

Black Hollywood Showrunners and Directors Award Scholarships to UCLA Film & TV Students

The Four Sisters Scholarship and the Felicia D. Henderson Screenwriting Fellowship Recipients Announced Today.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- The Four Sisters Scholarship and [Felicia D. Henderson Screenwriting Fellowship](#) grantees announced its 2020-2021 scholarship recipients including Miranda Allender, Beatriz Celani De Macedo, and Amber McCain. The artistic merit-based award is granted to screenwriting students whose stories depict women in a current or historical perspective as it relates to the African American experience.

After working as a creative associate at NBC, Felicia D. Henderson's writing career started with getting into the

prestigious Warner Bros. Writers Workshop. Henderson went on to write on the staffs of *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Moesha* and *Sister, Sister*. She then turned her attention to TV dramas and developed the [Soul Food TV series for Showtime](#). It was the first successful television drama to explore an African American family, and earned an Emmy nomination and won several NAACP Image Awards.

Felicia also co-executive produced the teen drama series *Gossip Girl*, sci-fi thriller *Fringe*, and Marvel's *The Punisher*, before co-creating (with Charles D. Holland) *The Quad*, a drama centered on the fictional HBCU campus.

She and her three best friends, Mara Brock Akil, Gina Prince-Bythewood, and Sara Finney-



Hollywood Writer, Showrunner and Producer Felicia D. Henderson Awards Scholarship Grants to Black UCLA Film Students.

Johnson endowed the UCLA Four Sisters Scholarship in Screenwriting, Directing, and Animation to support students pursuing projects depicting the African American experience. "It's my responsibility to support the dreams of content creators who want to tell the stories of black and brown people who look like me. It's that simple," said Felicia.

The long-term "sister-colleagues" also announced the recipients of the Four Sisters Scholarship in Screenwriting, Directing and Animation Award. Award recipients Zainaib Bakare and Karla Vargas Gastelum were also given the good news today.

"This all began 15 years ago because Gina suggested we use our honorarium from a speaking engagement to start a scholarship at our alma mater. So, we grabbed Mara and Sara, and the four of us endowed the Four Sisters Scholarship in Screenwriting, Directing, and Animation," co-donor Felicia explained. "Then, Gina kept fighting for directors to win every year, so I endowed a screenwriting scholarship in my own name. Just for writers. I guess you can say a few heated debates between friends was UCLA's gain," Felicia jokes.

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Felicia D. Henderson

included Dakota Fanning, Queen Latifah, Paul Bettany, Jennifer Hudson, Sophie Okonedo and Alicia Keys. The film won two People's Choice Awards and two NAACP Image Awards.

Her third feature, *Beyond the Lights*, came in 2014 and garnered an Oscar nomination for best



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Gina Prince-Bythewood wrote and directed the widely acclaimed feature film *Love & Basketball*, which premiered at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival. She won an Independent Spirit Award for Best First Screenplay and a Humanitas Prize for her work on the film. She followed that success with the HBO film *Disappearing Acts*. In 2008, she wrote and directed the celebrated adaptation of the best-selling novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*. The all-star cast

song. The love story set in the music world stars Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Nate Parker, Minnie Driver and Danny Glover. It received rave reviews and landed on several top critics Best of 2014 lists including the NY Times, Washington Post and Vulture. Gina is the first Black woman to direct a superhero film, *The Old Guard*, based on the celebrated graphic novel by Greg Rucka for Skydance and Netflix. The film stars Charlize Theron, Kiki Layne, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Matthias Schoenaerts, Marwan Kenzari and Luca Marinelli. It will premiere July 10, 2020.



Soul Food Created by Writer-Director-Producer Felicia D. Henderson is celebrating it's 20th Anniversary this year.

"When I was at UCLA, I remember the struggle to fund my thesis film. Your thesis is your calling card. It tells Hollywood how good you are and what you're about. We created our scholarship for those drawn to telling Black stories. So, they can focus on the craft, not how they are going to pay for it," said Gina.

"It's important to lift, encourage and support Black storytellers who are oftentimes underrepresented and overlooked. With this scholarship, I hope we're able to make sure African American voices and dreams are heard and realized, added co-donor Sara Finney-Johnson.

Sara is the co-creator and executive producer of *Moesha* and *The Parkers*. Before going off to create her own shows, she was on the writing staffs of *Family Matters*, *The Parent 'Hood*, and *The Game*. She has written and consulted on *The Game*, *Reed Between the Lines*, *Single Ladies* and *The Quad*.

Currently, the USC graduate is the co-executive producer of BET's *Games People Play*. Sara is also developing a one-hour drama inspired by her rich family culture near Selma, Alabama.

Los Angeles, California native Mara Brock Akil is a graduate of Northwestern University. The Writer-Producer-Director received her first break in Hollywood as a production assistant on the groundbreaking television series, *South Central*. She quickly rose through the ranks with a writing staff position on *Moesha* and eventually became a producer.

Later, she became a supervising producer on *The Jamie Foxx Show*, before creating her first TV series, the UPN comedy *Girlfriends*, the UPN comedy series *Girlfriends* and its spin-off *The Game*. Then, Mara went on to create BET Networks' first drama series, *Being Mary Jane* before creating and directing *Love Is* for OWN. Along with husband Salim Akil, she executive produces the CW's *Black Lightning*. Currently, she is developing several film and television projects that

she will write, direct, and produce.

"I was taught that you lift as you climb, so we can all get to a place to tell our story. Stories are simply reflections of our humanity. And given how inhumane black people are treated, it's clear we have an urgent need for more storytellers to illuminate our human condition," said Mara.

To support the Four Sisters Scholarship or Felicia D. Henderson Screenwriting Fellowship contact Fred Bush, Assistant Dean, Development & Alumni Affairs, UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, Email: fbush@tft.ucla.edu, Office: 310-206-5999, Cell: 917-921-4679.

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