Professor Mary Woo has stepped down from her administrative position as associate dean for research to focus on her research program, which is producing exciting new findings. Woo’s research explores brain-heart interactions in relation to sudden death risk, particularly in advanced heart failure patients. Her group recently became the first to report specific sites of gray-matter loss (parts of the brain damaged/missing) in heart failure. These areas control or modulate hallmark symptoms of heart failure.

Using imaging techniques, Woo’s group is now looking at the exact nature of this brain damage and potential causes, including sleep-disordered breathing and neurovascular autoregulation abnormalities. “These findings will increase our knowledge of the pathophysiology of heart failure,” she says. “Clinical implications include improved identification of heart failure patients at increased risk for sudden death, and the development of innovative treatments that can be used to prevent or minimize sudden death, depression, cognition complaints, memory problems, and sleep abnormalities.”

SUMMER PROGRAM SHOWED DAWN DEBERRY THE POSSIBILITIES; NOW, SHE HEADS TOWARD HER M.S.N.

When Dawn DeBerry decided she wanted to pursue a master’s degree and become a geriatric nurse practitioner, she knew there was only one program for her. DeBerry had been eyeing UCLA ever since she was a student at Mary M. Bethune Middle School, when she took part in a Summer Internship Program the School of Nursing has offered annually since 1992.

For DeBerry, the experience as a middle school student made a lasting impact. “It was the first time I had ever been on a college campus and it opened my eyes to the opportunities that were available to me,” she says. “Bethune was in an inner-city neighborhood and I had never thought I would have the chance to go to a school like UCLA. But the fact that everyone was so welcoming and eager to talk about the possibilities made me want to continue my education and go to college.”

In 1992, as part of UCLA’s Rebuild L.A. program, the School of Nursing decided on an ongoing project that would reach out to inner-city youth, “adopting” the Bethune school, which is located in South Los Angeles. Over the years, the School of Nursing has held a clothing and book drive, helped the Bethune school nurse by providing her with medical supplies, and donated money for families that could not afford to buy school uniforms for their children.

The Summer Internship Program, spearheaded by Recruiter Rhonda Plenoy-Younger, is a one-week, eight-hours-a-day program held each year in July. Through this project, approximately 15 Bethune Middle School students per year are brought to the campus, where they see both the administrative and academic aspects of the School of Nursing. The students work with mentors for half the day and participate in special activities the other half. While with their mentors, they learn basic academic office skills. The students tour the UCLA campus, visit the Hammer and Fowler museums, participate in a Leadership Workshop and play video games at the X-Cape arcade on the UCLA campus.

“We got to talk with students who told us about college and how it opened up so many doors,” DeBerry recalls. “We were told about careers in nursing. The experience just made it all seem more accessible to me, especially since most of the students counseling us were also minorities.”

After graduating from Bethune, DeBerry went to Francisco Bravo Medical Magnet High School, where she took classes that led her to become a certified nursing assistant. She earned an undergraduate nursing degree at Hampton University in Virginia, then began thinking about graduate programs. “UCLA was always my first choice,” DeBerry says. “Not only is it a prestigious nursing program, but I was used to the setting and the environment. It felt like home for me.”