

in TOUCH

Official
Newsletter
of the
**C.D. MOTE, JR.
INCENTIVE
AWARDS
PROGRAM**

SPRING 2024

UNLOCKING THE **DOOR** TO **OPPORTUNITY**

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Unlocking the Door to Opportunity

IAP Sets Scholars on Path to Homeownership

HOMEOWNERSHIP is more than the freedom to choose your paint colors or plant pansies after the spring thaw. It's the key to generational wealth.

Graduates of the Incentive Awards Program have embraced the ideal of buying their own homes for themselves and their families not only for today, but to build an economic foundation for their futures.

Only 39% of Americans under age 35 own a home, but a growing number of IAP scholars are enjoying the tax benefits, equity, appreciation and long-term financial gain of home buying—thanks in part to their education at Maryland and through the Incentive Awards Program.

Financial literacy workshops and mentoring helps IAP scholars learn to be good stewards of their resources during their four years at Maryland, and alums in the network share their own experiences to guide scholars facing decisions on saving and spending.

"We still had to figure out how to pay for our books, study abroad, personal expenses, etc. and to think about expenses we'd face after college," said **Esther Ekanem '17** (1, cover), a system engineering manager at Northrop Grumman. "This kind of discipline had a rippling effect and helped us acquire homes."

We talked to six alum homeowners, each of whom feels a sense of enormous pride and accomplishment for achieving such a significant milestone early in life.

★ ★ ★

Samuel Yirenkyi '14 (2), a systems development engineer at Google, and his wife, Sarah, wanted more space after the birth of their second child. Since buying a townhome in Sterling, Va., they have room to invite his mother for overnight visits and to entertain friends. "IAP was a catalyst for where I am now. I'm able to take care of my mom, and I enjoy the feeling of stability."





Elias Kallon '22 (3) had the foresight to purchase a one-bedroom condo in Chicago in July rather than rent during the five or six years it will take to earn his doctoral degree in materials science engineering at Northwestern University. "I had no student loan debt and therefore could save money from my various internships and research experiences," he said. "I live right next to another university, so it is in a prime location as a rental to graduate students after I complete my Ph.D. I don't fit the mold of others in my building, but it's very empowering to know that I do belong here."

Dulce Santos '13 (4), an educational specialist with the Maryland State Department of Education, and her



spouse, Hanzel, took a leap of faith and purchased a foreclosed home in Brandywine, Md., that "needed a little love," then sold it for a larger one in Bowie. She plans to purchase a second home that she can rent or save for her two children to live in when they enter college. "I never want them to worry about some of the things I worried about when I was younger. There's a plan for them even though they don't know it yet."

Ganiyat Lawal '16, MBA '19 (5), a technical program manager for Amazon Web Services, wanted an avenue to grow wealth and to curb her spending. She bought and renovated a multifamily home in Baltimore and lives in one unit while

renting the other units to create a stream of revenue for future security. "There are no female homeowners in my family, and it's been a goal of mine to have my own house ever since I was little," she said.

Growing up, **Victoria Gold '14** (6), a field reimbursement manager for AmerisourceBergen, always imagined she would move from her parents' home into her husband's home but later realized she didn't need to be married to

be a homeowner. Last March, she purchased a single-family home in Joppa, Md. "Every time I turn the

key and I enter my home that is decorated to my taste, I have a sense of gratitude and pride. I'm so blessed that I was able to do this by myself." ★



Nurturing Dreams

Mentorship Fuels Ph.D. Pursuit



The first time that Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs Nina Harris met **Elias Kallon '22** she thought: "He is going to be successful."

Today he's a doctoral student at Northwestern University—and he credits Harris in part for that success.

"It is encouraging to see that Dr. Harris not only attained a doctorate but became a key figure in the School of Public Policy. Knowing this is really inspiring to me," he said.

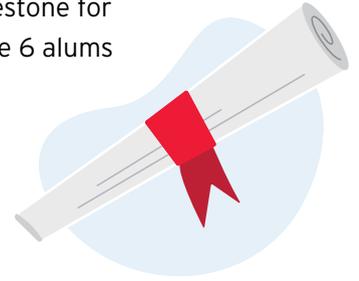
The longtime IAP mentor went beyond hosting structured meetings to informal get-togethers and comforting meals, providing a haven from the daily stresses of academia.

Harris also sparked his career focus in material sciences and engineering to include policy and economics. "Being an engineer I create solutions, but realizing I need to know how to implement these solutions is also really important," he said.

Now, Kallon aspires to follow in Harris' footsteps, becoming a mentor and influencing the development of future generations.

Doctorates Earned

Only 2% of the United States population holds a doctoral degree, and within this elite group, 14 individuals proudly stand as IAP alums. Let's celebrate this milestone for our accomplished students and cheer on the 6 alums who are in the pipeline.



NANCY CANALES '13
J.D., Georgetown University Law Center

ALECIA FRYE '16
J.D., Syracuse University College of Law

IMA IBIDAPO '05
J.D., William and Mary School of Law

RHONDA IDRIS '14
Ed.D., educational leadership, Liberty University

ANNA KALMYKOV '08
Ph.D., biomedical engineering, Carnegie Mellon University

DAVIAN MORGAN '14
Ed.D., organizational leadership, Vanderbilt University

MISBHA QURESHI '06
Ph.D., couples and family therapy, Drexel University

ROBYNE RIVERS '11
Psy.D., Argosy University

BRIAN ROBINSON '09
Ph.D., education policy and leadership, New York University

DARIAN SENN-CARTER '08
Ed.D., educational leadership, Edgewood College

SHAMIA STEWART '13
J.D., University of Baltimore

HABIBA WADA '11
M.D., Ross University College of Medicine

KAILA WILLIAMS '17
D.P.T., Temple University

YONAS WOLDEAB '18
Pharm.D., University of Maryland School of Pharmacy

DEGREES IN PROGRESS

CHRIS ACHA '22
Johns Hopkins University

BRIDGET BLOUNT '08
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

LATOYA FELDER '07
National University

JESSICA JACKSON '21
Sidney Kimmel Medical College

ELIAS KALLON '22
Northwestern University

INGA WILLIAMS '06
Morgan State University

From left: Darian Senn-Carter, Davian Morgan and Alecia Frye



In Tune With a Community Need

Vocalist Turned Entrepreneur Opens Music School



After graduating from UMD's School of Music in 2014, classically trained vocalist **Jasmine Mays-Robinson** landed two jobs: at Enterprise Rent-A-Car and Learn Now Music.

She followed up her 12-hour shifts at the former to spend an hour a day working for the latter, teaching in-home music lessons. "Playing C scales on the piano with a 6-year-old—it was the fuel that kept me going," she said.

Those private lessons evolved into teaching at music schools, in elementary school classrooms and at summer camps and running after-school clubs. And today, the Army wife and mother of two is the founder of Bel Air Arts Academy, a music school in Harford County offering instruction in 11 instruments and voice. Mays-Robinson shared how she turned her passion for music into a thriving business.

★ ★ ★

How did you transition to making music a focal point?

After leaving Enterprise, I earned a master's in voice performance from Catholic University. I kept teaching as a contractor, but I added other things like teaching at music stores, and I had recitals for those students. Fortunately, the management allowed me to use the space. It was very different teaching in homes versus an after-school club, or teaching adults versus children. I learned a lot.

What was the impetus for Bel Air Arts Academy?

When the pandemic hit, many teachers didn't want to adapt to virtual lessons so they paused instruction. Because I was flexible, I was able to absorb those students, so my business expanded. But I missed the face-to-face interaction, and I wanted to set a culture in which music would be taken seriously and lessons were more than transactions. I needed my own brick and mortar to make that happen. I have three lesson rooms, a lobby and a reception area, and employ six teachers, two front desk staff, and serve 177 students.

What do you look for in a teacher?

I look for teachers who are interested in developing a musical mind and musical skills in their students. Teachers who are hyperfocused on their performance careers are not great candidates, as they are always going to prioritize that over instruction. I need them to be focused on the students.

What age group do you serve?

The market is huge for children in Harford County, but we have a good community of adult learners as well and are putting things in place so they don't feel forgotten or that they're late in starting their music journey.

What's next for Bel Air Arts Academy?

The goal is to open more locations to accommodate more students, teachers and rock bands. We partner with our local private school and provide after-school clubs and summer camps. We even started a partnership with a theater company, Starlight Theatricals, where I am the resident music director.

We are also growing our conservatory program for students who want to pursue music as a career choice. We really want this to be accessible to anyone who is qualified, so we provide them with scholarships for lessons and state-sponsored events. This is a passion project for me because of the opportunities I've had. ★



Baltimore's Promise

Deep-rooted Commitment to Baltimore City Brings IAP Students and Alums Together

Tobias Nance '24 initially joined Baltimore's Promise, a collaborative of civic and business leaders, figuring he could support his hometown and maybe boost his resume.



He never expected as a youth grantmaker to make a difference for the city's young people and families—and to strengthen his IAP connections.

Armed with data and information provided by leadership, Nance was able with 14 fellow youth grantmakers to identify the community-based organizations (in areas including mental health, safe spaces and academic support) that most needed financial resources.

"We were entrusted and empowered to disburse \$500,000 in services to young people just like me," he said. "I found it to be fun."

IAP alum **Bridget Blount '08**, then-chief impact officer, led the team that shared what types of programs were already available to young people in Baltimore, and where there were gaps for ages 16-24.



"Tobias stood out because he had a way of thinking about what was presented, asking probing questions, and also having a perspective on what was needed in the community," she said.

Nance was invited to Baltimore's Promise board meetings and presented at conferences, as he could clearly articulate the need for the Youth Grantmakers Initiative.

Blount is now deputy chief executive officer, and Nance has transitioned to the community advisory board, serving alongside fellow IAP scholar **Kerra Dukes '25** and alum **Amara Sillah '10**.

The strong IAP representation at Baltimore's Promise is unsurprising to Blount.

"Many of us graduated high school with one goal: to come back and make sure that young people had educational opportunities and exposure to decide who they want to be," she said. "We love our city so we want to be part of the process of making that possible."



Reviving La Voz



FOR 12 YEARS, La Voz Latina (The Latin Voice) was silent at UMD. Then journalism major **Alexa Figueroa '25** and a group of her peers relaunched the University of Maryland's Latinx newspaper.

The now digital, bilingual paper focuses on reporting news and issues central to the Latinx community at UMD and Prince George's County.

Here are three things Figueroa learned as she took on this Herculean task:

- **THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY**
I grew up in an all-Latino community and I didn't realize how important it was to me until I didn't have it anymore. La Voz created a sense of belonging that I couldn't find elsewhere.
- **THE MEANING OF GOOD LEADERSHIP**
I learned to be open to the collective needs of the greater Latino community at UMD rather than be focused on my own vision.
- **THE NEED FOR CONFIDENCE**
A lot of times I was told that my efforts weren't going to work, but there were more times when I was told I could do it. Leaning into the community's confidence in me encouraged me to keep going.

Enrichment With IAP and Our Scholars

OUR COMMUNITY WAS ABUZZ with energy this year, hosting a variety of events that brought us closer together. From dynamic workshops and mixers that created community to the fall retreat with its intimate discussions to Fall Welcome (where our largest-ever cohort was presented), these gatherings left an indelible mark on students and staff alike.

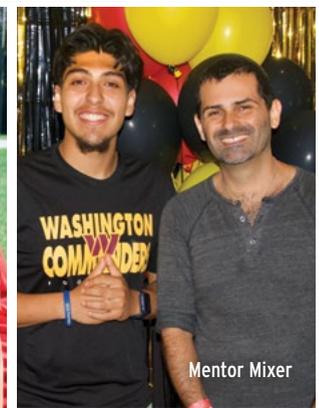
Top: Habitat for Humanity
Bottom: Alvin Ailey American
Dance Theater, Kennedy Center



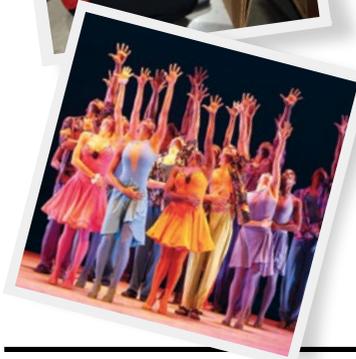
Summer Discovery



Fall Retreat



Mentor Mixer



High School Outreach



DC Central Kitchen

IAP's Short-Term Move

The Incentive Awards Program's office has temporarily moved from Cole Field House to Susquehanna Hall amid major renovations to build new cultural centers as well as a new and enlarged space for the program.



Pioneering Paths

IAP Trailblazers Create Change

MICHELLE CASTRO '24
MAJOR: MANAGEMENT
MINOR: PROFESSIONAL WRITING



As president of UMD's chapter of the Association of Latino Professionals For America (ALPFA), Castro is dedicated to cultivating and empowering Latinx leaders in the business arena. She draws on her experience persevering through challenges to nurture a community that uplifts students, particularly those in the Robert H. Smith School of Business.

....

"I want to be a great representative for Latinx women. By being my authentic self and with my knowledge of the value of connections and networking, I hope to contribute to the professional growth of the Latinx community on campus."

LEANDRA WILLIAMS '25
MAJORS: PUBLIC POLICY AND SOCIOLOGY



Williams' journey as an Accelerator Fellow for the Do Good Institute, affiliated with the School of Public Policy, became the catalyst for her to found Black Girls 2, an organization committed to establishing a safe campus space. Its focus lies in raising awareness of and preventing violence and assault against Black women.

....

"Creating this organization has been really rewarding. It's not just about students; it also extends to faculty, staff and beyond. Seeing the healing experience by shedding light on a population that deserves to be seen and heard has been the greatest gift."

ARIANA TSEGAI '26
MAJOR: PUBLIC POLICY,
CONCENTRATION IN EDUCATION POLICY



Tsegai serves on the Dean's Student Advisory Council for the School of Public Policy and is the student involvement coordinator for first-year students in the CIVICUS living-learning program, making strides to enhance the student experience.

....

"I've come to realize that collaboration is essential. While it's natural for people to focus on their individual needs and desires, taking a step back to consider the broader community needs has helped me approach changes in a more practical and realistic way."

ALVARO CERON-RUIZ '27
MAJOR: PUBLIC POLICY



With prior experience as the student member on the Prince George's County Public Schools Board of Education, Alvaro stepped into the role of public policy legislator for UMD's Student Government Association. He not only casts votes on behalf of the School of Public Policy but also actively addresses its concerns, and proposes bills and ideas that contribute to the well-being of constituents.

....

"Equal representation is important to me, and I hope to serve as a representative for the Latinx voice by actively contributing to the decision making process."



STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS

IAP has two new faces on its team. **Melissa Del Rios** (right), with over a decade of experience at UMD, joined as assistant director in early 2023, and **Martrell Moore** (left) became IAP's first program management specialist in February, providing administrative support. In addition, **Chelsea Cesaro-Sanchez** (second from right) was promoted to program manager after four years as coordinator of student services, expanding her responsibilities managing and leading programmatic efforts.

Family Connections

Family has always been central to IAP, figuratively and literally. With Cohort 23's arrival, three sets of siblings are progressing through the program at the same time, making UMD and IAP feel more like home.



LESTER '26 AND GIANCARLO '27 PAZ

Driving past UMD's campus with their father while they were growing up provided Lester and Giancarlo with a physical representation of their goal: a college education. The first members of their family to attend college, they hope to motivate their brothers and cousins to join them. Both are majoring in engineering, with the hopes of working together in the future.

"It brings a little home here. Giancarlo is like my best friend. So obviously I needed my best friend here." - LESTER



KESHAWN '26 AND KAHRON '27 BROWN

Keshawn and Kahron attended different high schools in Baltimore and have reunited at UMD, where they are each other's constant source of support. Kahron uses Keshawn as motivation to improve academically, while Keshawn has broadened his involvement beyond academics. Having each other on campus makes their time at UMD even more enjoyable.

"I think a lot of times I don't think people understand why I stress about school so much, but I feel like he does because he knows where we've been and why I push myself so much to that point." - KESHAWN

REBECCA '25 AND SAMUEL '27 OLUWASANMI

Rebecca and Samuel followed two older siblings to UMD, where they're pursuing degrees in public health science and engineering, respectively. She was instrumental in guiding Samuel through the UMD and IAP applications, and he often calls Rebecca to ensure she is staying on task. Having each other to rely on has provided a different and brighter college experience than they had anticipated.

"Having your sister in college is a different feeling. If it gives you a safe haven, somebody you could talk to and rely on." - SAMUEL



INGA (FERGUSON) WILLIAMS '06 wrote in, "I have been focusing on building a stronger foundation and legacy for my children and those I get to impact every day. In addition to James Jr., 10, and Jamie, 4, my husband and I have so many babies who latch on to us through our daily roles. As soccer parents and as Cub Scout, church and PTCA leaders, we are creating a sense of belonging through safe, healing spaces. I am the assistant director of the Upward Bound Program at Morgan State University. I get mushy talking about my job because of how it blessed me in my youth and how grateful I am to be the 'me' who I once needed."



Janiceia Byron '07

JANICEIA (ADAMS) BYRON '07 received a second master's degree in special education from Fordham University. She is the special education services provider at East Harlem Scholars Academies, where she has worked for 10 years. There, she recently received the Core Value Award, recognizing her dedication.

JENNIFER COVAHEY '08, director of college success at the CollegeBound Foundation, was named one of The (Baltimore) Daily Record's "Leading Women Under 40."



ANNA KALMYKOV '08 and her husband had a second daughter, Ava Ludmila Kalmykov Mossburg, last May and purchased their first home last year. She conducts research part-time at the University of Pittsburgh, working to develop novel cancer treatments.



DARIAN SENN-CARTER '08 recently published a chapter in the book "Voices of the Field: DEIA Champions in Higher Education" and served as an expert reviewer of the section "Assessing College Student Success and Impact" for the *American Educational Research Journal*. He was also awarded the Transfer Champion Award at Anne Arundel Community College, where he is professor and interim director of the

Homeland Security and Criminal Justice Institute, for his ongoing commitment to transfer students.

ASHLEY HALL '13 shared that the past year was "wonderful." She interned at the Space Telescope Science Institute (sponsored by AURA and NASA), where she assisted with the preparation and stabilization of web servers for the 2022 early-release images from the James Webb Space Telescope. She recently married, gave birth to a son, Aizen, and moved to Texas. "My husband and I are happy that all is going well and looking forward to what the future brings us!"

DULCE (HERNANDEZ) SANTOS '13 became coordinator for community schools under the Office of School Improvement and School Transformation in the Maryland State Department of Education. Her role includes supporting Local Education Agency staff to accelerate student achievement, especially for students who have been historically underserved.

IAP Scholars Trek to Brazil

IAP collaborated with the School of Public Health and Education Abroad to provide a winter study abroad experience in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Nine IAP students, along with eight other UMD students, interacted with guest lecturers and nonprofit organizations across 10 days in January to learn about Brazil's national health care system and how access to wellness is impacted for those with marginalized identities. Students leaned into the discomfort of being in an unfamiliar country, surrounded by a new language, and returned to the U.S. with a better understanding of themselves.





Dulce Santos '13 (second from right)

She and her husband celebrated six years of marriage in July, their daughter was born in May 2022, and their son turned 4 in January. "I continue to be grateful to IAP. I wouldn't be where I am without your support!"

RHONDA (ROACH) IDRIS '14 defended her dissertation last June, earning her doctorate from Liberty University, and is a faculty member for University of Arizona Global Campus. She also leads a team of specialists revising the Washington, D.C. Public Schools curriculum.

TARIK BAYU '16 wrote, "I completed my bucket list of solo traveling, took my mom on a trip to Mexico, bought my first rental property, and got married this year! It's been a whirlwind!"



FIDEL MARTINEZ '16 is a data engineer at Karl Storz, a medical technology company, in Los Angeles.

AMIRAH GRADY '17 is an entrepreneur, birthworker and private chef in Dallas through her legacy business, Ancestral Alchemy. Her crochet pieces and other products are available for purchase at a local Black-owned collective. "In April, I debuted a new crochet piece at Dreamville Festival in Raleigh, N.C. I was also selected as a designer for UMD Caribbean Student Association's Carifest, and I served as grant writer and production manager for the first-ever Divine Androgyné Showcase + Fashion Show, an event sponsored by Baltimore Blaq Pride and the Black Arts District."



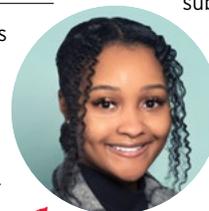
SABRINA CHRISTIAN '18 is the business program manager for the Center for Digital Health and Artificial Intelligence at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School.

ASHLEY CLARKE '19 was named one of Editor & Publisher's "25 Under 35," which recognizes the next generation of news media professionals. The Center for Public Integrity's audience engagement editor was also named 2023 Nonprofit Newcomer of the Year from Institute of Nonprofit News and was recognized by the National Association of Real Estate Editors for her reporting on a D.C. housing program that was failing District residents. Lastly, her team was awarded the 2023 McKinney Award from the National Homelessness Law Center for its reporting on student homelessness.

BRITTANY ESHUN '19 earned a master's of science in health information management and technology from University of Maryland Global Campus.

TAYLOR-OMAREE SMITH '19 earned her master's in legal studies from Washington University last year and became an aunt for the second time. "This year, I bought a luxury condo, got a promotion within city government doing policy and legislation, and I am in my third year at the University of Baltimore School of Law. I can't travel as much with school, but over the past two years, I've been to some amazing places! This life isn't perfect, but I am beyond blessed and things are starting to fall in place."

ISSMATU BARRIE '20 is a research associate at Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group. She is pursuing a master



of science in health information management and technology at University of Maryland Global Campus.

JASMINE (MORGAN) EVERETT '20 is the program director of CollegeTracks, a college access nonprofit organization at Paint Branch High School in Montgomery County. She considers it a privilege to help low-income and first-generation students with the college application and financial aid processes.

MIGUEL TURCIOS '20 works at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, studying influenza, immunology, drug overdose, arthritis and other subjects pertinent to emergency medicine.

THOMASINA SMITH '22 works for the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services. She helps families of children with disabilities get the services they need to transition into the workplace or to continue their education. "It's been an eye-opening position that I really enjoy," she wrote.

JADE BROWN '23 was promoted to marketing on-site supervisor in charge of promotions and social media for IMP's multiple venues.

ELISHA DAVIS '23 is a long-term substitute teacher at her alma mater, Baltimore Design School, teaching English/language arts to sixth- and seventh-graders.★



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SUZANNE G. AND MURRAY A. VALENSTEIN BALTIMORE SCHOLARS
PRINCE GEORGE'S AND MONTGOMERY COUNTY SCHOLARS

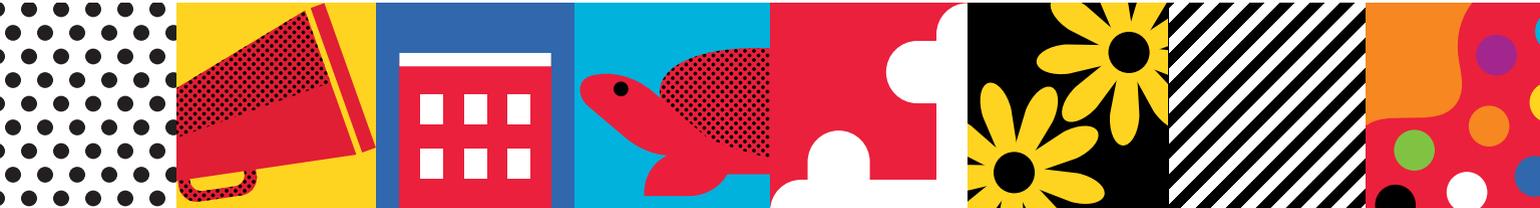
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MARYLAND DAY 2024

Look for us at Maryland Day!
Grab some popcorn and spin
the quiz wheel to brush up on
IAP trivia and win prizes.

April 27, 2024

