Avery August may look way too young to be a Ph.D., but he's definitely put in the time and effort to earn his degrees. August grew up in the Central America country of Belize, where he became captivated by the sciences "at around 6 or 7 years old," he says. He had a whole new environment to contend with when he emigrated to the U.S. as a teenager. "In high school, I felt discouraged from attending college. I saw similar treatment at the mostly minority high school I attended." That was at Los Angeles High School; he obtained a GED certificate after leaving the 11th grade.

School wasn't the only place he found walls to break down. "My relatives have always been unclear what my career path entails," he says. "However, they have now been exposed to my work and have a much clearer understanding of the role of scientists in society, as well as the dearth of scientists from underrepresented groups." August is thrilled that his younger relatives know what a scientist does, thanks to his example "rather then the impression they get from television or the movies."

August attended Los Angeles City College, and then transferred to California State University at Los Angeles, majoring in Medical Technology. "As an undergraduate, I was introduced to the joys of research by my organic chemistry professor," he recalls. "I then worked in the biochemistry department performing research on chemical modification of fatty acids and lipids for use in analyzing membrane structure." For further studies, he went far from home to Cornell University's Weill Graduate School of Medical Sciences for his PhD degree in immunology. "At Cornell, I investigated signaling mechanisms used by T cells in the immune system to respond to foreign antigen." He did post-doctoral training in the Laboratory of Molecular Oncology, at the Rockefeller University in New York with Dr. Hidesaburo Hanafusa.
August is currently a professor of immunology in the department of veterinary & biomedical science, and director of the center for molecular immunology & infectious disease at Pennsylvania State University. “We would like to understand the molecular basis for how the immune system responds that leads to allergies, as well as how it develops,” he says of his future research breakthroughs.

August also knows that there is work to be done outside the lab, to get more minority students interested in research. He thinks one key is that “science departments must aggressively recruit and attract these students. When they enroll, ensure that they have a support system to see them through the degree. Aggressively lobby funding agencies to support outreach activities to recruit such students, starting in high school if possible.” As director of the Alcorn State:Penn State Bridges to the Doctorate Program, he is doing is part.

To find out more about August's research, visit his department's web page at [http://vbs.psu.edu](http://vbs.psu.edu).