

2016 MLK Scholarship winner



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Connell School of Nursing student Chiamaka Okorie, 2016 winner of the Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship, addresses the audience at the 34th annual awards ceremony in Gasson Hall. (Photo by Frank Curran)

Connell School of Nursing student Chiamaka Okorie '17 has been named the 2016 Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Scholarship winner.

The annual scholarship, presented to a Boston College junior who has demonstrated superior academic achievement, extracurricular leadership, community service and involvement with the African American community and African American issues, was awarded to Okorie at a dinner last week, held in honor of all the finalists (/bc-web/bcnews/campus-community/honors/mlk-scholarship-finalists-2016.html). Her mother, Jane Ena Okorie, and her younger sister, Nnenna, traveled from the Bronx to attend the event.



Chiamaka Okorie
Frank Curran

“It’s such a huge honor. Martin Luther King was able to unite a whole host of people for one mission, and that’s because he centered it on something that’s beyond race, that goes down to core identity,” said Okorie, who was born in Nigeria and came to the U.S. when she was eight. “That’s been the focus of my reflection. ‘What is my identity and how do I use that?’”

It was Boston College’s commitment to service that attracted Okorie. “Service was a big part of my high school career. No other school put that at the forefront of their mission [like BC did]. That really spoke to me. I thought ‘This is going to

their mission [like BC did]. That really spoke to me. I thought this is going to be a community of people who going to be engaged in conversation and are going to set the world aflame.' I wanted to be one of those people.”

Freshman year, Okorie got involved in Campus Ministry’s Jamaica Magis program (</offices/ministry/socialjustice/MAGIS.html>), which brings BC students to live and serve in solidarity with people in Jamaica. She participated in the summer service trip in 2014, and led the winter trip this year. She has served as a teacher’s assistant at Holy Family Primary School in Kingston, as well as with Missionaries of Charity, Missionaries of the Poor, and Mustard Seed, providing companionship and care for their populations which included the elderly and children with disabilities or HIV/AIDS.

Okorie entered BC as a political science major intent on a career as a diplomat. She had a change of heart during her freshman year after returning to Nigeria over semester break, prompting her to transfer to the Connell School.

Okorie plans to pursue a career in public health policy. She wants to work as a nurse first, which she feels will inform her advocacy efforts. She is particularly passionate about maternal health.

“Maternal health is linked to the idea of female empowerment,” she said. “Women and child face the greatest burden of health care disparities. If a woman isn’t taking charge of her health and her child’s health then it is a lost opportunity for the whole community.”

Last summer, Okorie traveled to Ghana on an Amanda Houston Fellowship to conduct a research project on malaria prevention for mothers and babies ([/publications/chronicle/FeaturesNewsTopstories/2015/features/Houston-](/publications/chronicle/FeaturesNewsTopstories/2015/features/Houston-Fellowship-Winner-Found-Enlightenment.html)

[Fellowship-Winner-Found-Enlightenment.html](/publications/chronicle/FeaturesNewsTopstories/2015/features/Houston-Fellowship-Winner-Found-Enlightenment.html)). This past fall, she presented

REWARDS-WINNER-FOUND-ENLIGHTENMENT.MMM). This past fall, she presented her findings at the Conference on Child Rights & Sight at Yale University.



MLK Scholarship finalists with BC President William P. Leahy, S.J. From left: Joi Dallas, Osamase Ekhaton, Fr. Leahy, award winner Chiamaka Okorie, Jessica Stephens and Jacquelyn Andalcio.
Frank Curran

As vice president of the Black Student Forum, Okorie focuses on dialogue on what it means to be a black student here at BC—something she admits she initially found a bit overwhelming. “It’s been a great way for me to learn about my black identity. It’s personally very important to me that people embrace it, understand how to communicate what they’re struggling with, and define their experience. And then, overcome that, to appreciate BC for the opportunity it can give them. It means a lot

to me—that personal development.”

Okorie also is a resident assistant, helping freshman students adjust to college. “I really love it. It has been a meaningful opportunity to help build community for my women, support them during a transition that was challenging for me, and encourage them to be authentic.”

Okorie’s programs have ranged from “Shonda Nights,” where the topic of black women in the media is discussed, to a retreat for women she organized with other RAs.

Okorie expressed gratitude to many members of the BC community who have supported her. She credited Cathy Read, Allyssa Harris and Maureen Connolly from the Connell School and Michael Davidson, S.J., Christine Cichello, Daniel Leahy and Chris Darcy from Campus Ministry. She also cited Residential Life’s

Katie Corey Di Leo and Peter Hausladen, as well as Director of Undergraduate

Kate Corey Dileo and Peter Hausladen, as well as Director of Undergraduate Admission John Mahoney, Learning to Learn Director Dan Bunch, Montserrat Coalition Manager Yvonne McBarnett and Kwasi Sarkodie-Mensah, who served as her advisor for her Ghana project.

Read about the 2016 MLK Scholarship finalists here (</bc-web/bcnews/campus-community/honors/mlk-scholarship-finalists-2016.html>).

Kathleen Sullivan / News & Public Affairs

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