



FISK-VANDERBILT  
**Master's-to-Ph.D.**  
BRIDGE PROGRAM



The Fisk-Vanderbilt Master's-to-PhD Bridge Program, with more than 65 students joining since 2004, focuses on increasing the number of underrepresented minorities earning PhDs in astronomy, biology, chemistry, materials science and physics. Our program provides something truly unique—a family atmosphere—with caring mentors combined with high-level research. In the first two years of the program as students work toward the Master's degree, they have as a Fisk University student: access to instructional and research opportunities both at Fisk and Vanderbilt, as well as full funding to cover tuition and fees, a monthly stipend, and medical insurance. We then assist with applying to a PhD program of choice, at Vanderbilt or elsewhere, making the process as seamless as possible. To date, every student who has successfully completed the Bridge program requirements has been offered admission to the Vanderbilt PhD program, and several students have chosen to continue to PhD programs at other top-flight institutions. Students in the Bridge Family, whether at Vanderbilt or elsewhere, are supported to the PhD and beyond. We provide mentorship, networking opportunities, assistance with presentations, qualifying exams, thesis and defense preparation, job talks and job placement.

***Our students are our greatest assets  
and in the end it is their drive and  
motivation that propels the program.***

*- Dr. Brian Nelms  
Assistant Professor, Fisk University  
Director of Graduate Studies in Biology*



## **SEVEN JUNIOR FACULTY MENTORS RECEIVED NSF CAREER AWARDS**

We have a tiered mentoring system that generates a “wrap-around” support network. Students arriving to the program are assigned two peer graduate students mentors, one at Fisk and one at Vanderbilt. All students have access to Bridge post-doctoral fellows who have regular office hours and meet with students individually on a weekly basis. There are two program coordinators that assist in any number of practical, day-to-day issues. Each academic track has two coordinators on each side of the FV Bridge that students can meet with for discussions about mentor and course selections, lab placements, or advice about transitioning to their PhD program of interest. A professional development coordinator is on hand for advising on CV and resume preparation as well as assisting with essay writing for fellowships and graduate applications. The Executive Director provides extensive one-on-one academic mentoring to ensure students stay on track. And of course, the research advisor and the program Co-directors are on hand for scientific and personal advice and support. Close communication between all these parties allows us to step in at the first hint of any need for a student.

## FISK - THE NATION'S #1 PRODUCER OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PHYSICS MASTER'S DEGREES



*The Bridge Program has afforded me the opportunity to develop as a scientist and professional at one of the most prestigious universities in the country and under excellent guidance. Most notably, the support I received from the Bridge network of peers and mentors has been invaluable to success in my studies and I'm confident it will continue throughout my career.*

**Melissa Harrison**, Physics M.A. 2007 (Fisk),  
Materials Science Ph.D. 2012 (Vanderbilt), now employed at Intel

## VANDERBILT IS THE NATION'S #1 PRODUCER OF MINORITY PHDS IN ASTRONOMY, MATERIALS SCIENCE, AND PHYSICS

*The Bridge Program has provided me with the tools that I needed for my self-confidence within the scientific community. Now I am doing something that I love, and I feel confident and strong, having been the better for completing the program.*

**Tommy Le Blanc**, Physics M.A. 2006 (Fisk), Astronomy Ph.D. 2012  
(Vanderbilt), now employed at Space Telescope Science Institute



## 100% OF STUDENTS APPLYING TO PhD GRADUATE PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED



*It is virtually impossible for me to express the depth of my gratitude for the Bridge Program. The multi-faceted mentoring and encouragement I received there were invaluable to my development and are still informing the next steps I'm taking in my career. Having 'bridged' from Fisk to Yale and now beyond, I still feel very much a part of the family - and the legacy - of all that this program has to offer.*

**Jedidah Isler**, Physics M.A. 2007 (Fisk), Astronomy Ph.D. 2013 (Yale)

## 100% OF PhD GRADUATES HAVE BEEN EMPLOYED PRIOR TO GRADUATION