

\$1.5 million grant promotes undergraduate research at UNC Asheville

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UNC Asheville senior Emily Lanier speaks with Marilyn Foote-Hudson, executive director of the North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation. Photo by Sarah Carballo

Continuing its history of support for undergraduate research, UNC Asheville announced this week it has received a \$1.5 million grant awarded by the North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation — to fund scholarships, fellowships and undergraduate research in chemistry and biology.

The five-year grant was announced at the April 7 opening session of the [National Conference on Undergraduate Research](#), hosted this year by UNC Asheville, for the event's 30th anniversary.

Returning to UNC Asheville for the fifth time since it was founded in 1987, this year's conference continues through April 9, drawing nearly 4,000 students and faculty mentors from across the country. Student researchers have been presenting their findings in many disciplines, including natural science, social science, arts and humanities.

At the opening, UNC Asheville Chancellor **Mary Grant** called attention to the grant's contribution to the future of undergraduate research at the university. "The investment in our research programs will continue to lead us into the next generation of undergraduate research here at UNC Asheville," Grant said.

The grant will allow scholarship students in the program to each receive up to \$39,000 in the form of four academic-year scholarships, research support for two summers, two years of academic-year research support, and three years of support for conference travel, according to a UNC Asheville [press release](#).

Emily Lanier, a senior chemistry major, said the time and cost associated with the research process can be prohibitive for full-time students, especially those working their way through college independently. Lanier, who said she routinely dedicates 10-15 hours each week to her research, said the grant allows students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to participate.

“I’m really excited about the students that are coming in,” Lanier said. “I almost wish I could come in again as a new freshman and get to experience what this is going to do for our chemistry department.”

Amanda Wolfe, assistant professor of chemistry at UNC Asheville, agrees that the grant program helps to alleviate financial constraints for students. “These stipends will enable the North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Scholars to really submerge themselves in science, instead of having to job-hunt for an off-campus job to support themselves,” she said.

In addition to low-income students, UNC Asheville’s program supports the success of female and underrepresented minority science majors and first-generation students, noted **Marilyn Foote-Hudson**, executive director of the North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation.

“[The grant] will have an individual impact on so many scholars and advance the institution’s efforts in knowledge generation and innovation while strengthening the entire education pipeline in these important fields,” Chancellor Grant said.

In addition to the university’s standard curriculum, undergraduate research routinely encourages creative thinking and collaboration among students, as well as with their faculty mentors, Grant noted. In doing so, she added, the institution is cultivating thinkers who will be instrumental in solving the challenges of the 21st century.

“We know from talking to employers and looking at research,” Grant said, “that what the world needs are people who can ask questions who have curiosity, who can work in a group, who can solve problems.”

Ben Teague, senior vice president of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Coalition, said that dedication to student-learning outcomes, including through undergraduate research, can significantly benefit Asheville’s local economy.

“It’s my dream that we will no longer be a talent-import area — that we will not only stop brain drain, in letting the talent that’s here go to other places — but we will develop our own talent and continue to supply the businesses that are here with what they need directly from the university systems and community college systems that we have,” Teague said. “UNC Asheville, as the hometown university, plays a critical role in making that happen.”

UNC Asheville will provide nearly \$700,000 in matching funds, to augment the contribution made by the North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation, bringing the project total to over \$2.2 million, according to the university’s press release.

Lanier, who will be graduating this spring, spoke highly of her educational experience at the UNC Asheville and was optimistic for future students. “I love our chemistry department. It’s given me a stellar education,” Lanier said. “But this kind of opportunities — for a lot more of the students ... to not have [to hold down] other jobs, and [to] get to really dedicate themselves to their research and actually accomplishing something — is a really incredible opportunity for a lot of the incoming students.”

However, Grant added, UNC Asheville’s mission is to support and encourage student’s best work across every discipline. “When we’re working with our students here, whether it’s in our humanities programs, whether it’s in our science programs, it’s about getting them to do their best creative, critical thinking work,” she emphasized. “Work that will take them outside UNC Asheville and beyond.”