

**Note from Communications Committee:** As we were completing this issue of the newsletter the communications committee was informed of the sudden passing of our friend and mentor LaMont Toliver, Director of the Meyerhoff Scholars Program. We have included the information we have thus far about plans by the university and the Meyerhoff Alumni Advisory Board to commemorate Mr. Toliver. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Toliver, Meyerhoff Scholars and UMBC families.

## Program Message

*A few words from Sharon Johnson, business manager for the Meyerhoff Scholars Program.*

Allow me to introduce myself! My name is Sharon Bland Johnson. After working at NASA for over 25 years, I succeeded Ms. Justine Johnson as Business Manager in December 2004. I consider it to be an honor and a privilege to work with such an esteemed program and with such inspiring students. I am blessed to have this opportunity.

We are living in challenging times. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields are critical to our country's economic competitiveness and growth. I read and hear about your accomplishments with admiration. *YOU* comprise a key part of the STEM workforce and pipeline that will keep this country strong. It is not easy to do what you do, but you persevere, despite setbacks and obstacles. You serve as UMBC/Meyerhoff Ambassadors each and every day, showing the world what can be accomplished. Continue making that impact and serving as role models. I am so proud of all of you!

UMBC/Meyerhoff needs your time, talent, and your treasure! Please come back to campus when you can to share your expertise and experiences with current scholars. As Business Manager, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention money! When you have the means, remember to give back to the program. Every hour and dollar is an investment in the next generation of scholars waiting to follow in your footsteps! Those investments are guaranteed to multiply! Hold fast to dreams!

Blessings,

Sharon Bland Johnson

## Officer's Corner

*A few words from Tiffani Bright, Vice President of the Meyerhoff Alumni Advisory Board.*

I wonder how often we pause to truly appreciate what the Meyerhoff Program gave each of us. As you continue to establish your career, I encourage you to remember the family that you are part of— the experiences, support, and opportunities that you were granted; and the responsibility you have to expose students to STEM careers. It is a sad reality that most students interested in pursuing STEM careers will never have the "Meyerhoff Experience" that we were afforded. Far too many will never be exposed to the truth that all can (and do) excel in STEM or even understand the critical need for diversity of thought and people in these fields.

While educators and politicians can discuss the value of STEM education and the shortage of trained professionals, we are in a privileged position to connect with students because we have obtained undergraduate and, in many cases, graduate-level STEM degrees. We know firsthand about the countless sacrifices along with the rewards. Let us not miss opportunities to apply our knowledge, time, and talent towards increasing the awareness of STEM careers and helping others achieve success in the STEM fields. Everyone in the Meyerhoff family can do this because we have each received this precious gift. Whether you are in academia, business, government, industry, law, medicine, policy, etc., it is critical that you utilize your expertise to encourage students from all backgrounds to pursue STEM careers. Become the "Face of Meyerhoff" in your community.

When was the last time you participated in a career fair, judged a science fair, tutored someone, or volunteered at a community day to educate the public about the science behind a disease or some aspect of technology? Are you working with STEM organizations or providing internships? How are you spreading the word about UMBC and the Meyerhoff Program? Opportunities to give back even abound within the MAAB— what about serving as a Meyerhoff mentor, joining a MAAB committee, participating with the Newsletter Q & A section, networking at the alumni social events, or making a financial contribution to support the program?

As we came together at our family meetings, who doesn't remember Doc asking how many of us were helping others? Of course he and the Meyerhoff staff were extremely proud of our individual academic accomplishments, but I am sure it was pure joy for them when they saw the number of Ms standing not only for own their personal achievements, but also for assisting in the academic success of others. The reality is that all of us are doing incredible things, but where would we be without this supportive family? So, let us all maintain that attitude and commitment to help others achieve their goals and become successful. Remember that we are the "Face of Meyerhoff" and we are privileged to spend time whether little or much supporting the next generation of STEM professionals. "To whom much is given, much is required."

Best, Tiffani

### MAAB OFFICERS

**President** – Kamili Jackson, M4  
**Vice President** – Tiffani Bright, M11  
**Secretary** – Shawnielle Predoux, M4  
**Treasurer** – Torria Ellis, M4  
**Parliamentarian** – Jason Lee, M3  
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### MAAB REPRESENTATIVES

<b>M1</b> – Michael Haywood	<b>M2</b> – Vacant!!
<b>M3</b> – Angelique Blanding	<b>M4</b> – Jattu Senesie
<b>M5</b> – Jason McCullers	<b>M6</b> – Jonta Williams
<b>M7</b> – Camelia Owens	<b>M8</b> – Alexandra Harryman
<b>M9</b> – Raj Stewart	<b>M10</b> – Sabrina Johnson Turner
<b>M11</b> – Aolat "Abi" Chike	<b>M12</b> – Erica Reaves
<b>M13</b> – Nwokedi Idika	<b>M14</b> – Donel Sequea
<b>M15</b> – Tiffany Williams	<b>M16</b> – Stephen Mobley
<b>M17</b> – Nancy Chiles	<b>M18</b> – Natee Johnson
<b>M19</b> – Lydia Grmai	

**Graduate Fellow** – Joseph Washington



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In this section of the newsletter, alumni answer questions submitted by other alumni. Thank you to all who participated and keep the questions and answers coming.

### Question 1

*My advisor is often overly critical (beyond the bounds of "constructive criticism"), from making suggestions to outright saying that I am not "cut out" for graduate school and earning a PhD. How much of this criticism should I take to heart versus chalking it up to personality differences between him/her and me?*

### Answers

**Response 1** - You should not take this type of non-constructive criticism to heart nor should you chalk it up to personality differences. **If you have made up your mind that you are going to earn a PhD and plan to work your hardest to accomplish that goal, then you are "cut-out" for a PhD.** If you are early on in your research I strongly suggest finding another advisor. You need someone whose goal is to help you succeed. PhD advisors essentially decide when you are ready to finish your degree and defend your dissertation. You do not want someone like you have described to be that person. If you are too far along to switch advisors, I suggest you look into your graduate schools policy for successful completion of a PhD. Some schools only require a majority vote from your committee (so choose the rest of your committee members wisely). Remember that **the defining characteristic of someone who earns a PhD versus someone who does not is not intelligence, but rather hard work on your work, and determination.**

**Response 2** - There are some people who are clearly not cut out for graduate school. In my humble opinion, most scholars who are able to make it through the Meyerhoff Program are NOT among those ranks. Calling a spade a spade, **there are some professors in graduate school who take training and mentoring students to mean "hazing."** At times, it may seem that the only legal, "above-board" form of hazing now is the graduate school experience. If an advisor is not being helpful and has made insinuations that a student is not "graduate school material", **it may be helpful for the student to put his/her ego on the back burner and ask for specific examples of what makes him/her inadequate in the advisor's eyes.** If the issues raised are manageable and addressable and worthy of being addressed, then the advisee should do so. If the professor raises personality issues that seem to be personal preference issues, a change of advisor may be warranted. **If the professor cannot cite any specific issues, the student should "read between the lines" and consider changing advisors.** If the student has a friend/mentor outside of his/her program with whom to share the experience, that may also be helpful.

**Response 3** - My response may seem a little "gloomy", but I'm a realist about the graduate school process. **There should be some measure of working one's way up to the top, but "overly critical" comments are not a necessary part of the process.** When I look

back and reflect on my graduate experience, I have fond memories of those professors and worksite supervisors who encouraged me, taught me, believed in me, and saw something in me that would bring merit to my field. I believe every graduate student needs to have some mentors like that in the process.

**Response 4** - I wouldn't take it personally, but I would possibly take it as a sign that your current advisor may not be a good match for you. **Just like any relationship the working relationship you have with your advisor (if negative) can have an adverse impact on your work, research, life and more important to a grad student your graduation date :-)** It's best to find someone in your department that you can work well with and benefit from technically. While you may not be able to dump your advisor completely (they may be funding you) it may be possible to have another member of the department that you can work with in addition that can help you work more effectively.

**Response 5** - I would find a balance between the two. Not to imply that you aren't cut out for graduate school, but there may be more that you can do to prove yourself. At the same time, **you shouldn't necessarily dwell on these criticisms to the point of doubting your own qualifications.** Just keep in mind that your actions and progress are being watched.

**Response 6** - **Take any criticism to heart which you know is true.** I had an advisor at UMBC laugh at me when I told him some of the schools I was applying to. He said no way I'd get in, and I wasn't Ph.D. material. Well, I got into a Ph.D. program just fine.

**Response 7** - Also, any "good" advice should be followed up by other recommendations or alternative suggestions. Even if they disagree, they should find something else you can do. If it's all negative, then take any of it with a grain of salt.

### Question 2

*I feel like I've been in school my whole life. Meeting people there had been a fairly organic process. However, now that I'm out of school, and in the "real-world," how do I go about meeting people?!??*

### Answers

**Response 1** - **Start by joining clubs.** That entails everything from a gym to an alumni association to any sort of ethnic or religious groups. **It's no different than when you were in school.** You met people that you had some common denominator with (same class, same group, same major, etc.).

**Response 2** - I had this exact problem, so I know what you mean. It was even harder for me, as I went straight from school to married with a kid. So I didn't even get to just hang out with friends.

**You're lucky in that now we have [meetup.com](http://meetup.com).** I'm using that now, and it's been pretty useful. Other than that, get into activities you like doing - intramural sports, some kind of church, volunteer activities, etc. **Go into it just to do it. If you meet people, it's a bonus.**



### ALUMNI NEWS

**Kia Davis** (M4, Mathematics) became the chairperson of the mathematics department at Ridgeview Middle School in Gaithersburg, Maryland in fall 2011.

**Dr. Damon Tweedy** (M4, Biological Sciences) had two articles published recently discussing race and medicine. "A Case of Racism and Reconciliation" appeared in the February 7, 2012 issue of *The Annals of Internal Medicine* (<http://www.annals.org/content/156/3/246.extract>) and "A Perfect Match" was in the February 15, 2012 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (<http://jama.ama-assn.org/content/307/7/673.extract>)

**Olugbemiga Adekunle** (M10, Computer Engineering, minor in Mathematics) is married to Martha Crawley and they are expecting their first child in June 2012. Olugbemiga graduated from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign with Master of Science in Electrical and Computer Engineering in August 2010. He started working as Computer Science Faculty at Blue Ridge Community College in Weyers Cave, VA in August 2011.

**Chris Aberg** (M11, Chemical Engineering) celebrated Valentine's Day by proposing to Lissete Betancur. She said yes and the happy couple is now engaged.

**Dr. Tiffani J. Bright** (M11, Information Systems) recently published an article entitled "Development and evaluation of an ontology for guiding appropriate antibiotic prescribing" in the *Journal of Biomedical Informatics*.

**Lawrence Fomundam** (M13, Computer Engineering) worked with Northrop in the Navigations systems division for about 3 years in Woodland Hills, CA. He recently made a career leap and is now at the University of Florida in the Electrical Engineering Department with a concentration in Mixed Signal Design.

**Maya Matheny** (M11, Biological Sciences) published the article "Inflammatory Cytokine Levels and Depressive Symptoms in Older Women in the Year After Hip Fracture: Findings from the Baltimore Hip Studies" in the *Journal of the American Geriatric Society*. Maya is currently an MD/PhD candidate at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

**Danielle Robbins** (M13, Mathematics) successfully defended her thesis on August 25, 2011 in Biomathematics at North Carolina State University. The title of her dissertation was *Sensitivity Functions for Delay Differential Equation Models*. She moved to Phoenix to begin her job as a Research/ Data Analyst for the Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center at Arizona State University on Sept. 1, 2011.

**Dr. Kenneth Gibbs** (M13, Biochemistry) published "Decoupling of Tumor-Initiating Activity from Stable Immunophenotype in HoxA9-Meis1-Driven AML" in the February 2012 issue of *Cell Stem Cell*. He is also loving his American Association for the Advancement of Science fellowship and living in DC.

**Dr. Yogita Taylor** (M13, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology) recently got engaged on national TV. See the proposal in the clip below:  
<http://gma.yahoo.com/blogs/abc-blogs/boyfriends-surprise-proposal-gma-163838549--abc-news.html>

**Laura Latéy Jones** (M17, Biological Sciences) will be marrying Everton Vonric Bradford on March 11, 2012.

**Nancy Chiles** (M17, Biological Sciences) had the recent publication "Osteoporosis in Men: Update 2011" in the August 2011 issue of *Rheumatic Disease Clinics of North America*.

**Jamie Heard** (M17, Biological Sciences) had a posthumous publication as second author of the article "A Hoxb13-driven reverse tetracycline transactivator system for conditional gene expression in the prostate" in *Prostate* (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22297979>) Jamie's research mentor was Dr. Charles Bieberich in the Department of Biological Sciences. The Meyerhoff Scholars family lost Jamie in 2008 while he was a student at UMBC.



## FEATURED ALUMNUS

### Jason Lee (M3) Passing on the Legacy of STEM Education

*Article by Vondell Coleman (M4) after an interview with Jason*



To whom much is given much is required. It is a simple yet powerful message that was spoken to many of us over the course of our lives, but branded into our core, as we were shaped into Meyerhoffs at UMBC. It is a constant reminder to all of us that if we pass through life without uplifting and impacting the community around us, then we have missed the true purpose of the gifts bestowed upon us. It is a mantra for the life of a Meyerhoff that Jason Lee (M3) has never forgotten!

Our very own Jason Lee is the recipient of the distinguished 2012 Ford Motor Company “Ford-Employees African American Network” (FAAN) Community Service award for his work at Detroit Area Pre-College Engineering Program (DAPCEP). Jason was honored alongside comedian Steve Harvey and Dr. Herbert Smitherman at a dinner hosted by national broadcast journalist Ed Gordon for his work to provide Detroit area kids with opportunities to discover how much fun being a scientist or engineer can be.

After graduating from UMBC, Jason attended graduate school at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor where he studied Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering as a GEM and Tauber Manufacturing Institute Fellow. He soon after began his career at Ford Motor Company where he obtained diverse and extensive experiences in Ford’s Manufacturing and Product Development divisions. In 2004, he accepted a position as DAPCEP Executive Director through Ford Motor Company’s Executive Loan Program fully expecting to return to Ford full-time. Pre-college enrichment opportunities have been a passion of Jason’s since his days as president of UMBC’s chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers. In 2007, Jason made a decision to pursue his passion and transitioned from Ford Motor Company to become the first DAPCEP Executive Director employed by the non-profit organization in its thirty-two year history.

The mission of DAPCEP is to increase the number of historically underrepresented students who are motivated and prepared academically to pursue degrees leading to careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) related fields through supplemental educational programming. DAPCEP is a Detroit-based \$4.5 million dollar non-profit that provides state-of-the-art STEM programming to under-represented metropolitan Detroit youth in kindergarten through 12th grade. During his tenure as DAPCEP Executive Director, Jason has applied engineering process and efficiencies to the organization’s infrastructure and educational programming. As a result, the program has increased its fiscal foundation and portfolio of educational opportunities for young people. That portfolio of educational opportunities has become quite impressive with kindergarteners in The Little Engineer That Could program, 4<sup>th</sup> graders studying forensics, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders writing software and learning civil engineering with Sims, and high school students studying renewable energy sources and the wonders of silicone from sand to silly putty, just to name a few. DAPCEP even has a PURSE program designed specifically for the challenges that females face in the STEM fields as well as a program dedicated to underrepresented males.

Along with its corporate and eight Michigan university partners, DAPCEP serves more than 4,000 students each year at no cost to its students. The organization provides both out-of-school-time and in-school STEM educational programming to Detroit area youth. DAPCEP has been providing exceptional opportunities to youth for thirty-five years and is recognized as a national model for out-of-school time educational enrichment. To date, DAPCEP has impacted the lives of over 150,000 metropolitan Detroit youth. Jason Lee has been true to the Meyerhoff spirit by showing his commitment to the service and the advancement of higher education among the young people of Detroit.

For more information on DAPCEP go to <http://www.dapcep.org/>



## Health and Wellness



Health was defined by the World Health Organization in 1947 as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity". Dr. Halbert Dunn, "the Father of the Wellness Movement," said that wellness should cultivate a "zest for living" by incorporating the following five dimensions - emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual and physical. As members of the Meyerhoff community we have dedicated ourselves to excelling in the intellectual aspect of wellness. Unfortunately, at times that focus has been to the detriment of the other four dimensions of wellness. As Meyerhoff alumni, I think it is our duty not only to represent academic excellence but also to be examples of overall wellness. This new section of the newsletter is meant to offer tools for us to maintain our total health and wellness.

First, let me share some of the startling obesity data in the United States. Greater than 30% of US adults are obese (BMI >29.9). Approximately 80% of black females over 20 years old are overweight or obese (BMI >24.9). Obesity is a modifiable risk factor for diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease and cancers of the endometrium, post-menopausal breast, colon, esophagus, gallbladder, kidney, and proximal stomach. In 2006, African Americans had the highest age-adjusted death rate due to heart disease, cancer and diabetes. The fight against obesity is not about aesthetics but rather about health promotion.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified five strategic areas to help prevent obesity:

1. Increase consumption of fruits and vegetables (at least five per day)
2. Increase physical activity (at least 30 minutes five times per week)
3. Decrease consumption of sugary drinks
4. Decrease consumption of high energy dense foods (lots of calories in small non-filling volumes)
5. Increase breastfeeding initiation, duration, and exclusivity (this helps prevent childhood obesity)

These recommendations are lovely but the application of them is sometimes complicated by real life. Many of you are a busy grad students or medical residents who routinely drive past the local gym in order to maintain your close relationship with the staff of the nearest fast food establishment. The last thing on your mind is planning a week's worth of meals and workouts. I am fortunate that my love of food is balanced by my love of exercise. This is not everyone's reality. The secret to developing a healthy lifestyle from scratch is to start slowly and take it day by day. You did not get your degree in one month and you probably will not become a vegan Iron Man triathlete in one month either.

Here are some practical basics for healthy nutrition to get you started. **Prepare your own food.** When you make food you are more aware of exactly what you are eating. I relate to the fact that it is painful to cook when you hate cooking so I try to prepare leftover-friendly food. If you make a lot of food at once you can knock out multiple meals in one session. Knowing all you have to do is microwave dinner can also

prevent you from getting takeout on the way home after a long day. **When you do eat out, avoid the items that are clearly horrible for you.** I don't have to list them because you know what they are as soon as you see/smell/taste them. **Keep unhealthy foods out of your home.** If you do not have a cookie at your disposal, you will be more likely to eat a piece of fruit when you crave something sweet. **Drink more water.** Adequate hydration can ward off the fatigue that leads you to downing that sugary soda to get a caffeine rush. **Monitor your portions.** Eating black beans with brown rice and a side of kale salad every day is less effective at preventing obesity when consumed in multiple gargantuan helpings.

Even when nutrition is reasonably well-controlled it can be a challenge for busy individuals to get enough physical activity. For many people, the word exercise is associated with the idea of lots of time and sweat. Not all physical activity has to be that hardcore. **Walking** is a perfectly legitimate form of exercise that most people can squeeze into their schedule at least a few times per week. Walk around the perimeter of your office building for a mental health break during the day. Go for a walk after dinner with your significant other, your children or yourself. At the very least, walk a couple of flights of stairs every day. Ten minutes of activity three times in the day is as effective as thirty minutes of consecutive of exercise in terms of cardiovascular benefits. Along those lines, **dancing** is a great workout. Put music on the radio, MP3 player or TV and get your groove on. About four songs will get you to ten minutes of moderate level activity. For those looking for something more intense, playing in a **recreational sports league** or **training for a race** may be the incentive to get moving. Most communities have road races throughout the spring and summer. Many recreation centers have pick-up basketball and volleyball games as well as competitive leagues. The most important thing is to move.

The beauty of increasing physical wellness is it improves other aspects of your well-being. Eating a healthy diet fuels you to deal with the intellectual rigors of work and school. Physical activity gets blood pumping to the brain to keep your mind sharp as well as releases endorphins to improve your mood. Preparing meals and exercising can be family activities that model healthy behaviors for your kids.

Of course, physical health is not everything. Burnout is real so I would like to close with some tips I have picked up over the years for maintaining emotional wellness:

- Do some things just because they are fun. Not everything has to be tied to some greater societal good.
- Remember it is OK to say no just because you don't want to do it.
- Have at least one person to whom you can vent honestly.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help or a break.
- Use your vacation days.
- Find someone who fills your tank when everyone else has drained it.
- Tell the people you love that you love them, often.

*Jattu Senesie (M4) is a board-certified ob/gyn and certified personal trainer with an interest in health promotion focusing on obesity prevention and health disparities reduction.*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### HONORING LAMONT TOLIVER



#### THE UMBC LEGENDS OF EXCELLENCE BRUNCH

This event will be held on Saturday, March 31 at 11 am. It is held once every 5 years and honors faculty and staff at UMBC who made a significant impact in the lives of African-American and Latino students. This year is particularly special for the Meyerhoff Scholars Program because the late LaMont Toliver is one of the four honorees. You can find more information about obtaining tickets for this event at the link below:

<http://alumni.umbc.edu/s/1325/UMBC-template.aspx?sid=1325&gid=1&pgid=719&cid=1577&cid=1577&crd=0&calpgid=13&calcid=664>

#### MEMORY BOOK

The university is compiling a book of memories about Mr. Toliver from entries placed on the UMBC Meyerhoff Alumni website. The completed book will be presented to the Toliver family. There have been some lovely sentiments already shared on Facebook and in e-mails. Please also enter your messages and memories at the link below to be included in this memento for the Toliver family:

[http://alumni.umbc.edu/s/1325/meyerhoff\\_interior.aspx?sid=1325&gid=2&pgid=746&cid=1631&post\\_id=0](http://alumni.umbc.edu/s/1325/meyerhoff_interior.aspx?sid=1325&gid=2&pgid=746&cid=1631&post_id=0)

#### BOOK OF TOLIVERISMS

The MAAB is compiling a book of Toliverisms to have bound and available for sale on [lulu.com](http://lulu.com). This will be a way for alumni to remember Mr. Toliver's words of wisdom and share them with those who will not have the privilege of hearing them firsthand. An example would be "Questions?, Comments?, Concerns?" If you want to contribute a saying from Mr. Toliver please send it to [Toliverisms@gmail.com](mailto:Toliverisms@gmail.com).

### CALLING ALL MEYERHOFF ALUMNI

#### ***M2 COHORT REP NEEDED!***

The M2 cohort representative position is still vacant. Any M2 who is interested in being part of the Meyerhoff Alumni Advisory Board and helping to keep alumni in touch and involved can contact the communications committee at [maabcomm@gmail.com](mailto:maabcomm@gmail.com)

### **SAVE THE DATE**



The **Summer Bridge 2012 Alumni Cookout** will take place on Sunday, June 10, 12 - 3 pm. Please plan to attend and meet the newest members of the Meyerhoff Scholars family.

### **BE A MENTOR**



Our promise to the Meyerhoff Program is to "give back" to those who have contributed so much to our success. What better way to live out this promise than to help foster the next generation of scholars?

Because of this, the Meyerhoff Alumni Advisory Board is implementing a new **Mentoring Program**. We need your help to make this a success!

If you are interested in being a part of this initiative, please send an email to [MAABMentor@gmail.com](mailto:MAABMentor@gmail.com)

This newsletter was brought to you by the MAAB Communications Committee:

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