Dear Friend,

In 2017, the University of Louisiana System, one of the nation’s largest systems of higher education, made a bold commitment to produce the most educated generation in Louisiana’s history. To reach this goal, the System is making strategic decisions to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps across all student populations.

Nationally, 16 percent of Black adults have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 37 percent of White adults. Louisiana mirrors national trends with only 17 percent of Black adults having earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 28 percent of White adults. Black males have even more ground to make up in the Bayou state where only 11 percent hold a college degree.

To begin addressing this disparity, the UL System launched the Reginald F. Lewis Scholars program in 2021. The program recruits Black male students to participate and excel in academic, community, and career experiences that prepare them to compete globally in the future economy while enjoying fulfilling lives. Even in this short time, the results have been astonishingly gratifying:

- Full tuition scholarships and meal plans: Over $400,000 for 35 Scholars.
- Internship placement: Cohort one Scholars were strategically placed into internships that align with their academic goals and career aspirations.
- Community service engagement: Scholars collectively participated in over 500 hours of community service.

Enclosed is the RFL Scholars annual report detailing the accomplishments of our first year as well as some individual accomplishments of our esteemed Scholars.

The opportunities provided to our Scholars would not be realized without the unwavering support of individuals, alumni, businesses, and partners like you. Because of your involvement, the program’s impact can be far-reaching and instrumental in preparing diverse and talented global leaders as well as successful young men.

I encourage you to remain involved and connected to maximize the impact. Please continue to support the Scholars by donating online at bit.ly/3hlmcp8 or mailing your donation using the enclosed envelope.

Sincerely,

Claire Norris
Vice President for Advancement
University of Louisiana System
It was 16 months ago that the University of Louisiana System Black Male Advisory Council presented a vision of a transformational educational experience for a select group of men who had demonstrated the grit, determination, and desire to achieve excellence—a vision realized in the Reginald F. Lewis Scholars. Two months later, we introduced the first cohort of Scholars at our inaugural Black Male Summit. Those nervous 16-year-olds have blossomed into confident men who are continuing to grow into the best versions of themselves, providing along the way a representation of scholarship, character, and leadership to which we all should aspire.

This endeavor was sought for the sole intention of creating a better opportunity for Black male students. We hoped to learn from this seemingly homogeneous yet remarkably diverse group of students how we can better serve their demographic and empower each individual with the tools necessary for self-determination. That outcome is imminent, fulfilling our boldest expectations. What we didn’t prepare for is the intrinsic value gifted to those of us with the honor to work directly with the Scholars.

Reginald F. Lewis is the ideal role model—a man who refused to let his circumstances define his life’s path but instead worked harder than everyone around him to realize his destiny; a man who gave of his time and riches to others; and a man who used his influence to elevate others. We are so proud of our Scholars and so appreciate those who are sowing into their success—campus facilitators, corporate partners, state lawmakers, nonprofit organizations, individual donors. The Scholars are poised to become the next leaders of our great state and beyond. Their success knows no bounds.

For your Future. For our Future.

Dr. Jim Henderson
President and CEO
University of Louisiana System

The current degree attainment level for Black Americans is lower than the attainment level of White adults in 1990—over a quarter of a century ago. Louisiana mirrors, and even lags, national trends.

- 17% of Black Louisianians have a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 28.1% of White Louisianians.
- Black males trail even further behind in degree attainment in Louisiana. Only 11% of Black men have a college degree or higher compared to 17% of Black women.

In 2021, the University of Louisiana System established the Reginald F. Lewis Scholars program to improve the collegiate experience and success of Black males. The curated educational experience focuses on three areas: academic, social, and service. Scholars are provided educational programs, mentoring opportunities and co-curricular experiences to foster their personal development. Two students from each of the nine member institutions, 18 students in total, are invited to participate in the program annually. Students are selected based on need, leadership and merit.

ACADEMIC
The university’s academic mission is the highest priority of the program. Scholars are provided additional academic support and opportunities including undergraduate research projects and at least one study abroad opportunity.

SOCIAL
Ensuring Scholars develop a significant network available to support them in life and career success is the second priority. Scholars are matched with mentors, internships and ample opportunities to increase their individual social capital through various Scholar events.

SERVICE
Developing good citizens is our third priority. Scholars are matched with numerous service opportunities through various projects and also serve individually in the State of Louisiana administration, Service includes their acts. Scholars remain humble and grateful.

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM
-Strengthen the secondary-to-higher education pipeline to enable many more Black male students to attend college;
-Increase admission, persistence and graduation rates across the UL System;
-Improve the social, academic and financial support structures for Black male students;
-Facilitate and promote mentoring development; and
-Improve the employment prospects for Black males after graduation.

OUR WHY
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President and CEO
University of Louisiana System

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RFL SCHOLARS ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022 | 3
Reginald F. Lewis was an American businessman. He was one of the richest Black American men in the 1980s, and the first Black American to build a billion-dollar company. After graduating from Virginia Tech University, he attended a summer program at Harvard Law School where he successfully lobbied to become a student, making him the only person in the institution’s 148-year history to be admitted before applying. Active in the civil rights movement, Lewis valued service and philanthropy. His remarkable life and career were cut short by his untimely death after a short illness in January 1993. He was 50 years old. He is survived by his wife Loida Nicolas-Lewis and his two daughters Leslie Lewis and Christina Lewis Halpern. The family continues to support educational programs and organizations dedicated to equipping underprivileged students with resources to succeed.

A MESSAGE FROM LOIDA LEWIS

“KEEP GOING. TO BUILD A BETTER SOCIETY IN AMERICA. TO BE A COMPASSIONATE AMERICA ... KEEP GOING, NO MATTER WHAT.”

- REGINALD F. LEWIS

Very soon after Isaiah was selected as a Scholar, he was ready to dive in and fully commit to his studies including the physical embodiment of health and human performance. Krisshunn Youngblood, the RFL Scholar facilitator at McNeese, took a special interest in him. They worked together to make a plan to achieve his goals, both personal and academic. With regular check-ins from Ms. Youngblood, commitment from Isaiah and constant encouragement from the other Scholars, Isaiah lost over 60 pounds by converting to a healthier diet and increased physical activity like basketball and horseback riding. Isaiah took his interest in health even further with a summer internship at Baton Rouge General Hospital.

His dedication in the classroom also paid off in spades. Isaiah finished the fall semester with a 3.2 GPA. He knuckled down and completed his second year at McNeese with a 3.8 GPA in the spring semester.

Isaiah applied for his first passport and is excited to join his fellow Scholars in France in 2023.
Cohort 2

Korde’ Cortez
Grambling State University
Social Work
Jackson, LA

Kamerius Palmer
Grambling State University
Education
Jennings, LA

Brandon Terrance
Louisiana Tech University
Mechanical Engineering
Baton Rouge, LA

Joseph Johnson
Louisiana Tech University
Electrical Engineering
Shreveport, LA

Iafris Killings
Northwestern State University
Computer Information Systems
Baton Rouge, LA

Caden Matthews
Northwestern State University
Computer Information Systems
Shreveport, LA

Nicholas Gibson
Southeastern Louisiana University
Computer Information Systems
Hammond, LA

Joshua Randall
Southern Mississippi University
Computer Information Systems
Hattiesburg, MS

Frank Clavelle III
University of New Orleans
Computer Information Systems
New Orleans, LA

Cadenley Francois
McNeese State University
Nursing
Sonora, Haiti

Chima Owuona
McNeese State University
Computer Engineering
Shreveport, LA

Deon Charles
Nicholls State University
Allied Health Sciences
Raceland, LA

Charleston Rainey
Nicholls State University
Safety Management
Thibodaux, LA

Isaiah Crawford
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Kinesiology
New Orleans, LA

Braxton Jackson
University of Louisiana Monroe
Allied Health Sciences
Bossier, LA

Eric LaR Jr.
University of Louisiana Monroe
International Studies
Bossier, LA

Brandon Everett
University of New Orleans
Communication & Media Studies
New Orleans, LA

Brandon “Blue” Irvin
University of New Orleans
Chemistry
New Orleans, LA

Caiden Matthews
McNeese State University
Computer Information Systems
Raceland, LA

Eric Lair Jr.
University of Louisiana Monroe
International Studies
Bossier, LA

Joshua Randall
Southern Mississippi University
Computer Information Systems
Hattiesburg, MS
SCHOLAR HIGHLIGHT - ROBERT HILL
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS - ART HISTORY
NEW ORLEANS, LA

“As an art history major, I plan on building on top of my experience to become a conservator. I've always been more of a hands-on learner, and I like to blend my strengths and creativity with my affinity for self-expression. During my internship with the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, I was able to cement my interest in curation while working on condition reports of incoming exhibition pieces. The internship also broadened my understanding of the various career options available within the museum. I was mainly tasked with organizing a juried ceramics exhibition called “Art of the Cup.” Though I had some initial doubts about my responsibilities and duties, I quickly grew accustomed to the fast-paced nature of the environment. Working with the staff at the museum was my favorite part of the internship because of their commitment to their projects.

Thanks to connections made within the Reginald F. Lewis Scholars program in setting up this internship, I was able to create my own network with the curators and administrators at the Ogden Museum.”

Career opportunities are often dependent on past experience. It is vital for our Scholars to engage in work experiences aligned with their career goals. With the assistance of community partners, Cohort 1 Scholars were matched with various summer internships to build on their existing skills, expand their social networks and increase self-awareness.
The Scholars assemble multiple times annually for personal development, service and opportunities to build camaraderie. During the 2021 – 2022 academic year, Scholars visited University of Louisiana at Lafayette for the Black Male Summit, Northwestern State University, the Bayou Classic, UL System Day at the Capitol, Louisiana Tech University and University of Louisiana Monroe.

The Universities of Louisiana Black Male Summit is an annual event designed to address issues facing Black males in the university setting. Areas of concern for students, faculty, and staff are openly discussed during breakout sessions, keynote addresses and panel discussions. The event culminates with the introduction of the new cohort of Reginald F. Lewis Scholars. During the 2022 Summit, Cohort 1 Scholars led a standing-room-only breakout session titled Real Talk: Conversations with Black Males on Leadership and Rules of Engagement.
In partnership with Raising Cane’s and its founder and CEO Todd Graves, the Reginald F. Lewis Scholars recognized Black History Month with a statewide tour of the “Carrying on the Dream” exhibit highlighting civil rights artifacts from Graves’ collection and a rare display of the hearse that carried the body of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The tour included an art piece produced by artist and Reginald F. Lewis Scholar Robert Hill promoting themes from the civil rights movement and screenings of the documentary “I am MLK Jr.” which celebrates the life and explores the character of the American icon.

Graves led the preservation of the hearse and, through its exhibit, wants to remind Louisianians what Martin Luther King Jr. contributed to society. “It’s important that the next generation really understands how the contributions of Martin Luther King Jr. changed the world,” he said. “Many of us did not get a chance to hear MLK during his lifetime, so I am hoping they will be able to appreciate him and his work through this tribute to honor his life.”

“The MLK tour was really heartening because it allowed me to learn and share history. Martin Luther King taught us how to stand our ground and be strong toward mankind. Seeing what he has done and accomplished for us really brings the bravest man out in me.”

- Earnest C. Wyatt, University of Louisiana at Monroe

KSLA American Press The Advocate

Hearse used to carry Martin Luther King Jr.’s body in Memphis being shown in Natchitoches

Hearse used to carry Martin Luther King Jr. to be in Lake Charles

An exhibit featuring the hearse that carried MLK, other artifacts coming to Lafayette

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Eb is the first recipient of the James Carter Exemplary Leadership Award—an honor bestowed upon one Scholar who rises up from his Cohort to embody the characteristics of past UL System Board of Supervisors Chair James Carter.

Selected by his peers as NSU’s SGA Vice President, Eb is active in on-campus life. If that wasn’t enough, he is also a student athlete. He competes in sprints and hurdles on the Demon track team all while keeping up a 3.7 GPA. He was recognized by the Southland Conference with the Steve McCarty Citizenship Award which recognizes outstanding qualities in citizenship, sportsmanship, leadership and community service.

Eb interned with the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System. He plans to pursue a career in healthcare administration.

Community Partners and Grants

$150K SECURED THROUGH GRANT

The University of Louisiana System Foundation secured a Baptist Community Ministries grant in the amount $150,000 to support the Reginald F. Lewis Scholars. The program closely aligns with BCM’s goal statement for education, “a healthy community provides learning opportunities for all its residents,” by providing Black male students access to educational programs, mentoring opportunities, and co-curricular experiences purposefully designed to prepare graduates for life and career success. Funding will support Scholars from the five parish Greater New Orleans Area.

Community Sponsors

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Louisiana Healthcare Connections
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Raising Cane’s
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SodexoMagic
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We thank the following donors for their generosity and support of the Reginald F. Lewis Scholars between August 2021 - August 2022.

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- Cormier Charitable Fund

**COMMUNITY SPONSOR ($2,500-$4,999)**
- Phil and Mary Lou Brown

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**FRIENDS OF SCHOLARS**
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- Shayne Creppel
- Maverick & Kelly DeMello
- Jacob Elts
- Hunter & Cami Geisman
- Terrence Ginn
- Earl Godfrey
- Jovan Hackley
- Elizabeth Hornsby
- Gavin Hamms
- Lyndon Kimbrell
- Mary Lamsa, Ph.D.
- Eddie Moch
- Nicole Moncrief
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Help us reach our goal.

In August 2022, the University of Louisiana System Foundation announced its fundraising goal of $1.5 million by the end of the academic year. This will fully fund our first three cohorts of RFL Scholars. Help us reach our goal with your gift today.

**Give by check:**
Mail your donation to
UL System Foundation
1201 N. Third Street, Suite 7-300
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

**Give online:**
Click to submit your virtual pledge
For more information on the Reginald F. Lewis Scholars, contact Dr. Claire Norris, Vice President for Advancement, at claire.norris@ulsystem.edu or 225.219.0271.