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From Inner City High School To Elite Science Conference

By Peter Milosheff, viewed 827 times.

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HCS group picture, 2010

Abayomi Are and Antonio Galvan might seem unlikely participants in a world-renowned conference focused on cutting edge academic science.

Abayomi Are and Antonio Galvan might seem unlikely participants in a world-renowned conference focused on cutting edge academic science. Abayomi, the daughter of Nigerian immigrants, is a senior at Frederick Douglas Academy who lives in a neighborhood so rough her brother was recently shot on his way home. Antonio Galvan, a high school junior and resident

of the Bronx, is the son of Mexican immigrants who expects to be one of the first in his family to go to college. But on November 14, Abayomi and Antonio will be rubbing shoulders with Nobel Laureates, leading scientists and top graduate students when they travel to Raleigh, North Carolina for the prestigious Sigma Xi Annual Meeting and International Conference. Abayomi will present her research on proteins that suppress cancer tumors in mice; Antonio will discuss his findings on the effect of two genes on mice cerebellum.

Abayomi and Antonio completed their research under the aegis of Harlem Children Society, an NSF-funded non-profit that gives underprivileged New York City students the opportunity to conduct real scientific research by placing them in internships at labs around the city. Created by Memorial Sloan Kettering molecular geneticist Dr. Sat Bhattacharya, as a way to encourage minority participation in the STEM fields, the organization currently places 150 New York City students in labs every summer and has expanded its program to locations across the country and the globe.



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Approximately 13 students from Harlem Children Society will be attending the Sigma Xi conference this year to compete in the Undergraduate and Graduate Student Poster Competition. Dr. Bhattacharya, who is the president of the Roosevelt University chapter of Sigma Xi, selected the students based on their presentations at workshops held at Rockefeller University over the course of the summer. *"The workshops gave students a chance to organize and present their findings and develop skills in communicating complex scientific topics,"* says Dr. Sat. *"I chose the students attending Sigma Xi based purely on merit: their presentations and their performance in the internships. These are our star students."*

Perhaps it is no surprise that Abayomi was one of Dr. Sat's star students this summer. She attended a previous Sigma Xi conference with Harlem Children Society, and says it taught her a valuable lesson: *"Compared to some of the other students, I felt my project was mediocre. I realized that I had to work much harder if I wanted to compete in this field."* And so, this summer, Abayomi threw herself into the program with renewed focus – despite a very serious personal setback. In August, her brother was shot four times by stray bullets near their home. *"It was hard for me to get back on track,"* says Abayomi. But she kept at it, and the hard work paid off: *"I am 1000% excited to go to Sigma Xi again. It is an honor and a privilege."*

This is the 6th year that Dr. Sat is bringing Harlem Children Society students to the Sigma Xi conference and says the experience has been pivotal in helping students decide to pursue science in college and beyond. *"Every student who has attended the conference is sold on science. It is intellectually challenging as well as glamorous - you are treated like royalty."*

The Harlem Children Society students will be presenting their research in the Sigma Xi Student Research Conference Undergraduate and Graduate Student Poster Competition on Saturday, November 13 at the Raleigh Convention Center in Raleigh, North Carolina. They will be judged by local and national Sigma Xi members.

The Harlem Children Society website could be accessed [here](#).

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Richard Leslie is a Bronx resident who works in Westchester as a network administrator. His passion for photography and an interest in current events has led him to the field of journalism.

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