

Asheville Campus Welcomes its First UNC FIRST Program Student

Fast-tracked medical student sets sights on improving healthcare in Western North Carolina



Whiteville, NC native Bailey Allen is completing his first year of medical school in Chapel Hill. Bailey was recently selected for an accelerated training program that will bring him to the Asheville Campus in June.

Bailey Allen is finishing up his first year at the UNC School of Medicine, but he won't be paying rent in Chapel Hill for much longer.

Bailey is one of three students recently accepted into the School of Medicine's Fully Integrated Readiness for Service Training (FIRST) Program, an accelerated program that enables students to complete their medical degree in three years followed by placement in an NC family medicine residency program and then three years of post-residency practice in an underserved area of the state.

Born and raised in a small town in eastern North Carolina, Bailey knew exactly where he wanted to complete his medical school education and residency.

"I've lived in North Carolina all my life. This is my home and where I want to stay," he explains. "I've never lived in Western North Carolina, but I enjoy spending time outdoors and look forward to doing that here. That's what I love about living in a rural area—being close to nature. I know this will help me provide the best patient care."

Having grown up in a town with only a few thousand residents, Bailey is keenly aware of the barriers to accessing healthcare in rural areas—maybe more aware than most.

"Columbus County where I grew up is the third largest county in the state. We have only one hospital, and it's

located in the middle of a spread-out county," he shares. "There are people in Columbus who don't have a car or reliable transportation. That makes getting good healthcare challenging if not impossible."

Transportation isn't the only barrier Bailey is eager to address as a rural family physician. It can be hard to find healthy food and even harder to find health education in rural areas, especially for those who don't speak English.

While on summer breaks as an undergrad at UNC Charlotte, Bailey volunteered at his local health department and helped educate patients about how to prevent and manage chronic health conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia.

"I was surprised how many people knew so little about what impacts their health," Bailey notes.

"Looking ahead to this next year, I'm excited to partner with patients at MAHEC to help them learn how to improve their health."

The FIRST Program will enhance our ability to establish family physicians in underserved communities and at a quicker pace.

—Dr. Robyn Latessa

As a FIRST Program scholar at UNC's School of Medicine Asheville Campus at MAHEC, Bailey will receive an excellent medical education, clinical training, and the opportunity to create long-term relationships with patients from day one.

"Our curriculum's longitudinal integrated clerkships help students develop strong relationships and continuity as they work with the same patients, preceptors, and peers over time," explains Robyn Latessa, MD, director and assistant dean of the Asheville Campus.

"We're excited to combine our longitudinal curriculum with the FIRST Program, which will enhance our ability to establish family physicians in underserved communities and at a quicker pace," Dr. Latessa adds.

UNC's FIRST Program is aptly named as it is the first accelerated family physician training program in the nation to provide support for the full pipeline from medical

continued on next page...

school through residency and post-residency practice in an underserved and/or rural area.

Creating a robust pipeline of family physicians is especially important in Western North Carolina where there is an estimated shortage of 78 primary care physicians across 15 of the 16 WNC counties that MAHEC serves.

UNC and MAHEC are working hard to meet the region's current and future healthcare needs with additional pipeline programs that include high school health careers programs, college internships, allied health training programs, Kenan Primary Care Medical Scholars, and rural primary care residencies and fellowships.

Through the FIRST Program, Bailey will receive ongoing support from the UNC Department of Family Medicine in partnership with the NC Office of Rural Health and Community Care, MAHEC, and the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians.

Bailey will begin his clinical training in Asheville in June and will complete medical school in May 2020 and then enter MAHEC's Asheville Family Medicine Residency Program. He will begin practicing medicine in an underserved community as early as 2023.

This is not a moment too soon for a medical student who is looking forward to making his home in rural North Carolina a place where everyone can flourish.

For more information about UNC's FIRST Program, please visit their [website](#).

For more information about the UNC School of Medicine Asheville Campus or any of MAHEC's health professions programs, please visit www.mahec.net.

