

# The Urban Scholars Program

*The Urban Scholars Program, a need- and merit-based scholarship program targeted to urban students, is a vital diversity initiative at Ohio University.*

The program, established by Ohio University President Roderick McDavis in 2005, is designed to increase campus diversity and enhance opportunities for high school students from urban areas to enroll and succeed in college.



**Roderick McDavis**

Diversity at Ohio University is beneficial to all concerned. Studies demonstrate that university students in diverse environments show greater intellectual and social self-confidence, critical thinking skills, and a greater growth of general knowledge than students who study in uniform environments. Also, diversity is woven into the university's history. The fourth African American to earn a college degree in the U.S., John Templeton, a freed slave, graduated from Ohio University in 1828.

But now, more than ever, the university is in need of diversity. In 1976, the first year for which statistics are available, African American students made up 6.3 percent of the student body. By the time that Dr. McDavis became president of the university, that number had declined to 3 percent, largely due to a decline in urban recruitment.

Increasing costs of a college education, coupled with decreasing state support for higher education, means that more of the financial burden is placed on students. Urban school districts in Ohio serve a large portion of the state's economically disadvantaged and minority students, and these students are particularly affected by increasing costs. One survey demonstrated that nearly 50 percent of all college-qualified, low-income high school graduates cite cost factors as being a primary reason they do not go to college. These students are forced to choose between amassing staggering debt or abandoning the dream of college.

Without a program like the Urban Scholars, the cycle of hardship can be self-perpetuating. The U.S. Census Bureau says that individuals with some college work earn about 22 percent more than those with only a high school diploma, and those with a bachelor's degree earn nearly 73 percent more than those with just a high school diploma. In addition to financial barriers, there are socio-cultural impediments. Some students might be the first in their family or community to attend college, and they may lack academic guidance and support. These factors contribute to a smaller percentage of urban students going on to college as well as to a more difficult transition into college life.

The Urban Scholars program was created to provide students with the resources and the support system they need to succeed. Scholarships are designated for those students who are academically talented, attend school in an Ohio urban school district, and demonstrate considerable financial need. The program provides a four-year renewable scholarship, an annual book stipend, academic support seminars, mentoring with an Ohio University alumnus, an annual leadership seminar, technology and research training, and a faculty-guided research experience.

The program also prizes character and the drive to succeed. Garret Kisner was a member of the inaugural 2005 class of Urban Scholars. After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, Kisner volunteered for a trip with the Ohio University Campus Crusade to help the people affected by the natural disaster. In June 2009, Kisner and the rest of his class became the first Urban Scholars-supported class to graduate from Ohio University.



**Garret Kisner**

The Urban Scholars Program is privately funded. It is Ohio University's vision to raise \$20 million in endowment funds for the scholarship program. Toward that goal, President McDavis and his wife, Deborah, have generously donated funds to the program.

If you would like to join President McDavis in providing an opportunity for deserving students to succeed at Ohio University, please contact Sam Venable, Assistant Director of Development, at (740) 593-2206 or [venable@ohio.edu](mailto:venable@ohio.edu).

