training and Research program (D-STAR). D-STAR provides undergraduate minority students an opportunity to work closely with a faculty mentor on a research project in the area of dentistry.

Ana's faculty mentor was Dr. Tegwyn Brickhouse, D.D.S., Ph.D. Ana assisted Dr. Brickhouse with an ongoing study to determine the best method for DNA extraction methods for saliva and dental plaque samples obtained from mothers and their infant children. At the end of the program, Ana created a scientific poster based on her research and presented an oral presentation.

Ana hands-on research experience was supplemented by bi-weekly didactic courses designed to develop the skills she and other undergraduate students need to become successful researchers. Examples of some of the topics covered include the following: 1) an overview of the research process, 2) introduction to scientific literature, and 3) basic format for scientific papers. In addition, Ana was required to attend a weekly lecture series, in which she learned about the research interests and career paths of current faculty.

In addition to the partial support of Ana, the Alliance facilitated other activities, which are listed below:

- In the fall of 2008, the Alliance hosted a recruitment trip to local Historically Black Colleges (HBCUs). A staff member from VCU's Division for Health Sciences Diversity participated in the trip. This trip combined with the independent efforts of VCU staff to recruit students for its research training programs resulted in 5 students from local HBCUs participating in VCU's 2009 summer research programs. These students, who were supported by VCU grants, include Jessica Love (Hampton Univ.), Priscilla Amoah (VSU) 3) Lorenza Black (VUU), 4) Aleesha Woodruff (VUU), and 5) Anisha Simpson (VUU).
- VCU's partnership with the Alliance resulted in the strengthening of its relationship with VUU faculty and the establishment of a long-term internship program designed to train VUU enrolled students in research on healthy pregnancy outcomes. Sky Payne, served as an intern during her senior year (2008-09) at VUU. This ongoing internship is supported with funds from a P60 grant from the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities Center.

Respectfully submitted,
PonJola Coney, MD
VCU Representative to the VA-Nebraska Alliance