

January 13, 2009

Media Statement

**NEDLANDS STUDENT WINS MEDICAL RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP**

A Nedlands student is one of three talented young WA scientists to win a sought-after scholarship handed out by the state's premier adult medical research institute.

This month, Laura Florez will have the opportunity to carry out her own research in biomedical science when she steps into a six week summer vacation program at the Western Australia Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR).

Three years ago Ms Florez made the move from Colombia to study genetics, and is now entering her final year of a Bachelor of Science in Genetics at The University of Western Australia.

Ms Florez said she relocated to Perth because of its outstanding research and teaching facilities.

"In my home country, there are not many opportunities for research, so I decided to move to Perth where science is taken seriously and is recognised as being much more developed and advanced," she said.

During her summer vacation program, Ms Florez will investigate missing or duplicated segments of DNA, known as Copy Number Variations (CNV's), with the aim of identifying genetic links to epilepsy.

Ms Florez said the scholarship was a practical stepping stone to further her career.

"The vacation scholarship will give me invaluable experience toward my academic studies and provide me with the skills needed to hopefully start my Honours project this year at WAIMR, as well as helping me towards my goal of completing a PhD in WA," she said.

"I'm very privileged to have been given this opportunity and look forward to working towards a successful career as a research scientist."

During January and February, Ms Florez will work at WAIMR's Nedlands campus under the guidance of Professor Luba Kalaydjieva and Dr Dimitar Azmanov in the Laboratory for Molecular Genetics.

WAIMR Director Professor Peter Klinken said this was the fourth year WAIMR had offered vacation scholarships and was thrilled to welcome Laura, along with two more scholarship students, to the WAIMR team.

"Our aim is to help these young scientists expand their practical experience, fast-track their careers, and give them the best start to their chosen paths here in WA," Professor Klinken said.

"The program has not only proved successful for the students, it's also been embraced by our senior scientists who value the innovative ideas and fresh approaches the next generation of medical researchers bring to the table."

Other projects being undertaken by students within the vacation scholarships program include researching the rates and trends of merkel cell carcinoma – a form of skin cancer, as well as investigating gene defects associated with a muscular disorder known as distal myopathy.

**-ENDS-**

**MEDIA CONTACT: Sarah Hayward, WAIMR Media Consultant, m 0411 404 415, o 9388 9280**