

DAVID GEFFEN MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT

UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine

Year 13 ■ June 2025

INTRODUCTION

The David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA graduated 40 David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients in the Class of 2025. These recipients enter their careers during a time of transition — both globally and on campus. Some events of the past year, including the Los Angeles County wildfires, have been devastating, while others are sources of hope, such as the way the community united in the wake of this tragedy. These experiences have shaped the scholars' journeys and ultimately the physicians they will become.

At the start of 2025, UCLA welcomed its seventh chancellor, Julio Frenk, M.D., Ph.D., a leader whose personal story is one of resilience and optimism. The son of Holocaust refugees who found safety and opportunity in Mexico, Dr. Frenk brings with him a bold vision for the school's future — keeping UCLA's mission of teaching, research and service at the forefront. Among his initiatives: a universitywide commitment to combating antisemitism and fostering a sense of belonging for all.

Well prepared by their education, the David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients embark on the next chapter of their lives ready to advance medicine, care for patients and train future generations of clinician-scientists. Their vision, too, is clear and bold: a future where patient suffering is alleviated. The stories that follow reflect the passion, dedication and humanity that define this remarkable group of current and recently graduated scholars.

GAINING MOMENTUM

Current and recently graduated David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients have already achieved acclaim in their field. They are eager to begin their careers and continue contributing to medical knowledge.



Clare Moffatt, M.D., Class of 2025, gave a poster presentation, “Implementation of Risk Analysis Index Frailty Score Initiative in Head and Neck Surgery Patients,” at the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery Annual Meeting in Miami this past September.



Matthew Rios, M.D., Class of 2025, won best poster for pediatrics and community health at the Latino Medical Student Association-West Regional Conference in February. Dr. Rios is the leadership chair of the national organization.



Frank Zhou, M.D., Class of 2025, was first author of “Reducing Wasteful Spending on Discarded Lecanemab in the US Medicare Program,” published in the prestigious journal *JAMA Internal Medicine*. Dr. Zhou was also selected as a representative to the American Medical Association’s house of delegates to advocate for improved access to care through Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program.

GAINING MOMENTUM



Olena Kleshchova, Class of 2026, serves as a case manager for the Los Angeles Human Rights Initiative Asylum Clinic, where she assists with forensic medical and psychological evaluations. She also volunteers with TeleHelp Ukraine, a student-run organization that connects health care providers in the United States with patients in Ukraine via telemedicine.



Meachelle Lum, Class of 2026, is organizing peer-led mental health interventions in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Medical students and residents are designing educational presentations on common psychiatric diagnoses in adolescents, such as anxiety, depression and learning differences, including ADHD. They are also conducting wellness workshops to help students develop safe coping mechanisms. The team is working closely with LAUSD partners to design a “Connected for Wellness” app that helps promote well-being and healthy self-care strategies.



Anael Rizzo, Class of 2026, won the best poster award for her presentation on “Prostate Cancer-targeted Therapy III” at the American Urological Association’s 2024 Annual Meeting in San Antonio. In December, she was awarded a UCLA Underrepresented in Medicine-Center of Excellence research scholarship for her proposal focused on health disparities and a commitment to pursue a career in academic urology. In February, she was awarded a medical student service grant by Physicians for a Healthy California to improve health care access in under-resourced communities.

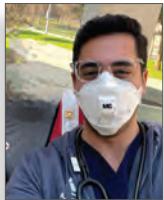
GAINING MOMENTUM



Vidhi Singh, Class of 2026, presented her research on health disparities in colorectal cancer screening at Digestive Diseases Week 2025 in San Diego. She is also working with researchers in the Department of Cardiology at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center to study the impact of the drug AC41 on cardiovascular outcomes in nonalcoholic fatty liver disease. AC41, also known as bumetanide, is typically used to treat edema, pulmonary edema and excess fluid in the membrane lining of the abdomen.



Cecilia Wada, Class of 2026, presented a poster on cost efficiency in kidney stone management at the American Urological Association's 2024 Annual Meeting in San Antonio. She was awarded best poster in the health services improvement category. Cecilia is also contributing to research on adolescent health in chaotic home and school environments.



Armeen Barghi, Class of 2027, served as a Red Cross disaster volunteer medic at the Westwood Recreation Center shelter in the wake of the Los Angeles wildfires in January.

GAINING MOMENTUM



Milan Carter, Class of 2027, received a consortium fellowship to pursue a master's degree in business at the UCLA Anderson School of Management. She looks forward to expanding her skill set in an interdisciplinary environment and learning how to bridge the gap between medicine and business to drive meaningful change for patients.



Melanie Ramirez, Class of 2027, organized a coalition of California PRIME programs, which train future physicians to become leaders in medicine who will address policy, care and research. She has partnered with community advocacy groups to bring medical students to the state capitol to meet with legislators. Melanie, who is pursuing a master's degree in public health, is also conducting mixed methods research at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center to assess how a clinic-based antipoverty program helps health utilization and mental health outcomes in a prenatal patient population.



Delaney Sullivan, Ph.D., Medical Scientist Training Program (MSTP) Class of 2027, was first author of two papers published in leading peer-reviewed journals this past year: "Accurate quantification of nascent and mature RNAs from single-cell and single-nucleus RNA-seq" in *Nucleic Acids Research* and "kallisto, bustools and kb-python for quantifying bulk, single-cell and single-nucleus RNA-seq" in *Nature Protocols*.

GAINING MOMENTUM



Sara Blagburn Blanco, MSTP Class of 2028, had research published in *Frontiers*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal. She also co-led the CELL Scholars student group, which offers funded research opportunities in UCLA laboratories to select high school students. Sara's research proposal was selected to receive funding from the Jessamine Hilliard Neurobiology Graduate Student Grant Program at UCLA.



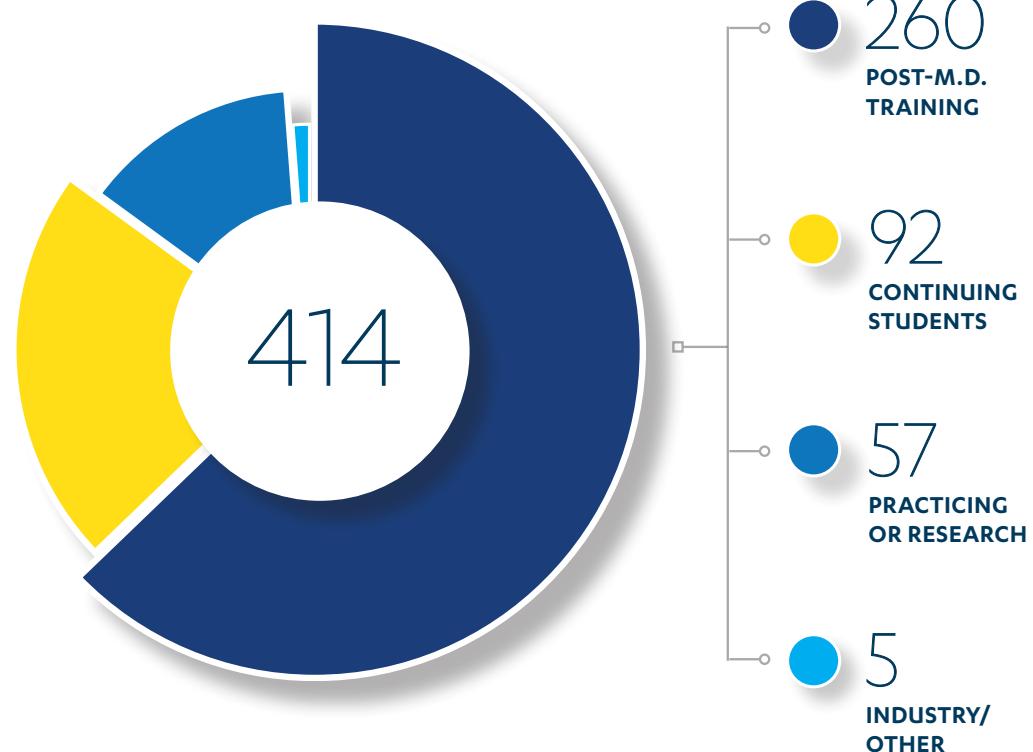
Humza Zubair, MSTP Class of 2028, was part of a UCLA team that gave a scientific session entitled "Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Based Language Center Localization Protocol Identifies Language Centers and Results in Clinical Outcomes Similar to Awake Intraoperative Testing" at the 69th annual meeting of the Western Neurological Society.

INFLUENCE AND REACH

David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients are physician-scientists to the core, eager to advance discovery. These scholars are committed to delivering the best care and conducting the kind of translational research that will improve and save lives. Students at the David Geffen School of Medicine train in a wide range of patient care settings — from Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, where they are exposed to some of the world's rarest medical cases, to community clinics, where they attend to a wide variety of populations. Our medical students graduate prepared to care for the full range of patients they may encounter.

INFLUENCE AND REACH

Total recipients of David Geffen Medical Scholarships



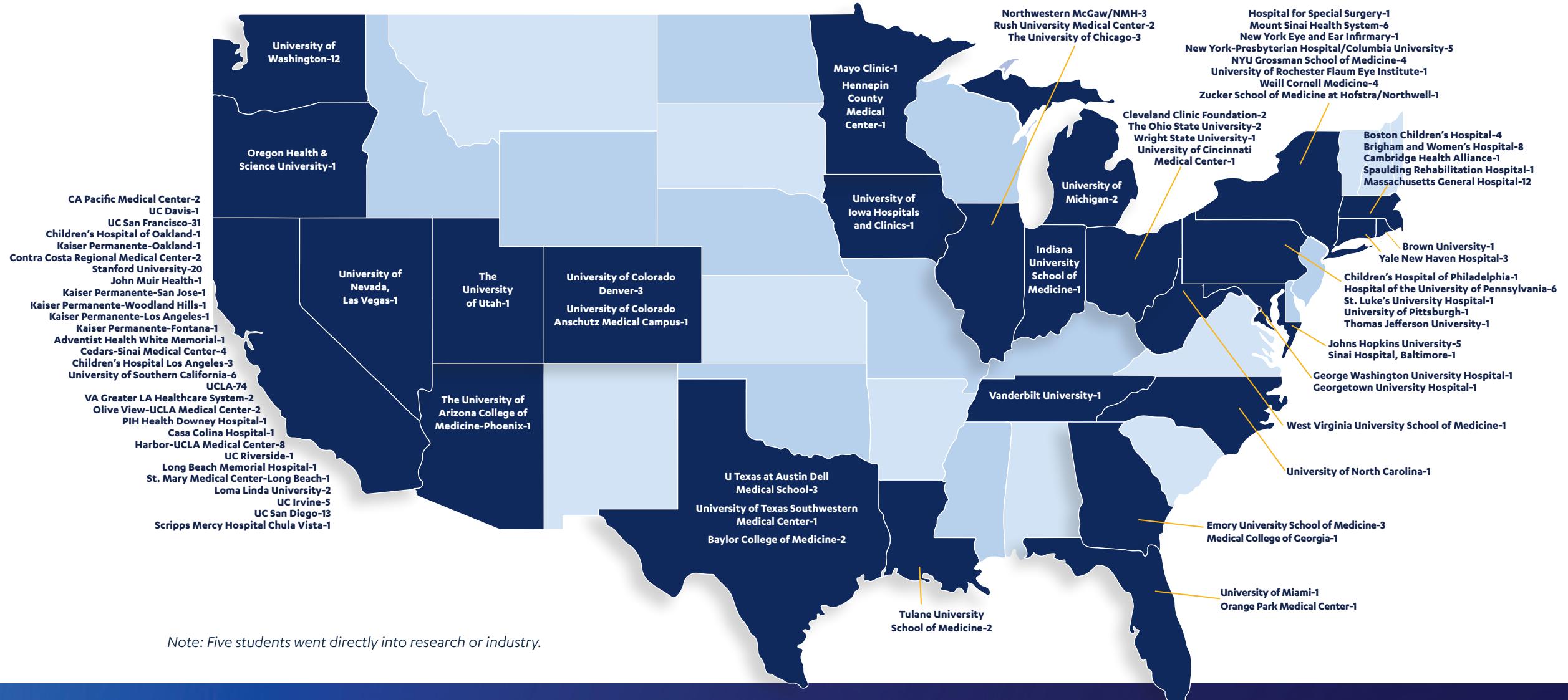
UCLA Student Chapters and Organizations Led by Recipients

- Anatomy Academy
- *The UCLA Beat* (literary journal)
- Caltech Postdoc Association Board of Directors
- First Gen @ David Geffen School of Medicine
- Medical Student Council
- Medical Students for Choice
- Med Mentors
- Mobile Clinic Project
- PRIME-LA (Social Events Committee)
- Psychiatry Interest Group
- Ophthalmology Interest Group
- Radiology and Interventional Radiology Interest Group
- Student National Medical Association (SNMA)
- Sun Protection Outreach Teaching by Students
- Surgery Interest Group
- Ultrasound Student Interest Group

The above list reflects a sample of the more than 28 clubs and organizations led by David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients.

David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients complete their graduate medical training in leading residency programs across the country.

INFLUENCE AND REACH



INFLUENCE AND REACH

Most popular specialties of David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

DAVID GEFFEN MEDICAL
SCHOLARSHIPS RECIPIENT
GRADUATES IN:



Residency: 233



Fellowship: 27



PRACTICE

Faculty physicians: 17

Clinical practice: 40

Industry/other: 5

It is not difficult to find David Geffen Medical Scholarships alums — they tend to be in the spotlight. Although all former recipients are early in their careers, they have already made great contributions to their fields.



ANDREW FISCHER LEES, M.D.

Class of 2017

Dr. Lees is part of the enterprise informatics team with the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services. Previously,

he served as a postdoctoral clinical researcher for the National Library of Medicine, part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), before completing his fellowship in clinical informatics at the University of Washington.



WILLIAM SHEPPARD, M.D.,

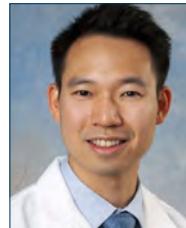
M.P.H.

Class of 2018

Dr. Sheppard has returned to UCLA Health as an orthopaedic spine specialist after training at

the prestigious Cleveland Clinic Neurological Institute. He utilizes leading-edge technologies, such as ultrasonic equipment, robotics and image guidance. His research focuses on cervical spine clinical outcomes, spinal infection prevention and management, innovations in endoscopic spine surgery, spinal trauma, and cord injury management. Dr. Sheppard is also an assistant professor of spine surgery at the David Geffen School of Medicine.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

**JASON CHANG, M.D., M.B.A.***Class of 2019*

Dr. Chang is an assistant professor of rehabilitation and regenerative medicine at Columbia University Irving

Medical Center in New York, where he also serves as an attending physical medicine and rehabilitation physician and assistant clinical professor. He has had numerous papers on the optimization of procedural techniques in interventional pain published in peer-reviewed journals. Dr. Chang also contributes to research on wearable technology, predictive analytics and enhancing access to care through technological advancements.

**NATHANIEL COGGINS, M.D.***Class of 2019*

In 2024, Dr. Coggins completed his board certification in emergency medicine and a fellowship in hospice and palliative care at the University of Utah. He is now a clinical assistant professor of emergency medicine and clinical assistant professor of medicine (primary care and population health) at Stanford Medicine.

**PRECIOUS FORTES, M.D., M.H.S.***Class of 2020*

Dr. Fortes, currently a year-five cytopathologist fellow at UCLA, won third place for her poster at the California Society of Pathologists meeting this past December.

**STEPHANIE CLAVIJO, M.D., M.P.H.***Class of 2021*

Dr. Clavijo was one of the leaders of the didactic curriculum session on “Reducing Harm and Ensuring

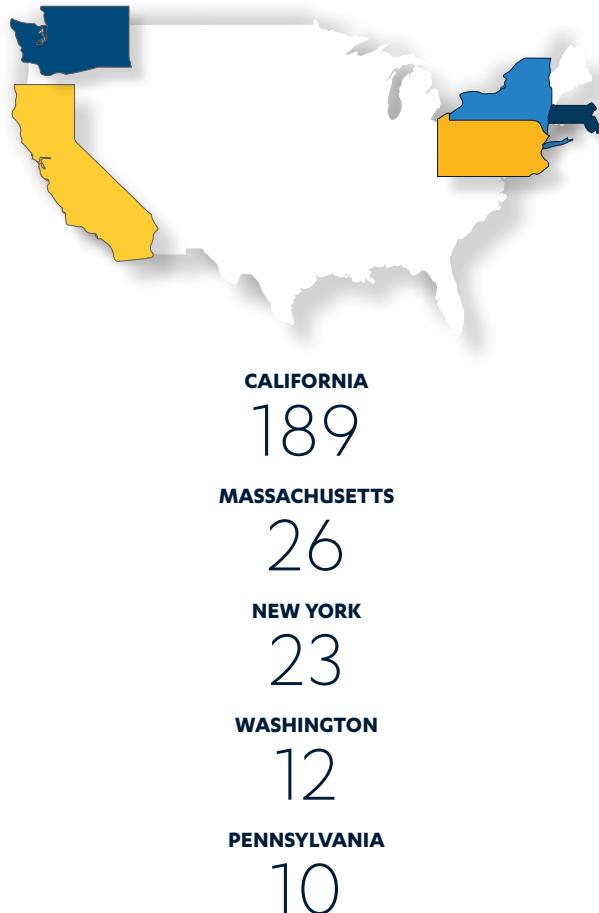
Equity for Patients Who Use Stimulants” at the 2024 American College of Academic Addiction Medicine Annual Conference. She finished her internal medicine residency at UC San Francisco last year and is now a primary care addiction medicine fellow at the same school.

**KARA FAKTOR, M.D., M.SC.***Class of 2021*

This past February, Dr. Faktor was selected for the 2025-26 Surgical Education Research Fellowship Program. The highly respected fellowship, which takes place at the recipient’s home institution, recognizes exceptional individuals dedicated to advancing surgical education. She is also a 2024-25 GloCal Fellow, studying the impact of an outreach program on

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

TOP LOCATIONS WHERE GRADUATES LIVE



reducing pediatric surgical disease in a refugee population in Uganda. In 2024, Dr. Faktor also received the Medical Student Teaching Award at UC San Francisco, where she is a resident research fellow.



JOHN NEEMANN, M.D., M.S.
Class of 2022

Dr. Neemann has published prolifically in the past year, including as first author of an article in *The American Journal of Ophthalmology*. He is currently a resident at UC San Francisco.



AMBER TANG, M.D.
Class of 2022
Dr. Tang is an internal medicine resident at the David Geffen School of Medicine. She is currently project lead on the

UCLA Health Patient Cardiology Care Gaps initiative. Dr. Tang was first author of a paper

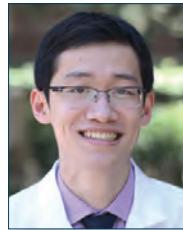
published in the journal *Circulation: Heart Failure*. Her research on patient outcomes after heart failure hospitalization will guide the reimplementation of the American Heart Association's IMPLEMENT-HF trial.



SAHAR ASHRAFZADEH, M.D.
Class of 2023

Dr. Ashrafzadeh is a resident in psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford and already has 17 publications to her name. Her work has been featured in *Cell Metabolism*, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* and *Pediatrics International*.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



KEVIN QIAN, M.D., PH.D.

Class of 2023

Dr. Qian is currently a fellow in the Specialty Training and Advanced Research (STAR) Program at UCLA, where he is

a resident in internal medicine. While he was earning his Ph.D., Dr. Qian, an MSTP student, discovered a previously unknown gene that controls how lipid stores are organized in different types of fat cells. He published a landmark paper in the journal *Nature* describing the way in which fat cells store lipids in droplets and ultimately burn these lipids in ways that can promote weight loss.



JOSEPH FRIEDMAN, M.D., PH.D., M.P.H.

Class of 2024

Dr. Friedman is first author of peer-reviewed articles that have been published in leading

journals, such as *JAMA*, *Nature*, *The Lancet*, *JAMA Psychiatry*, *The American Journal of Psychiatry* and *Addiction*. Popular press writings have appeared in venues such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *Time Magazine* and *The Nation*. Dr. Friedman is currently a psychiatry resident at UC San Diego. In addition, he completed an intensive three-year global health data science fellowship at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. His research combines epidemiological and anthropological approaches to studying substance use, drug overdose, psychiatric conditions and other socially bound causes of mortality and morbidity.



ALEX VESLING, M.D., M.S.

Class of 2024

Dr. Vesling is a pediatrics resident at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. He is a board member and director of

operations at Bridge to Health, positions he held throughout medical school. Bridge to Health's objective is to provide sustainable health care and impact communities in a cost-effective manner.

DAVID GEFFEN MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT

CLASS OF 2025

This year, 40 David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients join the 282 previous graduates. They will begin postgraduate training at locations near and far, further expanding the reach of the scholarships.

MATCH DAY

At 9 a.m. on March 21, 2025, David Geffen School of Medicine graduates took part in a nationwide tradition, ripping open the envelopes that contained the next steps in their journeys to becoming physicians. UCLA is fortunate to have 11 of this year's graduating David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients remaining at the university to complete their residencies.



Match Day marks a pivotal moment in each scholars' path to becoming a physician.



Clare Moffatt, M.D., is one of the lucky David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients to remain at UCLA for her otolaryngology-head and neck surgery residency. The UCLA Department of Head and Neck Surgery is currently ranked No. 1 in the nation by U.S. News & World Report.



Sang Ngo, M.D., (right) and his mother celebrate his match with Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in general surgery.



Sarah Sakowitz, M.D., is heading to Massachusetts General Hospital for her general surgery residency.

CLASS OF 2025 SPECIALTIES



67.5%

will stay in
California



50%

will train within
the UC system



42.5%

will train in a primary
care discipline

CLASS OF 2025 SPECIALTIES



CLASS OF 2025



Chancellor Julio Frenk, M.D., Ph.D., addresses the 2025 graduating class.



Dean Steven Dubinett, M.D., congratulates David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipient Dominique Taylor, M.D.



The Class of 2025 recites the Hippocratic Oath.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

“And.” It is a simple word, yet it defines the David Geffen Medical Scholarships recipients, who strive to become more than physicians. Many obtain dual degrees to help them pursue systemic changes in health care, whether it is gaining an M.P.P. to influence health care policy, an M.B.A. that helps them to develop and disseminate new devices or a Ph.D. to spearhead research they can then apply to their patients. In fact, most of the scholars conduct research, feeding the pipeline of translational investigations that will improve life for patients globally. Others learn skills to educate the next generation. These are not only the brightest minds; they are also the most exceptional people. At the David Geffen School of Medicine, they find their “and” — and that makes all the difference.

ALEXANDER VILORIA WINNETT, PH.D. CLASS OF 2027

I'd always heard about the great research and great health care coming out of UCLA. I was so impressed by the people who were at the David Geffen School of Medicine. It was a dream school. It felt like a place where I would maximize my potential.

Dr. Winnett is in the MSTP, where he will receive his medical degree from the David Geffen School of Medicine and a Ph.D. from Caltech. He completed his first two years of medical school before attending Caltech, where he recently earned his Ph.D. in biology. He returned to the medical school in June to finish his training and clinical rotations.

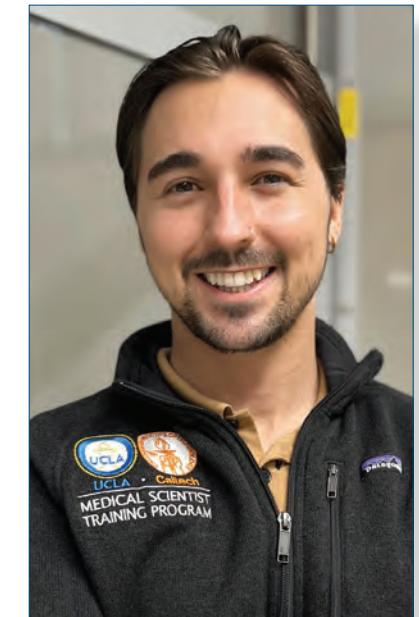
The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic initiated Dr. Winnett's career path in mucosal immunology. He reached out to the then medical director of the antimicrobial stewardship program at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System to see how he might help. Alex assisted at the VA, collecting and synthesizing information about COVID-19 and infection control from March to July of 2020.

This experience led to the topic of Dr. Winnett's Ph.D. dissertation, a comparison of nasal swabs, throat swabs and saliva tests. He found that the gold standard nasal swabs did not detect COVID-19 until several days after the other tests, meaning that people were infectious without realizing it. Dr. Winnett's results were first met with skepticism, but later studies supported his findings. The former director of *in vitro* diagnostics at the FDA contacted Dr. Winnett to gain an understanding of the data

in the context of diagnostics being considered for authorization. Together, they summarized all available data to encourage test manufacturers to validate a combination nose and throat swab for use with COVID-19 tests. Dr. Winnett is now using the samples he collected to design mucosal vaccines that block infection. His research has potential applications for testing for other types of infections as well.

The David Geffen Medical Scholarships made much of this groundbreaking work possible. Alex did not have to hold a job to support himself, as he had throughout his undergraduate studies, and his mentors did not need to wait for a grant to come through for him to start his research. The scholarship also enabled him to take the time to train as a physician-scientist and make a real-world difference.

The David Geffen School of Medicine has given me a much deeper appreciation of how societal context impacts health. It seems like it's all about the patient who's in front of me and how I take care of the patient, but there's recognizing that there are so many other factors that go into this person's health. Some of those I can try to influence in positive ways as a clinician; others are much more formidable but regardless require that recognition.



NAFISA WARA CLASS OF 2026

The David Geffen School of Medicine trains fantastic physicians who are so well equipped to take care of the L.A. community and also the larger United States and global community.

Wara's "and" began when she was an undergraduate at Harvard University, where she majored in molecular and cellular biology and minored in global health and global health policy. She was a peer sexual health educator, speaking to groups of often giggling, yet appreciative, coeds about safe sexual practices. Her ever-supportive parents did their part, letting her store boxes of condoms and related materials in their basement during summers.

After college, Wara was supported by a Harvard Postgraduate Public Service Fellowship to live in Durban, South Africa, bringing HIV and other sexual health services to adolescent girls and young women. The experience swayed her to pursue a career as an infectious disease doctor. One of her mentors at Massachusetts General Hospital suggested she get in touch with Risa Hoffman, M.D., who was then directing the Global Health Program (GHP) at the David Geffen School of Medicine and conducting similar work in Malawi. Dr. Hoffman connected Wara with Dvora Joseph Davey, Ph.D., M.P.H., a UCLA epidemiologist working on HIV prevention and pregnancy in South Africa. Around the same time, Nafisa learned of a UCLA study that demonstrated that a PrEP injection administered every eight weeks is as effective as taking a daily pill to stave off HIV.

She realized that she wanted to work with such true pioneers in HIV prevention. "There's so much innovation happening right now, and UCLA really is at the center of all of it."

Wara had already interviewed at the school and began to pitch her project, which was designed to get the injection to people who needed it as soon as possible, to her new mentors. GHP leadership loved her ideas. Wara began working on projects with UCLA faculty, including Dr. Davey, the summer before she started medical school.

Wara returned to South Africa for a second extended stay in her third year of medical school under a Fogarty Global Health Fellowship granted by the NIH. Between her stays, Wara traveled to the country about once a year and manages her team remotely when she is stateside.

I have been so grateful for people like Risa and Dvora, who put so much trust [in me] and were so thoughtful in mentoring the next generation of young scientists, researchers and clinicians. I've grown so much as a future clinician-investigator because of their mentorship. They expect so much, as they should, and they give so much in return.



SARA SAKOWITZ, M.D. CLASS OF 2025

My mentors at the David Geffen School of Medicine pushed me to become not just a better person but also a better thinker and problem solver. They've been such amazing role models as I continue my training and think about what's happening next.

Dr. Sakowitz, previously profiled in the 2024 David Geffen Medical Scholarships report, continues to add “ands” to her credentials. After completing her medical degree this past spring, Dr. Sakowitz returned to the East Coast in July to begin her surgery residency at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

Her “ands” start with her lengthy academic career. Dr. Sakowitz earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and German literature at Columbia University. She simultaneously pursued the pre-med track, having developed an interest in a career in medicine at age 9 after losing a close relative to cancer. Dr. Sakowitz completed a master’s degree in biomedical sciences at Boston University and earned a master’s degree in public health at Columbia before matriculating to the David Geffen School of Medicine. While earning her medical degree, Dr. Sakowitz worked toward her M.B.A. at the UCLA Anderson School of Management.

Dr. Sakowitz’s eventual M.B.A. will aid her in developing devices to use in the operating room, as she aims to translate her research into improved patient care. Her entrepreneurial mindset has been apparent for many years. While still an undergraduate, Dr. Sakowitz rose to national

prominence as the creator of Blue Moon Box, which brings innovative science projects directly to kids through a monthly subscription that was piloted in New York public schools. The box’s early success led to an appearance on *Good Morning America*, where she successfully pitched her product to *Shark Tank*’s Kevin O’Leary.

Along with completing her medical degree, Dr. Sakowitz published several articles in leading peer-reviewed journals as first author, including “Outcomes Following Colectomy at For-Profit Hospitals: A National Analysis and Impact of Psychosocial Risk Factors on Acute Clinical Outcomes” and “Following Colectomy: A National Perspective,” published respectively in the May and June issues of *The American Surgeon*.

Dr. Sakowitz also gave five presentations at the annual meeting of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons in January 2025, and the American Association for Thoracic Surgery selected her as one of its social media ambassadors.

Others have taken notice of Dr. Sakowitz’s excellence. She received the 2024 Southern California Chapter American College of Surgeons Medical Student Research Award, the 2025 College of American Pathologists Distinguished Medical Student Award, a Viola Hyde Surgical Research Stipend and the “Looking to the Future” Scholarship from the Society for Thoracic Surgeons. Much of Dr. Sakowitz’s auspicious start has been made possible by the David Geffen Medical Scholarships, which allowed her to fully focus on pursuing her research interests.



DAVID GEFFEN MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT

RECIPIENT LIST

The following pages include a complete listing of all scholarship recipients by year and the annual budget summary.

DAVID GEFFEN MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT

ANNUAL BUDGET

WITH DEEP GRATITUDE

The synergy between the David Geffen Medical Scholarships and the David Geffen School of Medicine continues to produce physicians in search of perpetual growth for the benefit of those they will serve. Graduates have been shaped by their unique educational and personal experiences. With your support, they are able to focus on their ambitions and goals. Their unlimited potential to become who they are meant to be in medical practice, research, clinical care and far beyond is a testament to your vision for the future of health care.

As institutions around the country contend with cutbacks in funding for both education and research, UCLA Health and the David Geffen School of Medicine are especially grateful for the incredible generosity of David Geffen and the David Geffen Foundation. In the face of new uncertainties, there is no doubt that these scholars will reimagine medical research, education and patient care. Thank you for your farsighted investment in our students and the health of generations to come.