

Montgomery Scholars Program Newsletter

# SCHOLARLY PURSUITS

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## Return to Normalcy



MONTGOMERY SCHOLARS  
MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

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## GIVING

We encourage the Scholars community and friends to give to the program. A gift, no matter its size, is really helpful at a time when educational funding is scarce. You can make your gift at our secure, online giving site: [www.montgomerycollege.edu/onlinegiving](http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/onlinegiving). Click on "Select an area of support" and then click on "Other" and type "Montgomery Scholars" in the box.

You can also send a check made payable to Montgomery College Foundation and write "Montgomery Scholars" on the memo line. Send your check to:

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**Thank you so much!**

Cover photo: Class of 2023 by Michelle Moran



## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

**Dear Scholars, Parents, and Friends of Scholars,**

The past few years have been a period marked by great change for the world at large, with COVID-19 looming as the primary factor. The Montgomery Scholars program was no exception. Our students went to remote instruction on a moment's notice, spent two years learning (and learning how to learn) virtually, then finally returned to campus. In the case of the Class of 2022, I ended up seeing most of them in person for the first time two months before graduation. Faculty members retired or took on new roles. Dr. Shweta Sen handed the reins of Montgomery Scholars over to me. Montgomery College welcomed a new president, Dr. Jermaine Williams.

And yet, despite all that, as the old saying goes, the more things changed, the more they stayed the same. Our students continued to excel and remind us of how privileged and fortunate we are to be a part of this unique family; the faculty and staff continued to dedicate themselves and work closely with our students, and remind me of how privileged and fortunate I am to have the colleagues that I do.

We saw our first winner of the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship in Anna Chacón, Class of 2022. We returned to Swannanoa for the Summer Travel Study Seminar in summer of 2023. We welcomed new faculty members for World Literature (Jennifer Lee) and World Music (Victor Provost), who took their batons and hit the ground running with remarkable speed. And just as importantly, we welcomed our new executive associate, Kaylin Nguyen, who took over a role that had been covered in recent years by extraordinary student aides, Kira Ng and Nao Miura. With Kaylin in the fold, we were able to put on our regular slate of events seamlessly: the Cornerstone Retreat, Info Session, Alumni Panel, Winter Solstice, Colloquium, Welcome Brunch, and Skoal. This past Winter Solstice was the first time since the pandemic we were able to welcome back alumni, and it was a glorious evening to behold the generations of Scholars who have come through the program return to celebrate as family. At the end of the evening, our IT helper Charlie put karaoke videos on the screen, and what ensued I can only describe as Scholars magic: Scholars past and present sharing the microphone and belting out one holiday tune after another.

Traditions old, and traditions new. As our students would say, I'm here for it!

**John W. Wang, Ph.D.**  
**Director, Montgomery Scholars**  
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# WELCOME, CLASS OF 2024

## A Full Return to In-Person Learning

This fall, Montgomery Scholars welcomed the Class of 2024 and celebrated the full return to in-person learning and events. After Scholars classes and events went remote in the spring of 2020, the program had to be creative in how it fostered the Scholars community spirit online. All of the classes, from Core to Capstone, were taught via Zoom, and events like Colloquium and Philo Café were held virtually in 2021.

At the start of the spring 2022 semester, the Scholars classroom in the Humanities Building once again came alive with the voices and (masked) faces of students and professors. Professors met some of their students in person for the first time, working with them in Core and on their rehearsals for the upcoming Colloquium. Monday, March 7 marked a triumphant return: Colloquium was held in person in the Theater Arts Building. The event allowed the graduating class of 2022 to show off their projects to a live audience.

**Fatihah Ullah**, with her project “Daughters Devalued: How Imperialism Erased the Women of South Asia,” shone as the keynote speaker, and the Scholars and their families and friends were able to come together with food and a visit from the new Montgomery College President, **Dr. Jermaine Williams**. In May, Scholars of '22 were celebrated at the traditional Skoal ceremony in the Gudelsky Building.

The return to in-person classes and events perhaps most impacted the Class of 2023, who started their Scholars experience remotely. **Sudha Sudhaker '23** notes that in addition to having to adjust to her first year of college, she also found it harder to stay engaged remotely. While she says that all her professors were “extremely understanding of the circumstances,” she missed the sense of community that in-person interactions can foster. **Liz Porter '23** also noted that “[n]ot being able to see my fellow Scholars’ faces, eat together, and do other fun activities like museum visits made the first semester [...] somewhat sad.” Since returning to in-person classes and events, **Sudha** says she is glad that she “no longer has to rely on [a] group chat” to feel connections to her fellow Scholars. 2023 Scholars were also able to participate in the annual trip to Swannanoa this past summer.

With all of the in-person events underway, Scholars of 2024 were welcomed in style at their opening Cornerstone event. They gathered at The Lodge at Little Seneca Creek for a day of fellowship, food, and team-building activities. Since then, they have enjoyed in-person classes, museum trips, and Philo Cafés.



The Class of 2024 enjoyed in-person activities.



The Class of 2024 enjoyed a one-day retreat last fall at The Lodge at Little Seneca Creek.



After nearly two years of remote instruction, Scholars returned to in-person learning, along with their MC peers and professors.

# CONGRATULATIONS, CLASS OF 2022

**Anna Lior Chacón** (Sherwood High School) is pursuing a degree in history at the University of Maryland, College Park. She was chosen as our first recipient of the Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship. Over the summer, Anna interned at the Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office in the Special Victims Unit.

**Luke Clarke** (Quince Orchard High School) was accepted into the digital media productions program at Florida State University and is currently pursuing a bachelor's in that field. He has had the opportunity to work on official ESPN and ACCN broadcasts for football, soccer, and volleyball games, some for class credit and some for pay. He has also been able to work on a number of film school projects and has had a short of his played at a student-run film festival.

**Viola Clune** (Quince Orchard High School), after being accepted to Williams College, Amherst College, Wesleyan University, and others, is now studying history at Yale University. She is particularly interested in Latin American history and historiography, and is also pursuing Spanish language studies and creative writing during her time at Yale. Just recently, she was tapped for Yale's Latin dance team, Sabrosura, and still hopes to get involved in dance and community advocacy in New Haven, and to explore journalism writing communities at her university.

**Egan Eteffa** (James Hubert Blake High School) is pursuing a degree in communication with a focus on digital media with the University of Maryland at the Universities at Shady Grove. She is a recipient of the Rawlings Educational Assistance Grant and UMD's Maryland Transfer Scholarship.

**Patrick Ibañez** (Walter Johnson High School) is a recipient of the Frederick Douglass Scholarship. He majors in marketing while minoring in technology entrepreneurship and corporate innovation at the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland.

**Homa Keshmiri** (Richard Montgomery High School) is pursuing a chemical engineering degree at University of Maryland, College Park. She is the recipient of two James Clark School of Engineering foundational scholarships.

**Celine Macairan** (Poolesville High School) transferred to the University of Maryland, College Park as a letters and sciences (undecided) major. Since then, she applied to the Smith School of Business and is now pursuing a degree in business finance and management.

**Vrisha Sookraj** (Northwest High School) was accepted to University of Maryland, College Park and is a recipient of the full-tuition Frederick Douglass Scholarship. She is majoring in psychology and hoping to minor in disability studies. Vrisha is also a volunteer with Maryland Mentor Corps.

**Fatihah Ullah** (Gaithersburg High School) is double majoring in international studies and economics at Johns Hopkins University as a junior. This past summer she was selected to work as an undergraduate diversity fellow at the National Bureau of Asian Research in Washington, D.C. Her time with NBR combined passion for research with a newfound interest in academic publishing and discussion. She is currently working on publishing an interview she conducted with Tariq Karim, former ambassador of Bangladesh, where she had the privilege to speak with him about the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its implications on disaster relief in Bangladesh. She has decided to continue pursuing interests in academic discourse and publishing with the Johns Hopkins International Studies Leadership Council, which centers on writing weekly pieces for the "Foreign Affairs Review," the council's own journal.



Paulina Martinez and Patrick Ibañez



Egan Eteffa and Dr. Michelle Moran



Luke Clarke, Viola Clune, Homa Keshmiri, and Dr. Michelle Moran

# Kudos to Our Beacon 2022 Participants and Winners

Sixteen Montgomery Scholars were selected to present at the 2022 Beacon Conference, a conference that has celebrated and showcased outstanding student work from community colleges in the Mid-Atlantic region since 1993. **Jessica Beitler, Anna Chacón, Luke Clarke, Viola Clune, Egan Eteffa, Patrick Ibañez, Homa Keshmiri, Jami Kinnamen, Ardo Kolade, Celine Anne Macairan, Paulina Martinez, Lauren Portis, Vrisha Sookraj, Joshua Thomas, Travis Tran, and Fatihah Ullah** were selected to share their work at the conference, some with posters, and others with full presentations.

Professor Rebecca Eggenschwiler and Dr. Nathan Zook were this year’s Capstone mentors, and Dr. Andree Betancourt was the speech coach.

The Scholars also celebrated several first-place winners at the conference. **Egan Eteffa** won the Women’s and Gender Studies category for her work “Tokenism in Entertainment: A Failed Attempt to Level Up Representation in TV and Film.” In history, **Viola Clune** took first for her paper “Dominican History, A Compass for America’s Moral Moment: How Histories of U.S. Foreign Intervention Can Combat Modern Nationalist Ideologies.” **Patrick Ibañez** won in business and economics for his paper “Maximizing Economic Output: A Global Investigation on Workplace Discrimination Towards LGBTQIA+ Individuals.” In philosophy and religion, **Homa Keshmiri** won for her presentation titled “The Philosophy of Science: Utilizing Ancient Approaches for an Enhancement in Scientific Inquiry Mentor.” **Ardo Kolade’s** essay “Why Comic Books Should Be Used in Education” took first place in the education panel. And finally, **Fatihah Ullah** won in the international studies and globalization category for her work “Daughters Devalued: How Imperialism Erased the Women of South Asia.”

Congratulations to all participating and winning Scholars! We look forward to next year’s conference, which will mark a return to an in-person conference on Friday, June 2, at Rockland Community College in Suffern, New York.



Homa Keshmiri and Fatihah Ullah



Vrisha Sookraj



Class of 2022 on the night of the Colloquium

# WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Here are some of the Scholars from the first 22 classes and their whereabouts. If anyone from the classes of 2001–2022 has an update for the newsletter, email [mcscholars@montgomerycollege.edu](mailto:mcscholars@montgomerycollege.edu) and we will include the information in the next issue.

## Class of 2002

**Aaron Kaufman '02** was elected to the Maryland House of Delegates, representing District 18, in fall of 2022. He currently serves on the Judiciary Committee.

## Class of 2017

**Lori Wysong '17** published her first book, *Historic Washington, DC: A Tour of the District's Top 50 National Landmarks* (Globe Pequot, 2021).

## Class of 2019

**Jennifer Vargas '19** graduated in May 2022 from University of Maryland, College Park with a B.S. in psychology and minor in sustainability. She is currently enrolled at Towson University pursuing an M.A. and C.A.S. in school psychology.

## Class of 2020

**Thifany Braga '20** transferred to Johns Hopkins University and double majored in international studies and Spanish, also earning a minor in Latin American studies. After graduating from Hopkins this past May, she started working as a government contractor at the Department of Justice's Criminal Division. Her plan for this gap year is to determine whether she wants to pursue a master's in international studies or apply to law school.

**Laura DeMarco '20** received her bachelor's degree from University of Maryland at The Universities at Shady Grove in communication. While there, she received the Leadership and Service Award. Currently, Laura is in grad school at UMD on the main campus, working on her master's in library and information science while holding a graduate assistantship in the McKeldin Library. She was just elected to UMD's Library Assembly as a grad student representative, and is living away from home for the first time.

**Manthan Desai '20** transferred to Simon Fraser University in Vancouver to study biochemistry and computer science. He officially moved to Vancouver last fall and intends to stay until he completes his bachelor's degree in spring 2023. After that, he plans on moving back to the United States and finding a job while completing his master's in computer science concurrently.

**Yassin Drammeh '20** is currently studying mechanical engineering at UMBC with plans to graduate in December 2023. After college, she plans to pursue entrepreneurship in theme parks. She is a National Academy of Engineers Grand Challenge Scholar and plans to focus on creating sustainable water filters.

**Ellie Earles '20** graduated summa cum laude in May 2022 from Lee University, where she double majored in international studies and Spanish. Ellie thoroughly enjoyed her time at Lee and the opportunities it gave her. For example, she spent the summer of 2021 in Colombia where she got to explore, learn about the culture, develop her Spanish, and teach third grade English. In spring 2022, she completed an original thesis in which she researched indigenous political representation in Latin America. Ellie is currently living in Tennessee and working in the economic development sector of a nonprofit called City Fields. She's learning a lot and loving life!

**Farris Hamad '20** graduated from UMD with a degree in accounting in spring 2022. He spent the summer with his family in Jordan. In August, he moved to Baltimore and started working as an auditor with Ernst & Young. He is currently studying for the CPA exam.

**Anne-Michelle Liebersohn '20** is finishing the last few semesters of her undergraduate degree in electrical engineering at the University of Maryland. She is excited to be competing on the UMD Loop engineering team as a new member of its avionics division.

**Emily Nguyen '20** graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park with a B.S. in biological sciences in May 2022. Now she is in her first year at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry, where she is pursuing a D.D.S. on a three-year scholarship with the National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program.

## Class of 2021

**Alexzander Baetsen '21** is a recipient of the Point Foundation National Community College Scholarship for LGBTQ+ students, the Frederick Douglass Transfer Scholarship of the University of Maryland, and the Gross Regents Scholarship of the University System of Maryland. They are currently pursuing dual teaching certification in special education and elementary general education at the University of Maryland, College Park.

**Jose Ildefonso Flores '21** is attending the University of Maryland, College Park as a recipient of the Frederick Douglass Merit Scholarship. He is currently studying neurophysiology with plans of going to medical school in the next few years.

**Audrey Hall '21** transferred to Georgetown University where she is majoring in English. She was a Mellon Fellow in the 2021 Johns Hopkins Humanities Research Collaboratory and currently continues her interest in indigenous women's studies as a research fellow for the Gender+ Justice Initiative 2023. In addition, she is crafting a creative writing research project for the English Honors Thesis Program as she prepares to apply to law school.

**Cindy Tran '21** will graduate in spring 2023 with a B.S. in public health science from the University of Maryland, College Park. Currently, she is also working as a clinical medical assistant in primary care with a passion for creating meaningful connections with patients and empowering them to live healthier lives. She has future aspirations of pursuing a master's of public health and a master of science in physician assistant studies. In her free time, she enjoys gardening and volunteers to teach the lighting crew of a local high school's theater department.

# New Faculty/Staff and New Faculty Roles

This year, Montgomery Scholars welcomed some new faculty/staff members—and saw some seasoned faculty take on new roles.



Assistant Professor **Maria Abasi** is taking over as our dedicated Scholars counselor for the odd-year classes. Professor Abasi has over 10 years of experience in education. Prior to Montgomery College, she served as counselor at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) for the Pathway to the Baccalaureate Program, and as an advisor for the Great Expectations

Program. Professor Abasi earned a B.S. in psychology with a minor in biology from Xavier University of Louisiana, and a master of social work with a clinical concentration in children and families from the University of Maryland, Baltimore. She is a D.C.-area native and Magruder High School alum. She is the proud daughter of Nigerian immigrants and a first-generation college graduate. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, trying new restaurants, going to concerts, and spending time with her family and friends.



**Swift Dickison**, who has taught World Literature in the Core classes in previous years, has taken over the role of moderator for the Philo Café meetings this year. This is the first time Professor Dickison has participated as moderator. He used to meet with Scholars on occasion at Bob White's house when he moderated the Philo a few years ago. Professor Dickison also continues in his role with the Travel Study program at Swannanoa.

The Philo as it currently works involves the submission of three questions for discussion posed by a group of three different students collaborating on these questions for each meeting. Philo Café meetings continue on Thursdays from 4 to 5:30 p.m., with a few snacks and some informal conversation between Scholars to start.

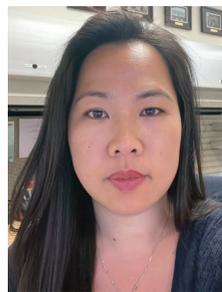


**Jennifer Lee** completed her M.A. in English at Georgetown University. Before returning to graduate school to pursue teaching writing and literature, she worked in public relations and communications with an emphasis on social issues campaigns and education advocacy. In addition to teaching World Literature for first-year students in the Montgomery Scholars program, she

teaches an array of composition and literature courses including Film and Literature, Asian Literature, and Introduction to World Mythology. She also serves as an editor for the College's *Innovation Journal*.



**Eurae Muhn**, who taught World Literature in the Core classes recently, has taken over the role of high school outreach for the program. She now visits high schools in Montgomery County to speak on behalf of the Montgomery Scholars program, as well as establish a relationship with the career counselors.



**Kaylin Nguyen** has assumed the role of executive associate, handling all administrative aspects of the Montgomery Scholars program, as well as other Honors Program duties. Kaylin has worked at Montgomery College for 16 years. During her tenure, she has developed a passion for working with students, faculty, and staff alike. Her commitment to her work is evident in the relationships she has

built with those around her. Kaylin's interest in human resources management led her to pursue a master's degree in the subject at the University of Maryland Global Campus. She found the program to be challenging, but ultimately rewarding, as it allowed her to gain a deeper understanding of the field. She is respected by her colleagues and valued by her students. Her dedication to her work has earned her a reputation as a trusted and capable colleague.



Our new World Music professor, **Victor Provost**, is widely regarded as one of the world's leading voices on the unique, and often misunderstood, steelpan. The Washington, D.C. *City Paper's* "Jazz Percussionist of the Year" six years in a row, his most recent recording, *Bright Eyes*, debuted at #5 on the iTunes Top 40 Jazz Charts and was met with praise from *The Washington Post*, *Downbeat Magazine*, and *Jazz Times*. An active educator, Victor is

an adjunct professor of music at George Mason University in Virginia and Montgomery College. He conducts residencies and master classes at universities and high schools throughout the United States and the Caribbean. He is also an arts ambassador to the U.S. Virgin Islands, which honored him with a Special Congressional Recognition in 2014, and to which he returns frequently to perform and teach as part of Dion Parson's community-based arts initiative, the United Jazz Foundation. Victor holds a B.M. and M.M. in performance with an emphasis on jazz studies from George Mason University.

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