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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 27, 2023

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First Ochsner Health Medical School Scholarship Recipient Matches into Residency Program in the Gulf South

Xavier University of Louisiana Announces 5th Annual Recipient

New Orleans, La – Five years ago, Xavier University of Louisiana and Ochsner Health launched a transformative scholarship program to advance health equity by providing deserving candidates from underserved communities full access to medical training at LSU Health - Shreveport School of Medicine (LSUHS School of Medicine). This year, Xavier and Ochsner are thrilled to announce that the first Ochsner Health Medical School Scholarship recipient, 2019 Xavier alumna Sarah Bertrand, MD, has graduated from LSUHS School of Medicine and is entering a residency in the Gulf South.

Ochsner and Xavier also this year awarded the fifth annual Ochsner Health Medical School Scholarship for LSUHS School of Medicine to Van Smith III, a 2023 graduate of Xavier.

“Graduates Sarah Bertrand and Van Smith are joining the ranks of generations of Xavierites who have, for nearly 100 years, pursued a more just and humane society by becoming leaders and changemakers in their chosen fields,” said Reynold Verret, President, Xavier University of Louisiana. “Education is the pathway to social justice, and this scholarship program is part of our dedication to preparing more health care professionals in our fight against health inequity.”

Bertrand, who graduated Magna Cum Laude from Xavier with her degree in biology, has matched into Family Medicine at Cahaba UAB Family Medicine - Urban Track in Birmingham, Alabama. Cahaba Medical Care is a primary care non-profit organization dedicated to addressing healthcare disparities and supporting underserved communities in rural and urban areas of Alabama.

“Xavier provided me with a solid education in the biological sciences and liberal arts, both of which have greatly aided my medical school career and helped shape my service-oriented view of medicine,” said Bertrand. “I am grateful to Ochsner for providing me with a scholarship that helped secure my future in primary care. Following residency, I hope to pursue a fellowship in addiction medicine and continue practicing with the hope of following Xavier’s mission in creating a more just and humane society.”

Smith is the most recent recipient of this award. A native New Orleanian, Smith graduated from Xavier with a Bachelor of Science in Biology in May 2023. He chose Xavier for its reputation as one of the top producers of African American graduates who complete medical school. He first

became interested in medicine after witnessing the effect of high rates of diseases in Louisiana and the lack of access to health resources for people in his personal life.

“I have seen several family members suffer from illnesses like kidney disease, cancer, and cardiovascular disease, and that often gave me a feeling of hopelessness,” said Smith. “These were a few factors that motivated me to consider the field of medicine. I wanted to be a catalyst for change for not only my family, but for my community.”

The annual scholarship is open to Xavier students who are Louisiana residents and have already been accepted into LSUHS School of Medicine. A joint Xavier and Ochsner selection committee reviews each applicant and selects the final recipient.

“The medical field is an area that lacks the presence of Black males. This was discouraging initially, but I used this as an internal fire to strive for what I wanted, and now I am one step closer,” said Smith. “Hopefully, my story and journey will serve as an example that there is no ceiling to success once you have a made-up mind and a faithful determined spirit.”

The annual scholarship is one of many ways Ochsner invests in the education of the next generation of healthcare providers, part of an initiative to transform Louisiana. Ochsner, Xavier, and LSUHS School of Medicine partner through Healthy State, a collaboration with leading healthcare, education, and policy organizations in public and private sectors across Louisiana who work together and leverage strengths to create healthier, happier, and more productive communities. Health equity is always at the forefront of those efforts.

This year’s selection also comes on the heels [of an announcement by Xavier and Ochsner to create a new HBCU college of medicine](#), further pursuing health and educational equity and working together to address a nationwide physician shortage. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, there is a critical physician shortage in the United States that is predicted to increase over the next decade. [The latest data shows](#) that although Black and African American populations account for about 13% of U.S. residents, African Americans comprise 5.7% of the nation’s physicians now.

“At Ochsner, we are committed to investing in education and providing excellent training for the next generation of healthcare heroes. We are excited to work with Xavier University and LSUHS School of Medicine to keep our talented students in Louisiana,” said Leonardo Seoane, MD, FACP, the executive vice president and chief academic officer of Ochsner Health. “By demonstrating outstanding academic accomplishments, inspirational resilience, and an unwavering commitment to health equity, Sarah and Van have both shown attributes needed to be compassionate, excellent physicians dedicated to serving their communities.”

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About Xavier University of Louisiana

Xavier University of Louisiana, America’s only historically Black and Catholic University, is ranked among the top three HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) in the nation. Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier produces more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Additionally, Xavier’s College of Pharmacy is also among the top producers of African American pharmacists in the country.

Established in 1925 by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for African American and Native Americans to receive quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in art, business, education, biological sciences, chemistry, pharmacy and political science. More recent additions in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science, neuroscience and genetics, in addition to new STEM-based master’s programs, have

provided Xavier students (3,419 students) an unbeatable combination of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty, who are experts in their fields, to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula provides students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls, thereby facilitating a more just and humane society for all. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit us online at www.xula.edu or contact Regi Reyes at (504) 520-5240 or rreyes@xula.edu.

About Ochsner Health

Ochsner Health is an integrated healthcare system with a mission to Serve, Heal, Lead, Educate and Innovate. Celebrating more than 80 years of service, it leads nationally in cancer care, cardiology, neurosciences, liver and kidney transplants and pediatrics, among other areas. Ochsner is consistently named both the top hospital and top children's hospital in Louisiana by U.S. News & World Report. The not-for-profit organization is inspiring healthier lives and stronger communities through its Healthy State by 2030 initiative, a bold and collaborative plan to realize a healthier Louisiana. Its focus is on preventing diseases and providing patient-centered care that is accessible, affordable, convenient and effective. Ochsner Health pioneers new treatments, deploys emerging technologies and performs groundbreaking research, including 4,000 patients enrolled in 685 clinical studies in 2022. It has more than 37,000 employees and over 4,700 employed and affiliated physicians in over 90 medical specialties and subspecialties. It operates 46 hospitals and more than 370 health and urgent care centers across Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Gulf South; and its cutting-edge Connected Health digital medicine program is caring for patients beyond its walls. In 2022, Ochsner Health treated more than 1.4 million people from every state and 62 countries. As Louisiana's top healthcare educator of physicians, Ochsner Health and its partners educate thousands of healthcare professionals annually. To learn more, visit <https://www.ochsner.org/>.