

Dr. Omar Bagasra-Eminent Pioneer



Dr. Omar Bagasra, an eminent molecular biologist, immunologist, and retrovirologist, was recruited to Claflin University in 2001 to establish the South Carolina Biotechnology center. Since that time, Dr. Bagasra has received national awards, been the subject of a PBS documentary, establish the South Carolina center for biotechnology at Claflin University, and procured grants of over \$1 million.

The biotechnology center at Claflin University is the first of its kind at an HBCU. Biotechnology is the use of advances in molecular biology for applications in human and animal health, agriculture, environment and specialty manufacturing. Claflin offers undergraduate degrees in biotechnology and bioinformatics.

Dr. Bagasra, guest editor for the *journal of Histochemistry*, has received numerous awards, and authored many articles, books, book chapters, abstracts. In 2002, the American association of cancer research HBCU named Dr. Bagasra Faculty Scholar.

Dr. Bagasra, author of *HIV and Molecular Immunity: Prospect for AIDS Vaccine*, has spent much of his time gaining insight into the molecular pathogenesis of HIV since 1981, the year of the first released scientific report of HIV /AIDS. In 1995, he was nominated for the King Faisal Award for Medicine. Dr. Bagasra's research was the subject of a documentary by Gala Films for PBS on AIDS and HIV-1 Vaccine in 2002. "We have a lot of hopes and dreams," said Dr. Bagasra. "We want to be the number-one leading laboratory in the country. I believe it is possible." The biotechnology center has begun developing transgenic plants capable of producing the vaccine for malaria and Hepatitis C virus.

Dr. Bagasra's vision of success for Claflin's biotechnology center requires tremendous financial support. Recognizing this, Dr. Bagasra remains vigilant in procuring funding for research and development.

In collaboration with the University of South Carolina's cancer Center, Dr. Bagasra procured a training grant for Claflin University students in the amount of \$566,035.

In 2002, Dr. Bagasra announced that he had successfully procured funding from the department of defense in the amount of \$485,000 to study the role of zinc in the pathogenesis of prostate cancer.

Dr. Bagasra won additional funding in the amount of \$75,000 to optimize in situ RT/PCR methodology in human cells and tissues for the validation of potential biomarkers of cervical cancer progression. The award will be used to support research into papillomaviruses (HPV) and cervical cancer.

In his quest to establish a DNA genotyping and sequencing laboratory at Claflin University, Dr. Bagasra approached the national institutes of health (NIH) for funding. The NIH awarded \$300,000 to Claflin University to establish a proteomic laboratory in collaboration with South Carolina State University.

Dr. Henry N. Tisdale said, “The collaborative efforts of the research are very important in our efforts to move our research programs to regional and national prominence. But most important are the research opportunities this program will create for our students.”