



Black Winemaker Scholarship Program 2023-2024 End-of-Year Report

(Report Period: 2023 – 2024 Academic Year)

Program Contacts:

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Overview

UNCF (United Negro College Fund) expresses its deepest gratitude to the Urban Connoisseurs Organization for their remarkable contribution to the advancement of higher education and the nurturing of future college graduates. The Black Winemaker Scholarship Program, funded by your generous grant of \$30,000.00, has significantly impacted the academic journeys of 3 deserving students during the 2023-2024 academic year. We are delighted to provide an in-depth account of the program's successes and the individual achievements of the scholars, offering both narrative and financial insights.

As the leading organization dedicated to providing minority students with access to higher education, UNCF administers over 400 scholarship and internship programs annually. This expansive support network is made possible through the unwavering commitment and generosity of our valued partners, enabling more than 60,000 deserving students, like Eniola Olaoye, a master's student and plant sciences major at Florida A&M University. Eniola, and countless others, have experienced a tremendous sense of relief and focus, thanks to scholarship programs like the one initiated by Urban Connoisseurs.

Selection Process

For the 2023-2024 academic year, the selection process for the Black Winemaker Scholarship Program was initiated. In May of 2023, the application process was launched, reaching potential candidates through various platforms, including the UNCF website and associated networking channels. UNCF's relationship manager for the program employed a range of recruitment strategies to identify a pool of highly qualified candidates, which included:

- Engagement and outreach to scholarship coordinators at educational institutions.
- Direct communication with students identified through UNCF's existing databases.

Applicants meeting the established eligibility criteria were invited to submit their applications for consideration. The criteria included:

1. Possess a minimum, cumulative grade point average of 3.2 on a 4.0 scale.
2. Be African American.
3. Reside as a U.S. Citizen or be a permanent resident of the United States.
4. Be enrolled full-time as a junior, senior, or graduate student (MS and/or Ph.D.) attending any U.S. accredited four-year or graduate college or university in the Fall of 2023 and majoring in viticulture or enology or like sciences (e.g. plant pathology.)
5. Be a graduate student (MS and/or Ph.D.) in Fall 2023 pursuing an advance degree in one of the fields of agriculture and environmental chemistry, chemical engineering, ecology, food science, integrative genetics & genomics, horticulture & agronomy, microbiology, plant pathology, soils & biogeochemistry, or viticulture.

Following a comprehensive review and verification process, UNCF awarded scholarships to 3 students, supporting them in their educational pursuits.



Derek Baljeu
Sonoma State University

I am writing to convey my deepest gratitude for the honor of being awarded The Black Winemakers Scholarship in the amount of \$10,000. My heart is filled with gratitude for the unwavering support you have provided through this generous scholarship. Your belief in my potential is not only a source of immense encouragement but also a testament to your dedication to empowering the next generation of leaders.

It is with immense humility and appreciation that I accept this scholarship, which will be instrumental in supporting my pursuit of a Wine Executive Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree at Sonoma State University. I am enthusiastic about furthering my education and developing the skills necessary to excel in the business world.

My long-term career aspirations include founding and managing my own winery, where I can merge my passion for entrepreneurship with my love for viticulture and enology. I believe that this combination will not only lead to the creation of exceptional wines but also provide opportunities for individuals from underrepresented communities to thrive in the wine industry. With the support of The Black Winemakers Scholarship, I am well on my way to achieving these goals. The scholarship funds will help alleviate the financial burden of graduate education, allowing me to fully focus on my studies and engage in extracurricular activities that enhance my learning experience.

With Gratitude,

Derek Rio Baljeu



Eniola Olaoye
Florida A&M University

I hope this letter finds you well. It is with immense gratitude and humility that I express my sincere appreciation for being selected as one of the recipients of the Black Winemakers Scholarship in the amount of \$10,000. I am deeply honored to have been chosen from such a talented pool of candidates. This scholarship represents far more than financial assistance for my education; it is a symbol of belief, encouragement, and support from the members of the Black Winemakers community. I am genuinely touched by your confidence in my abilities and potential.

I am a second-year master's Student majoring in Plant Science at the Center for Viticulture & Small Fruit Research (CVSFR), College of Agriculture & Food Sciences (CAFS) – Florida A&M University (FAMU). I have maintained a GPA of 4.0 as a graduate student and have been recognized on the Dean's List and Honor List throughout my academic career. My research interests include ethnobotany, naturopathy, and sustainable environmental practices. I have always had a passion for finding a more natural approach to healthy living, hence the reason for my research, which involves the identification and functional characterization of volatile compounds (aromatic and flavor) present in muscadine grapes to improve the taste and quality of muscadine wines. I am committed to furthering my knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully to the world of wines. Looking ahead, my career plans involve identifying the specific compounds (aromatic compounds and polyphenols) in native plants responsible for inhibiting cancer growth, slowing down the natural aging process, and curing various ailments. I am passionate about less invasive ways of healing diseases and eager to leverage my education and skills to make a positive impact. I plan to continue my education and get a doctoral degree to continue my research.

Once again, I extend my sincere thanks to Urban Connoisseurs and the donors for this incredible opportunity. Your support is a financial blessing and a source of motivation and inspiration for me to pursue my goals with determination and enthusiasm. I am committed to making the most of this scholarship and using it as a pivot toward a fulfilling and impactful career.

Thank you for your generosity and belief in my potential.

Sincerely,

Eniola Blessing Olaoye



Eryse White
Florida A&M University

I am deeply honored and immensely grateful to express my heartfelt thanks for being awarded the Black Winemakers Scholarship, a prestigious recognition that has granted me a scholarship of \$10,000. This scholarship not only provides a significant financial boost towards my educational pursuits but also symbolizes a profound acknowledgment of my dedication to the field of winemaking and the supportive community within the wine industry. I am sincerely appreciative of the support and recognition provided by this esteemed scholarship, which will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in my journey as a student and aspiring black winemaker.

I am a third year Agriculture Science Major with a concentration in food science and plant science. I have been recognized on the Dean's List and Honor List throughout my academic career. My interests lie within the art and science of winemaking and other spirits. Also, the nutritional impact food and wine has made on our society.

I aspire to continue educating myself in the science of winemaking and grow a diverse skillset that will allow me to work with individuals within the wine industry, and support wine grape growers, winemakers, and other professionals related to the industry. My ultimate goal is to have my own brand that makes products for people to enjoy. I love creating community-oriented spaces, and I know that will follow me into my career.

Sincerely,

Eryse White

Conclusion

In an era where secure financial assistance remains an ongoing challenge for many students and their families, the number of students unable to pursue higher education is on the rise. For those fortunate scholars chosen to receive the Black Winemaker Scholarship, the burden of piecing together academic costs has been considerably lightened. This has allowed these gifted students to channel their energy and focus on their academic pursuits. Moreover, being selected to receive a scholarship through a competitive program such as this has not only boosted their self-confidence but also reinforced their determination to persevere until graduation.

The invaluable partnership with Urban Connoisseurs significantly contributes to UNCF's impressive 70% graduation rate among scholarship-supported students, which stands 9% higher than the national average for all four-year college and university students. This scholarship program has effectively bridged financial gaps, fortifying students' academic potential and fueling their lofty career aspirations. UNCF's success is intrinsically linked to dedicated supporters like the Urban Connoisseurs organization, who recognize the pivotal role that a college education plays in a young person's future accomplishments. The attainment of a post-secondary degree is not merely a step towards securing a job but a critical factor in the pursuit of a fulfilling and successful career. We deeply appreciate your unwavering commitment to the principle that all students, regardless of their background, deserve the opportunity to advance their education.

UNCF is profoundly grateful for your dedication, and we extend our heartfelt appreciation for the chance to present this triumphant scholarship program. On behalf of the scholars whose lives have been forever transformed by your support, we extend our sincerest gratitude for your investment in the future of our students. We eagerly anticipate continuing this remarkable partnership and the positive impact it will continue to have on the lives of countless aspiring scholars.