

Amgen Commits \$25 Million in Grants

Foundation Funds Intensive Summer Research Program for Undergrads Across the Country

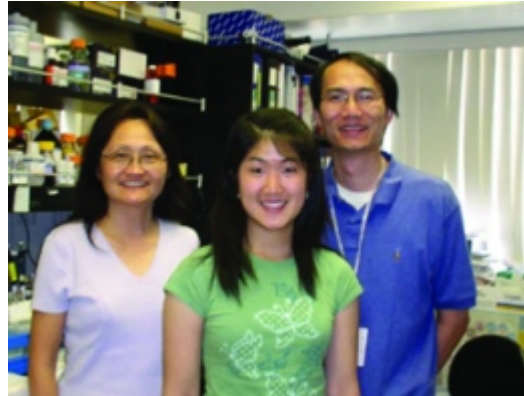
This is a regular feature on philanthropic activities by Valley-area businesspeople and companies.

By LINDA COBURN

Contributing Reporter

Amgen Foundation has made grants totaling \$12.5 million to 10 colleges and universities to fund the first four years of the Amgen Scholars program.

The Foundation has committed \$25 million over eight years to the initiative which will provide undergraduates in the fields of medicine and medical sciences with paid summer research internships at some of the top scientific institutions in the country including UCLA and Cal Tech.



From left: Dr. Hong Wu (faculty mentor), Jennifer Yeh and Dr. Wei Guo.

“We received 1,700 applications,” said Scott Heimlich, senior manager of the Amgen Foundation. “We are especially excited because a majority (58 percent) of the scholars are female and 30 percent of the students are from underrepresented ethnic groups, particularly African American and Latino American.”

Heimlich also noted that Amgen Scholars is not just for students attending top universities. “We have about 100 colleges and universities represented in this class, from 36 states and Puerto Rico,” said Heimlich.

Four Valley residents are among the 240 students who qualified to participate in the inaugural year of the program.

Jennifer Yeh, of North Hollywood, and Sergey Boyarskiy, of Van Nuys, were both assigned to the UCLA research laboratories.

During the school year, Yeh is studying chemical and biological engineering at MIT. This summer she spent 10 weeks at UCLA studying self-renewable leukemic stem cells.

UCLA bioengineering student Boyarskiy was able to further his research on emperor’s thumb, a novel gene implicated in regulating apoptosis (programmed cell death) in *Drosophila melanogaster* (fruit flies).

Another UCLA undergrad, Randall Chin, of Van Nuys, was the winner of the Los Angeles City College Math Contest in 2004. As an Amgen Scholar, he spent his summer at U.C. San Francisco researching the expression of synaptic vesicular transporters for glutamate in the ventromedial hypothalamic neurons.

Tanya Marton, of North Hollywood, represented North Hollywood High School in the 2004 National Science Bowl. She is now a sophomore at Yale, majoring in both molecular biophysics and biochemistry and cognitive science. Marton summered at MIT where she is studying the role of cytokines in cortical plasticity in vivo.

Tama Hasson, assistant director of the UCLA Undergraduate Research Center and Center for Academic and Research Excellence, explained the program’s funding.

"It's a grant like you might get from the NIH (National Institutes of Health) to run a summer program," said Hasson. "We were invited to apply and we had to submit an application that outlined the programs we would provide and had a budget for how much we would spend per student."

UCLA is hosting 25 students for 10 weeks.

The biggest expense, according to Hasson, is housing. The students are all living in one dorm on campus.

In addition to their research, the Amgen Scholars participate in a number of other programs. "They have a weekly luncheon," said Hasson, "where there might be an invited faculty speaker or they might have a workshop to assist the students with the components they have to accomplish as part of the program."

For example, each scholar has to put together a poster presentation about their research and write a research paper, so one of the luncheons was a workshop on how to put together an excellent poster.

"We have also had discussions about careers, degree programs, graduate programs, getting a medical degree versus a Ph.D., so they get career information as it were," said Hasson. "Plus they get free food, which they like."

The scholars were also given a GRE prep course courtesy of UCLA Extension. "One of the criteria for them getting into the program is an interest in going on to graduate school," said Hasson.

In addition to their work in the laboratories, all 246 of the Amgen Scholars were transported to a three-day symposium in Lake Tahoe where they listened to leading scientists discuss the cutting-edge of medical research, received practical advice on key aspects of career development, and got a chance to meet and get to know their peers.

Last week all of the participants went to Thousand Oaks to the Amgen headquarters. "They had tour of the facilities and met with some very high level administrative people as well as people who work in the company," said Hasson.

"They're a terrific group of students," she said. "They're very thoughtful. In the very first week we did a show of hands and asked how many had spent more than 12 hours in one day in the lab yet and many of them raised their hands."

Hasson went on, "Some of the students are from schools where it's not research-intensive, so this is a really significant experience for them to work in a top-tier institution and do research at this kind of level."