

July 26, 2017

I owe much of my budding professional career to Willie and his commitment to developing students and advocating for diversity. During my senior year as an undergraduate chemistry major at UMBC, I competed for and won the joint NIST-UMD Dolphus E. Milligan Graduate Fellowship. Willie was instrumental in helping to create the Milligan Fellowship, which was established to encourage more underrepresented minorities to pursue PhDs. As a result, I was given the opportunity to participate in a summer research internship at NIST, an institution I had never heard of prior to winning the award.

What surprised me most about my first meeting with Willie was how down-to-earth and approachable he was. I was so used to calling PhDs, “doctor”, but Willie, despite then serving as the director of NIST’s chemistry and biology programs, insisted on simply being called “Willie”. Willie continued to invest his time and support as I proceeded with my graduate education. His expressing his hope that I would eventually return to NIST as a researcher after completing my degree, was incredibly encouraging and was something I could call back on to motivate me through the trials and tribulations of graduate school.

Seeing Willie confirmed as NIST director soon after I returned to NIST as an NRC postdoc was inspirational. Knowing that he rose through the ranks at NIST all the way from bench scientist to NIST director serves as a real-life example of the amazing things that a minority scientist can achieve. Yet, even with all of his accolades and professional responsibilities, Willie is still “Willie”. His ability to lead skillfully and effectively, while maintaining his charismatic, approachable, and relatable demeanor would help make him an excellent ACS President. As a testament of Willie’s championing of young scientists and diversity, I whole-heartedly endorse his campaign for ACS President.

Christopher M. Sims, PhD; Former Dolphus E. Milligan Graduate Fellow and Current NIST Research Scientist