Two recent UCSF Graduate Division alums have been chosen as Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) Hanna Gray Fellows: D’Juan Farmer, PhD (Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, 2017) and Shan Meltzer, PhD (Neuroscience, 2017).

HHMI’s Hanna H. Gray Fellows Program seeks to encourage talented early career scientists who have the potential to become leaders in academic research. In particular, the program aims to recruit and retain emerging scientists who are from gender, racial, ethnic, and other groups underrepresented in the life sciences, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Drs. Farmer and Meltzer were among 15 outstanding early career scientists chosen for the second cohort of fellows in this HHMI program. These recent PhD recipients will continue their training, in a wide range of life-science disciplines, as postdoctoral fellows at 12 institutions in the U.S.

Each fellow will receive up to $1.4 million in funding over eight years, with mentoring and active involvement within the HHMI community. In this two-phase program, fellows will be supported from early postdoctoral training through several years of a tenure-track faculty position.

At UCSF, Farmer was mentored by Michael McManus, PhD. As a Moritz-Heyman Discovery
Fellow, he was selected as a presenter for that program’s annual Michael Page, PhD Research Symposium. He also accompanied Graduate Dean Elizabeth Watkins, PhD on a visit to Sacramento to advocate for graduate research and funding with state legislators.

Farmer is currently a postdoctoral scholar in the lab of Gage Crump, PhD at the University of Southern California, where he is researching the origins of vertebrate birth defects. In particular, he hopes that by studying craniosynostosis in zebrafish, he can uncover if and how stem cell depletion and dysfunction cause disease.

Meltzer was mentored at UCSF by Yuh-Nung Jan, PhD. In 2016, she received a Chancellor Diversity Award for the Advancement of Women, in recognition of her work with the Committee on the Status of Women, Women in Life Sciences, and the Asian Women in Sciences organizations at UCSF.

As a postdoc at Harvard Medical School, Meltzer is working in the lab of David Ginty, PhD to investigate the nerve circuitry underlying the sense of touch. Using new genetic tools, she plans to find and manipulate the molecules that control touch sensory neuron development in mice. Her research could lead to new therapies for restoring touch in people with nervous system disorders or injuries.

“During their time at UCSF, both D?Juan and Shan distinguished themselves not only in research, but also through effective community service, communication, and advocacy,” remarked Graduate Dean Elizabeth Watkins. “We know these leadership qualities, coupled with their talent as scientists, will serve them each well as they develop in the Hanna Gray Fellows program.”

As Hanna Gray Fellows, Farmer and Meltzer join UCSF postdocs James Nuñez, PhD, and Wendy Yue, PhD, who along with Flora Rutaganira, a 2017 PhD alumna (now at UC Berkeley), were appointed by HHMI in the inaugural cohort of fellows last year [1].

Read more about the Hanna Gray Fellowship on the HHMI website [2]. Applications for the next award period are now being accepted through January 9, 2019.

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[1] https://graduate.ucsf.edu/hhmigray