

# Empowering Voices: How CDI is Composing a Symphony of Change for Students in Academic Medicine

MGH Center for Diversity and Inclusion – March 2024

*As we eagerly await the 2024 SRTP Student Final Research Presentations, we invite you to join us in celebrating the remarkable journeys of our 2023 alumni. Their experiences in the Summer Research Trainee Program (SRTP), led by the Mass General Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI), offer a glimpse into the transformative impact of this program, and their stories reflect the profound change and growth that the SRTP fosters.*

*We invite you to attend the 2024 presentations, which will take place in Simches 3110. The MGH Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) warmly welcomes the MGH community to participate and support the next generation of researchers and medical professionals. Presentations will be held on July 24 and July 25.*

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In the hallowed halls of Massachusetts General Hospital, a symphony of change echoes through the Summer Research Trainee Program (SRTP) orchestrated by the Mass General Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI). “For over three decades, CDI has been on a mission to transform the face of medicine, selecting 30 undergraduate and medical school students each year for an eight-week immersive journey into the realms of academic medicine and biomedical research,” explains CDI Executive Director, Elena Olson, JD.

Established in 1992, SRTP has served as a beacon for individuals historically underrepresented in medicine (UiM). This program, which is made possible through the support of the Executive Committee on Research (ECOR), the President’s Office, donors, and the respective departments to which students are assigned, pairs students with Mass General faculty principal investigators (PI) who design a novel research project with the student. The mentorship extends beyond the laboratory, weaving a tapestry of career development workshops, meetings with leaders, networking events, and clinical shadowing. In 2017, SRTP received the Program Award for Culture of Excellence in Mentoring from Harvard Medical School, a testament to CDI’s dedication to fostering innovation and sustainability in mentoring. With a legacy stretching beyond the program’s inception, this accolade, however, is more than a trophy on the shelf. It symbolizes the impact on aspiring minds, minds like Jarius Garner and Elise Dornbusch.

Hailing from different academic landscapes across the country, Jarius and Elise, along with their peers, found a shared experience in SRTP this past June that had a profound impact in their lives. “This transformative summer experience is more than just an internship; it’s a bridge that connects aspiring minds with opportunities that might have seemed impossible,” describes Olson. The SRTP program, under the guidance of CDI, stands as a testament to the hospital’s commitment to fostering diversity in academic medicine and research.

Jarius, a determined second-year medical student and 2022 graduate of Howard University, reflects on his journey from Kennesaw, Georgia, to the prestigious halls of Morehouse School of Medicine. His dream is not only to become a neurosurgeon with a focus on neuro-oncology but also to reshape the landscape of medicine by advocating for diversity and equity. In an exclusive interview, Jarius shares, “SRTP is more than a program; it’s a lifeline for those of us underrepresented in medicine. It opens doors we never knew existed.”

Elise, a second-year medical student at the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine in El Paso, Texas, is driven by her passion for healthcare equity. Hailing from McAllen, Texas, Elise is breaking barriers and fostering change within the medical community. Her dedication to serving underrepresented populations is not just a career choice; it’s a calling. Her research on eating disorders in the transgender population, conducted under the

mentorship of Dr. Karen Miller, exemplifies the program's dedication to addressing critical healthcare gaps. "Being able to work on this project allowed me to express my interests freely and gave me firsthand exposure to a career in transgender healthcare that I would have otherwise been hard-pressed to find," Elise shares.

The SRTP program transcends the traditional boundaries of internships, fostering a community of support and mentorship. As Jarius and Elise navigate their medical journeys, the impact of SRTP extends beyond the laboratory.

"In the SRTP, I found not just a mentor, but a guide who understood the challenges and aspirations of someone like me," shares Jarius, emphasizing the significance of mentorship in his journey. Elise echoes this sentiment, "Having a mentor who can teach and encourage is essential, especially in medicine, so that future physicians are acknowledged for what they do well and feel empowered to continue the arduous journey of becoming a doctor."

"As we delve into the stories of Jarius and Elise," observes Olson, "we witness the awesome ripple effect of SRTP. Their narratives resonate beyond classroom walls, echoing the call for a future where every aspiring mind, regardless of background, can see a place for themselves in the vast landscape of medicine and research." With roots grounded in excellence, CDI beckons us to invest not only in this unique student program, but also in a shared vision of a diverse and inclusive future for healthcare.

*To learn more about Jarius and Elise, keep reading for their full interviews.*

## A Summer to Remember: Elise's Unforgettable SRTP Journey at Mass General

Featuring Elise Dornbusch, Paul L. Foster School of Medicine Texas Tech El Paso '26, SRTP Class of 2023



Elise Dornbusch, a second-year medical student at the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine in El Paso, TX, and originally from McAllen, TX, is passionate about border health and serving the LGBTQIA+ community. Throughout her academic journey, Elise has dedicated herself to advocating for underrepresented populations. Selected for the prestigious Summer Research Trainee Program (SRTP) at Mass General, Elise shared her initial thoughts, experiences, and the transformative impact the program had on her. Working on a groundbreaking research project focused on transgender health under the mentorship of Dr. Karen Miller, Elise's dedication to addressing healthcare disparities is evident. She emphasizes the importance of mentorship, the role of centers like CDI in fostering diversity, and the need for cultural competency in healthcare.

Elise's summer at Mass General provided her with valuable insights, challenging experiences, and lasting connections, contributing to her growth as a future physician committed to inclusive and compassionate care. To learn more, keep reading.

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### MGH CDI: Can you share your initial thoughts and feelings when you found out you were selected for the SRTP program at Mass General?

**Elise:** I was studying at a coffee shop with a friend from medical school when I saw an unknown number calling me from Massachusetts. I remember thinking it was a “scam likely” call and even joked with my friend about how I had been getting an unusually high level of scam calls recently. I usually decline those calls, but I decided to answer. After hearing who the phone call was from, I immediately got up and went outside to continue the conversation. I remember saying “Thank you” and “Oh my gosh” about a million times. Hearing someone from Mass General Hospital (MGH) say “congratulations” to me was surreal (even after receiving the official acceptance email, I read it an unhealthy number of times to make sure they sent it to the right person). After hanging up, I called my mom. She started crying when I explained the significance of MGH and what I would be doing for the summer. Neither of us could wrap our heads around it! I grew up in a single-parent household in McAllen, Texas, where leaving home for even San Antonio, Texas, is a significant accomplishment; having earned an opportunity to work in Boston, Massachusetts, at MGH of all places, was truly a pipe dream.

### MGH CDI: The SRTP program has a long history of promoting diversity and inclusion in academic medicine and research. How do you think this program contributes to that mission?

**Elise:** As I mentioned before, leaving to work and learn from some of the best clinicians in the nation was unreal. However, being selected for the SRTP program and going through their internship was more than just about exposure and being in a new environment. Throughout my entire first year of medical school, I struggled heavily with imposter syndrome and felt like I was not good enough for medical school in various ways. SRTP helped heal these parts of me by making me feel seen and recognized for my hard work. This program also showed me that you don't have to be perfect to still be impactful and a good student. I can imagine how several of my new friends from this summer and past SRTP cohorts could have felt similarly. Programs like SRTP help underrepresented medical students like me feel invited to this metaphoric “table” of opportunity.

**MGH CDI: Could you tell us about the research project you worked on during the SRTP program and why it was important to you?**

**Elise:** When the SRTP application asked for my research preferences, I quickly wrote “transgender healthcare” as my first option. A couple of months after being accepted into the program, Sandra Ordoñez, the outstanding CDI program manager, called to discuss the details of a project on this topic. We went back and forth for months trying to find a project that involved transgender healthcare but had no luck. As the school year ended and summer was approaching, we were unsure whether a project in this field would be possible. Then, I received an email notifying me that I would be researching eating disorders in the transgender population in the neuroendocrine unit under Dr. Karen Miller. Although Dr. Miller was not currently exploring this area of research, she was highly passionate and created this project specifically for me. Firstly, I was honored that this program and staff would go out of their way to serve my interests. Secondly, I was thrilled to be working on a project like this! Attending medical school in Texas and having a deep interest in a medical career involved in the intersectionality of being Latinx and part of the LGBTQ+ community, it has been hard to gain exposure to this field. Being able to work on this project allowed me to express my interests freely and gave me first-hand exposure to a career in transgender healthcare that I would have otherwise been hard-pressed to find.

**MGH CDI: The program recently transitioned from a hybrid/remote format to an in-person one. How do you think being in person impacted your experience, and what did you enjoy most about it?**

**Elise:** Having this program be in-person added many opportunities for new learning experiences for me. I was part of the COVID-19 student population that missed out on some of the more formative years of college, so I lacked a better understanding of some of the unspoken rules of professionalism and networking in medicine. The SRTP events taught me more about how to engage professionally, especially when simultaneously combatting my imposter syndrome in professional settings. In addition, having this program be in-person allowed me to gain exposure to what it would feel like to live and work in a bigger, fast-paced city like Boston. Because I grew up in the small town of McAllen, TX, attended undergrad in San Antonio, TX, and now live in El Paso, TX, another smaller city, living in Boston for two months was my first time experiencing complete culture shock.

My favorite part of having this program in person was making friends from all over the nation. I have done different virtual internships and have attended virtual conferences in the past, but I have not been able to make lasting connections like the ones I’ve made this summer. Living in a new place, exploring a new city, and experiencing stress together in-person helped me feel like I am not alone in the seemingly impossible journey of medical school. Not only do I feel like I have mentors I can contact for help, but I also have friends I text regularly and look forward to seeing again soon.

**MGH CDI: Could you share a memorable moment or insight from your time at the program that made a lasting impact on you?**

**Elise:** My research this summer was centered around transgender healthcare and consisted of going through several patient charts. I knew that transgender individuals experience some of the highest levels of abuse and hate in our society today; however, I quickly learned that these charts were much heavier than I anticipated, and the emotional burden slowly snuck up on me. I quickly began to empathize and sympathize with their stories to an unhealthy extent and felt the crumbling weight of systematic oppression and pain in this community. In many ways, it felt hopeless. While in some of the darker moments of this summer, I earned the opportunity to shadow in the transgender health clinic. This was hands-down the most meaningful experience of this summer – I was finally able to put a face to these patients. One of the patients I saw that day came in to

start their transition. As the doctor took their history and discussed transition goals, she also asked questions about the patient's mental health. The patient then confided in her, saying, "A year ago, I was considering ending my life. Since I've started planning my transition, and now that I'm here talking to you, I can see that life is worth living again." Hearing this made me realize how far from hopeless this fight is. I will take this experience with me throughout my medical career to remind myself that so much can still be done, even when it feels that the masses are working against us.

**MGH CDI: In your view, what role does mentorship play in shaping the future of academic medicine and biomedical research, and how did your preceptor support your journey?**

**Elise:** Mentorship, in my opinion, is one of the most critical aspects of education, especially in medicine, and even more so for students like me who don't have a family member or a direct role model to guide them through the process. Investing in exceptional mentoring programs like SRTP is vital to training the next generation of physicians, and I am so grateful to have met multiple mentors this summer. My preceptor, Dr. Miller, taught me many things regarding conducting a clinical research project, but she also taught me a lot about life as a physician. I was able to see what a career as a physician dedicated to academic medicine looked like, how to achieve a career like hers, and was given reassurance that life outside of medicine is feasible also (family, friends, personal discovery). Most importantly, I learned what an effective and compassionate leader looked like. Dr. Miller is the kind of person who expects nothing but greatness – in fact, she demands it. However, she is also the first in her team to congratulate, encourage, and praise whoever has done an excellent job. Hearing how she spoke about me to colleagues and experiencing her recognition firsthand was one of the first times I felt wholly validated by a mentor as an aspiring physician. In this way, having a mentor who can teach and encourage is essential, especially in medicine, so that future physicians are acknowledged for what they do well and feel empowered to continue the arduous journey of becoming a doctor.

**MGH CDI: As an Underrepresented in Medicine (UIM) student, can you describe what it means to you personally to have had the opportunity to participate in the SRTP program at Mass General?**

**Elise:** The opportunity to participate in the SRTP program at Mass General means several things to me personally. As I've mentioned, being in this program has been a direct way to negate any imposter syndrome thought processes, and it has also been a powerful motivator for me. Being part of this program made me feel seen for all the hard work I've done up until now and allowed me to be proud of myself. Aside from this, being able to work in Boston was my first experience living outside of Hispanic-dominated populations. Working with different patient populations and doctors from other ethnicities was eye-opening. Because of this experience, I have more exposure to the different ways culture plays a role in medicine and am better equipped to encounter a broader range of patients. I genuinely feel that participating in this program has contributed to the culturally competent future physician I will become. Finally, it also means so much to be part of such a powerful community like SRTP and the CDI organization at MGH. My involvement in this program makes me feel like I am part of something meaningful and have been shown a direct way to advocate for different underrepresented populations. I hope that my involvement with these organizations continues and that I can contribute to their missions in the future.

**MGH CDI: In your opinion, why are centers like CDI essential in the field of medicine and research, especially in fostering diversity and inclusion?**

**Elise:** Centers like CDI are crucial to medicine and research because they create space for minority populations to exist in places that would otherwise have several systematic barriers working against them. By empowering marginalized communities to thrive in positions of power, these centers open doors for learning and growing in ways medicine desperately calls for. For example, having physicians from different backgrounds allows other

physicians to learn from each other about different cultural customs. In addition, this also creates space for other patient populations to feel seen and represented by the people they are seeking care from. Finally, incorporating underrepresented populations in medicine ensures a voice for the many under-researched communities that have been neglected in the history of medical research. All of this contributes to a more robust level of cultural competency in patient settings and a more individualized approach to care.

**MGH CDI: Having experienced the support and resources provided by the CDI, how do you believe it contributes to breaking down barriers and fostering a more inclusive environment in academic medicine and research?**

**Elise:** The support that SRTP granted its participants is like no other in various ways. One of the most significant ways they contribute to breaking down barriers in medicine is through their financial support. From stipends to travel grants to housing, they went above and beyond to make this experience a reality. Personally, the economic burden of completing an internship outside of Texas has always been a hindering factor; however, SRTP's investment in its students allowed me to finally feel that I could prioritize my learning experience without fear and financial anxiety looming in the back of my mind. Many underrepresented medical students are paying their way through loans and, in some cases, have other financial obligations beyond medical school that are in addition to themselves. Circumstances like these make it hard to rationalize leaving home with no income for a few months at a time for a summer internship. It can also make students feel like because they cannot afford this time, they also won't have enough experience or exposure to be able to apply into their residency of choice. SRTP does an exceptional job at silencing all the background noise that goes into participating in summer internships and prioritizes student education over everything.

**MGH CDI: Looking ahead, after participating in SRTP and gaining valuable experiences, what would you like to say to other UiM students who are looking to pursue a career in medicine or biomedical research?**

**Elise:** I volunteer in different student-run clinics in El Paso when I can. We often partner with our local undergraduate school, where pre-medical students assist in running patient encounters and often act as medical Spanish translators. During these shifts, I usually talk to these students and listen to their concerns about "not being competitive enough to get into medical school" or "not being on the 'same level' as other students who have parents who are physicians." I can feel how lost they are in this process because I was once in their position, too- applying, preparing, and getting accepted into medical school is hard for any student regardless of their background, but doing it with no guidance makes it seem impossible. What I usually tell these students is that they are not alone. It is so easy to feel that everyone around you knows more than you or somehow has it figured out better than you, but that's not always true. So many of us have been in the same position, feeling lost, confused, and even hopeless when thinking about pursuing a career in medicine or biomedical science; there's a lot that goes into it, and so much that isn't directly advertised. In addition, it's a common theme for people in marginalized communities to feel shame in asking for help with things that other people might find trivial. To that, I emphasize that no one was born knowing everything, and just because you are learning it at a different time than the other people around you does not mean that you are any less deserving of the knowledge. Ask questions and be curious because now is the time. You don't need to have everything figured out. (In fact, you're not supposed to!) Seek out mentors, and don't be afraid to be vulnerable.

**MGH CDI: Your SRTP presentation focused on transgender health, a timely and important subject. What motivated you to delve into this topic, and what do you hope your research contributes to the field?**

**Elise:** I have always felt very strongly about advocating for the LGBTQIA+ community. Growing up, I saw the effects of homophobia thrust upon my Tia. I remember crying with her, being angry, and not understanding



how people could be so cruel. During my junior year of high school, the city of McAllen hosted its very first pride parade, and I attended. This was where my passion for advocacy truly began. I met people from all over Texas leading support organizations and offering different resources for safe-sex education, therapy resources, and options for transgender individuals wanting to begin transitioning. When I got to college, I joined my university's Safe Space organization, whose mission was to make all queer people feel like they had a space to ask questions and exist without fear of judgment. The summer after my first year of college, I lived on campus because I worked at the UT Health Science Center. Also living on campus was another member of Safe Space that I would become attached to at the hip. At this time, I still felt ignorant about all things gender expression and fluidity, but this friend was extremely patient with me and taught me so much about what it meant to be non-binary and transgender. When they began their transition that summer, they were terrified of having to inject their hormone therapy themselves. I offered to help them administer their shots, which became a weekly experience for us both. Not only was this a beautiful experience to have with a close friend, but it was also a painful one. I learned a lot about how hard it was for them to obtain their hormones, how expensive it was, and how little their doctors knew about the transition process. In addition, I learned how hard it was for them to even find a doctor willing to prescribe hormone therapy or who they felt was not passing judgment on their situation. Their healthcare experience was run solely by them and their Google search engine. I also played a role in being their support system while they struggled with their identity, outside discrimination, and lack of validation. This experience encouraged me to think about the kind of physician I want to be and how important healthcare is for this population.

I have been looking for different ways to engage in clinical research for this community since beginning medical school, and it was through SRTP that I finally got the opportunity. A common theme in transgender healthcare is a lack of knowledge. Eating disorders have one of the highest mortality rates of any psychiatric illness, and transgender individuals may be at an exceptionally high risk for complications. However, there is little data accurately characterizing the symptomatology and clinical presentation of these patients. Because eating disorders are frequent and can be severe in the transgender population, with high rates of medical complications and psychiatric comorbidities, research in this field is greatly needed. I hope my research can contribute to the ongoing investigation describing and identifying the specific risk factors associated with eating disorders for this population. Most importantly, I hope that my research contributes to the education of clinical providers and other future physicians so that more people can be comprehensively trained to treat eating disorders beyond the gender binary.

**MGH CDI: Texas has been at the center of discussions around healthcare access for gender-affirming care. How has your Texas background influenced your perspective on healthcare disparities, and how do you envision addressing these issues in your career?**

**Elise:** Before getting into the meat of this question, I'd like to say that there are many pockets of Texas where being part of the LGBTQIA+ community is celebrated! Although it can feel otherwise, Texas as a whole is not working against our community, and even in some of the cities that are, I have seen some of the strongest and loudest advocacy groups. However, despite these pockets and support organizations, it has undoubtedly been hard to be queer in Texas for several reasons. I have experienced my fair share of discrimination and unnecessary hate for being queer or even being part of an organization that advocates for LGBTQIA+ rights. There are still places where I must muster up much courage to talk about what I did this summer with SRTP and the population I want to care for in my future practice; in many ways, talking about these things can sometimes feel like I'm "confessing" because of how strongly people feel in the opposite direction. Before entering medical school, I had a good understanding of the social disparities that the LGBTQIA+ community faces. Over the past two years, however, I have learned more about the specific healthcare disparities the LGBTQIA+ population faces, especially the transgender community. I have seen how even in medicine, the people who are supposed to care for everyone equally without question and the textbooks that are supposed

to teach about how to care for all people, there is still a long way to go. This, compounded with the fact that our state's government is directly trying to shut down care for this community, leads to alarming healthcare outcomes.

Growing up and obtaining my education in Texas has forced me to have tougher skin and taught me how to stand my ground even in places where I know nearly no one will agree. I have learned firsthand about the different hoops and barriers for queer patients seeking care and how little some physicians know about caring for this population. To put it shortly, despite their best efforts, growing up in Texas has taught me how to be a better advocate.

I plan to complete my residency in a more progressive area regarding LGBTQIA+ healthcare to have greater exposure to hands-on patient care. This way, I can be best equipped to educate and create space for the fast-growing LGBTQIA+ community through clinical work and academia, wherever I practice. In addition, I hope to involve myself in political policy for transgender healthcare and be part of the people writing our medical textbooks to help ensure that the LGBTQIA+ population is represented where necessary, as well as other minority communities.

**MGH CDI: As a student advocating for transgender health, what advice would you give to others who want to drive positive change in healthcare access and inclusivity?**

**Elise:** Some advice I'd give to others who want to contribute to positive change in healthcare access and inclusivity includes emphasizing the importance of listening to the patient population you're advocating for. While it is essential to educate yourself and read up on the history of oppression and the different support methods, it is less effective if you cannot incorporate those facts into what your patients are telling you they're currently experiencing. One of the best ways to be an ally is to listen to the voices silenced for so long and make space for them to be heard.

**MGH CDI: Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience that you'd like people to know?**

**Elise:** I'd like to add how great SRTP is at choosing mentors, staff, and their student cohort! Everyone I met this summer was truly an outstanding individual, and I am very grateful to have met every one of them. My experience with SRTP was such a formative one and such a wholesome one as well. I don't think I've ever been part of a program as welcoming and loving as SRTP.

*To learn more about Elise and fellow members of the Class of 2023 SRTP cohort, [click here](#).*



## A Summer Odyssey: Jarius' Unforgettable SRTP Journey at Mass General

Featuring Jarius Garner, Morehouse School of Medicine '26, SRTP Class of 2023



Jarius Garner, a second-year medical student at Morehouse School of Medicine and a 2022 graduate from Howard University, is a driven scholar hailing from Kennesaw, Georgia. With aspirations of becoming a practicing neurosurgeon specializing in neuro-oncology, Jarius is deeply committed to advancing clinical and basic science research. His passion for investigating conditions such as meningioma and glioblastoma tumors, Alzheimer's disease, and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) fuels his academic pursuits. Beyond the lab and classroom, Jarius is an enthusiastic film and travel photographer, capturing moments that reflect his diverse interests.

Join us as we delve into Jarius' transformative experience in the Summer Research Trainee Program (SRTP) at Mass General, exploring the invaluable insights and lasting impact this opportunity has had on his journey in medicine and research.

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### **MGH CDI: Thank you for joining us, Jarius. Can you share your initial thoughts and feelings when you found out you were selected for the SRTP program at Mass General?**

**Jarius:** When I was first accepted into the SRTP program, I was in complete disbelief and shock. I knew the numbers of how many students each year apply to the program and how many students they pick in their cohort, so I was just thinking, "Let's apply and see what happens." Once I got the call, it felt like I was seen in the ways that I view myself. Capable of doing things such as research or medicine at a top hospital.

### **MGH CDI: The SRTP program has a long history of promoting diversity and inclusion in academic medicine and research. How do you think this program contributes to that mission?**

**Jarius:** This program truly contributes to the mission of promoting diversity and inclusion. Allowing 30 underrepresented students to conduct research, network, and shadow physicians and surgeons in one of the top hospital systems allowed us to see the world differently and grow in many different types of ways. Many times, limited opportunities are afforded to us, but Mass General and SRTP having this program truly allows for us all to become better students and future doctors.

### **MGH CDI: Could you tell us about the research project you worked on during the SRTP program and why it was important to you?**

**Jarius:** This summer, I worked in the Department of Neurosurgery with Dr. Gavin Dunn and his lab. My research was a basic science project in which I focused on finding the link between primary meningioma tumors and meningioma tumor clusters in the surrounding dura mater. I used techniques such as laser capture microdissection, microtomy, and RNA isolation to eventually test the transcriptional differences between the primary sample and tumor clusters. This research and pursuit of neurosurgery is a very personal one for me. My grandfather, a Vietnam veteran, passed away from an astrocytoma, Grade III when I was 8 months old. Unfortunately, I never truly got to meet him, but for me, any work towards brain tumors and the field of neurosurgery feels like I am carrying on his name with me.

**MGH CDI: The program recently transitioned from a hybrid/remote format to an in-person one. How do you think being in person impacted your experience, and what did you enjoy most about it?**

**Jarius:** Being in person truly made this experience one of the best I've ever had. Being in a hybrid or remote model limits the ability to connect with other cohort members and with the faculty that you work with, as well as the type of research you can conduct. Because this program was in person, I now have lifelong friends that I can reminisce about the time we shared during this summer. Additionally, the chance to shadow and network within the department would have been something that was not possible if this program was not in person, and this made a significant difference in the experience of the program. I enjoyed being able to hang out with my new friends, have lunches and mentoring events with SRTP, shadow neurosurgical cases, and enjoy the city of Boston (which I love!).

**MGH CDI: Could you share a memorable moment or insight from your time at the program that made a lasting impact on you?**

**Jarius:** One memorable moment from my time at the program was getting to meet Dr. Myron Rolle. The summer prior to starting medical school, I read his book, "The 2% Way," and it shaped my approach to how I was going to attack medical school and my dream of becoming a neurosurgeon. Now at MGH, I was ecstatic to meet him and just talk to him about my life, goals, etc. This was easily one of my favorite moments, and I would like to thank him for the time he gave me throughout the summer to learn from him in the operating room and outside of the hospital. It's not every day you get to meet your role models.

**MGH CDI: In your view, what role does mentorship play in shaping the future of academic medicine and biomedical research, and how did your preceptor support your journey?**

**Jarius:** Mentorship plays a huge role in shaping our futures in research and in general with most things in life. Dr. Dunn supported my goals and vision from the first time we talked before I had even stepped foot in Boston. When I arrived, we met again, and he was there to support me in whatever I wanted to learn, as well as helping me set up a research project that was both fulfilling and also groundbreaking. Working with Dr. Dunn this summer has sent my research goals on a new trajectory, and this would not be the case if it wasn't for his wisdom and continued support throughout the entire program. I would like to thank him for everything and thank every member of the Dunn Lab who I got to learn and grow under as well.

**MGH CDI: As an Underrepresented in Medicine (UIM) student, can you describe what it means to you personally to have had the opportunity to participate in the SRTP program at Mass General?**

**Jarius:** It means the world to be able to participate in a program like this. Coming from a small school to being in the epicenter of medical history and research is something I dreamed of and continue to work hard to return to. I have grown so much as a young and upcoming physician-scientist and have also grown my mentorship team/network to include world-class surgeons which would not have been possible, or the same rather, anywhere else. SRTP has provided me with an experience that I will hold on to for the rest of my life.

**MGH CDI: In your opinion, why are centers like CDI essential in the field of medicine and research, especially in fostering diversity and inclusion?**

**Jarius:** Centers like CDI are essential because the world in its basic form is a very diverse place. No two people are 100% alike, and we need to recognize the diverse background and nature of the world we live in. It is necessary and imperative that we continue to promote and foster diversity and inclusion at every level of the healthcare system to give patients the best care possible all the time. More centers like CDI around the country

and the world would go a long way in improving medicine now but also the future of medicine in a world that is increasingly becoming more diverse.

**MGH CDI: Having experienced the support and resources provided by the CDI, how do you believe it contributes to breaking down barriers and fostering a more inclusive environment in academic medicine and research?**

**Jarius:** The support and resources offered by the CDI have a direct impact on breaking down barriers and promoting inclusivity in academic medicine and research. They provide underrepresented individuals with the tools and opportunities needed to excel in these fields, ultimately diversifying perspectives, fostering collaboration, and creating a more equitable environment.

**MGH CDI: Morehouse School of Medicine is an HBCU with a rich history. How has your experience there influenced your path in medicine, and what message would you like to share with aspiring students from similar backgrounds?**

**Jarius:** Having attended the top HBCU in the country for undergrad, Howard University, I knew that I wanted to go to another HBCU for my medical degree program. My experience here at Morehouse School of Medicine has been nothing short of incredible. From my classmates to the faculty, to the doctors who work here, everyone is very helpful and truly cares about our education and upbringing in the world of medicine. When I first arrived at the school, I met with Dr. Patrickson, Vice-Chair of the Department of Neurobiology, and told him my goals and he provided me with key advice and insights that I have carried with me ever since I started medical school. It's interactions like this that have made me thoroughly enjoy my time here so far. To any aspiring students with a similar background, I would tell them to consider going to an HBCU for college or graduate school. It will be one of the best decisions you have ever made. Few places in the country are going to be able to give you the same number of resources and experience that an HBCU can provide, and I promise they will last a lifetime!

**MGH CDI: What aspects of your SRTP experience at Mass General do you think will stay with you as you continue your medical education and career?**

**Jarius:** When it comes to my experience with SRTP and Mass General, several things will stay with me as I continue with my education and career. SRTP exposed me to the world of translational research in a way that the classroom cannot replicate and through this hands-on involvement, I have gained a profound appreciation for the scientific process. This has not only helped me enhance my critical thinking skills but has also allowed me to explore my deep curiosity about the brain and its many wonders. The mentorship I received and continue to receive to this day is the type of support that will continue to shape me into the future medical leader and surgeon I know I will become. My SRTP experience at Mass General has provided me with invaluable skills, insights, and perspectives that will continue to shape my journey in medicine. I am truly grateful for everything and hope to return in the future!

**MGH CDI: Looking ahead, after participating in SRTP and gaining valuable experiences, what would you like to say to other UiM students who are looking to pursue a career in medicine or biomedical research?**

**Jarius:** First and foremost, believe in yourself and your capabilities. The journey may seem challenging at times, but your unique perspectives and experiences are assets in these fields. Embrace your identity and the diversity you bring to medicine and research; it can be a source of strength and innovation. Secondly, seek out mentorship and support networks. Programs like SRTP provide invaluable guidance and connections. Don't hesitate to reach out to professors, researchers, or healthcare professionals who inspire you. Mentors can offer

guidance, share their experiences, and provide valuable insights into navigating the complexities of these fields. Remember that failure is a part of growth. It's okay to encounter setbacks or face obstacles along the way. What matters is how you respond to them. Use adversity as a stepping stone to propel yourself forward and view every experience—positive or negative—as a learning opportunity. To wrap up, never lose sight of your passion and the impact that you can have in this world.

**MGH CDI: Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience that you'd like people to know?**

**Jarius:** I would also like to share that the experience in Boston is unlike any other city on the East Coast. I loved being able to go around and explore different shops, restaurants, and historical landmarks with my friends amid all the work we were doing. 10/10 recommend taking a visit there if you have never been!

*To learn more about Jarius and fellow members of the Class of 2023 SRTP cohort, [click here](#).*