



## PARTNERSHIPS

ASCEND has been built in partnership with different research institutions and pipeline institutions. Johns Hopkins University, University of Maryland Medical Center, National Institutes of Health are the research institutions who are serving as mentors for ASCEND Scholars and support the ASCEND program in other ways. ASCEND is working with many high schools, community colleges, and related organizations in order to develop a pipeline of highly-qualified students to participate in the ASCEND program and to support the efforts of these entities to educate their students in areas that will prepare them to enter college and graduate school and become biomedical researchers. Some of the organizations ASCEND is working with include: A Bridge to Academic Excellence (ABAE), Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS), College Readiness Division, Boy Scouts of America, Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC), Medical Education Resources Initiative for Teens (MERIT), The Juxtapia Group/JUICE and Prince George's Community College.



Dr. Jocelyn Turner-Musa

Greetings ASCEND Scholars! This is the third issue of the ASCEND Scholars Newsletter. The newsletter is designed to keep you up-to-date about the ASCEND Scholars Program. Since the last issue, we have completed a year of virtual learning, participated in virtual conferences, held our second virtual ASCEND Scholar graduation ceremony, and congratulated six Cohort 5 and three Cohort 6 scholars who completed the ASCEND Scholars Program and who graduated from Morgan State University. Scholars, we are so proud of your accomplishments and continued success. In this issue, you'll learn more about all the great things ASCEND Scholars are doing. Keep in touch and KEEP ASCENDING!

## ASCEND PROGRAM UPDATES

This year our fifth cohort successfully concluded their two-year training as ASCEND scholars with another stellar presentation of their research projects. This cohort has been a very special one in several ways. They were our first cohort of scholars who moved through their training without the benefit of an eight-week long Summer Research Institute (SRI) preparation. Instead, they took on, and successfully completed the challenge of a semester-long course, SCIE 200, which replaced the SRI in a condensed curriculum. They took this course during an otherwise busy academic year. Cohort 5 did not miss a beat! Moreover, cohort 5 completed the seminal last year of their work under Covid restrictions, without access to in person research facilities and mentors. They worked but on Zoom and online and to an extent, alone. Instead of giving in to these limitations they allowed their research projects to become enriched by the special challenges they and their communities have faced and addressed questions of new significance. This was a display of true ASCEND entrepreneurship.

Cohort 6, admitted in the middle of the Covid summer of 2020, has battled their own challenges. They never even had the benefit of bonding in person, before entering the fray of training to become an entrepreneurial researcher. Cohort 6 has shown their resilience and forged ahead to fulfill their academic and research goals. All members of cohort 6 have successfully placed in summer research projects this year, in some cases with mentors they first encountered in their SCIE 200 "bootcamp" training.

Bolutife Baiyewu, the "Farewell" speaker of the graduate awards celebrations of the SCMNS this spring and ASCEND scholar, cohort 3, has referred to her class ('20) and the Morgan graduating class of 2021 as the "diamond class, ...forged under pressure into diamonds". We think that the same can be said for ASCEND cohort 6 and 5. They will continue to shine bright.

Drs. Christine Hohmann and Payam Shiekhattari serve as Co-Principal Investigator for the ASCEND Center for Biomedical Research.



Payam  
Shiekhattari, MD,  
MPH  
  
School of  
Community  
Health and Policy



Christine  
Hohmann, PhD  
  
School of  
Computer,  
Mathematical  
and Natural



## SCHOLAR PROGRAM MENTORS

ASCEND pairs faculty lead mentors and near-peer mentors with Scholar research teams to ensure the students become exceptional biomedical researchers. The mentors guide and assist the Scholars with their team-based projects and also guide the Scholars in professional development and in enhancing their critical thinking, strategic planning, organizational and leadership skills.

### Lead Mentors

Melanie Bennett, PhD  
Amber Hodges, PhD  
Robert McCann, PhD  
Jocelyn Robinson  
Ingrid Tulloch, PhD  
Andreas Wulff, PhD candidate

### Near- peer mentors

Oluwatoyin Ajayi (MPH)  
Givania Griffin (MPH)

### Ambassadors

Devin Saunders  
Maya Purnell  
Jordan Dawson

## LEAD MENTOR SPOTLIGHT



Dr. Ingrid K. Tulloch joined Morgan State University as an Assistant Professor of Psychology in 2018. She teaches the scientific methods, senior research thesis, and physiological psychology courses. Dr. Tulloch also serves as the Director of the Animal Research Core Facility, a National Institute of Health-supported Research Centers in Minority Institutions (RCMI) core laboratory at Morgan State. Dr. Tulloch earned a BA in psychology with special honors at Hunter College and a Ph.D. in psychology specializing in biological psychology and behavioral neuroscience at the City University of New York Graduate School. She completed post-doctoral research in the Molecular Neuropsychiatry Branch of the National Institutes of Health's National Institute on Drug Abuse. Dr. Tulloch's research uses animal models and human participant research on addiction, violence, and aggression to understand how early life experiences and biopsychosocial processes influence these risky health behaviors. Her recent research has focused on psychosocial factors such as discrimination and the corresponding stress and immune responses to predict risky health behaviors and cognition.

She has co-authored papers on the molecular mechanisms of methamphetamine and nicotine neurotoxicity and related behaviors. Dr. Tulloch has mentored over thirty undergraduate students in psychology and neuroscience and belongs to several professional organizations devoted to research, teaching, and mentoring in these disciplines. In her spare time, Dr. Tulloch gardens and volunteers as a statistics tutor at the Maryland Correctional Institute in Jessup, MD.

### Current Mentees

#### 1) Cohort 5: **Layschel Kemp**

"The effects of Saffron on Lipopolysaccharide-induced Anxiety-like Behaviors in Mice"

" A Voluntary Consumption Model to Test the Behavioral Pharmacology of Saffron Tea in Laboratory Mice"--Anxiety measures

#### 2) Cohort 6: **Destinee Young**

"Will Saffron Alter Lipopolysaccharide Inflammation-induced Cognitive Deficits"

"A Voluntary Consumption Model to Test the Behavioral Pharmacology of Saffron Tea in Laboratory Mice" - Cognitive measures

**Alexus McKoy** "Relationship between racial discrimination and anxieties regarding COVID-19?"

**Kamilah Degraphenreed and Dai'Shona Jones** "Neuroimmune Correlates of Racialized Sexual Violence in African American

Women at an HBCU"

# STUDENT RESEARCH CENTER HIGHLIGHT



The Student Research Center is a registered Morgan State University undergraduate student organization, partially run by students with the support of the SRC Coordinator/staff advisor and faculty advisor. The SRC encourages networking and health research enrichment for the students by engaging students in a vibrant research environment, where they will be surrounded by and can exchange research ideas with peers and near-peer mentors. It is a place where students will have the opportunity to broaden their knowledge of biomedical research and to interact with other students who have a shared interest in biomedical research. The goal is for students to be motivated, trained, and empowered to conduct their own research.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SRC is now virtual. Activities are held virtually via Zoom and social media, specifically Instagram. The second annual virtual SRC week was held April 26<sup>th</sup> – April 30<sup>th</sup> 2021. Dr. Lisa Brown still serves as the faculty advisor for the SRC and the SRC now falls under the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR).

There have been five executive boards since the inception of the SRC. The SRC leadership has selected the 2021 -2022 executive board, however, they will be announced at a later date.

The positions to be announced are:

- President
- Vice president
- Secretary
- Mister SRC
- Miss SRC
- Public Relations & Communications Committee Chair



# ASCEND IN THE NEWS

## DPC Virtual Symposium (03/29/21 – 04/02/21)

The Diversity Program Consortium held its 2nd Annual Virtual Symposium on March 29th - April 2nd. Cohort 5 Scholars Christabell Agyapong, Deja Caton, and Nashae Prout gave oral presentations, Cohort 5 scholar Layschel Kemp gave a live poster presentation, and Cohort 6 scholar Destinee Young gave a poster presentation that was displayed in the Poster Gallery. The students presented their summer research and Nashae Prout presented her ASCEND project.

## 36th Annual Mae P. Claytor/Martin D. Jenkins Behavioral Science Research Conference (4/27/21)

The 36th Annual Mae P. Claytor and Martin D. Jenkins Behavioral Science Research Conference was held on April 27th via Zoom. Students in the Behavioral and Social Sciences presented their original research or community organization program evaluations. Over 150 people attended. The keynote speaker was biological psychologist Dr. Michele K. Lewis who is a professor at Winston-Salem State University. ASCEND Scholars Layschel Kemp (Cohort 5), Alexis McKoy (Cohort 6), Kayla Mercer (Cohort 6), and Destinee Young (Cohort 6) presented their ASCEND research projects. Chyna Roger (Cohort 6) received the Carrol S. Perrino Scholarship. The scholarship is given to a student who has a GPA of 3.25 or better, is a student leader, has interest in attending graduate school, and is actively involved in the Psychology Department and Morgan State University. Chyna will receive \$500 during the 2021-2022 academic year.



## ASCEND SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

Nashae Prout is a DC native and proudly Jamaican. She is a recent Cohort 5 ASCEND Scholar graduate and also a Morgan State University Alumna. She received her Bachelor of Science in Health Education with a concentration in Environmental Health and a minor in Biology. Her research interest includes health disparities and urban populations. Nashae will be matriculating at the University of Rochester, New York to pursue her Ph.D in Toxicology. She hopes to gain more confidence in her research skills and become the Principal Investigator of her own research lab in the future.

Awards/Honors: Peer Bears Mentor of the Month (February 2021), Academic Trailblazer (2019-2021), Dean's List (2018-2021), SRC E-board member (2019-2021).

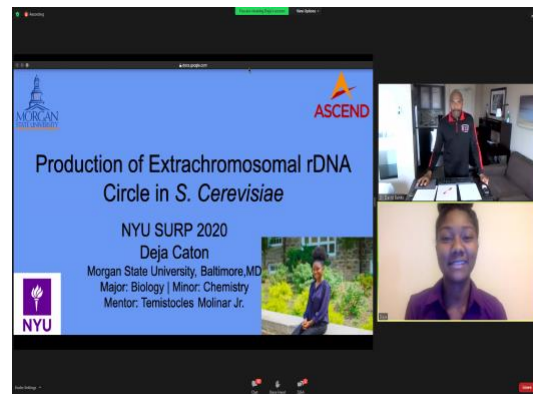
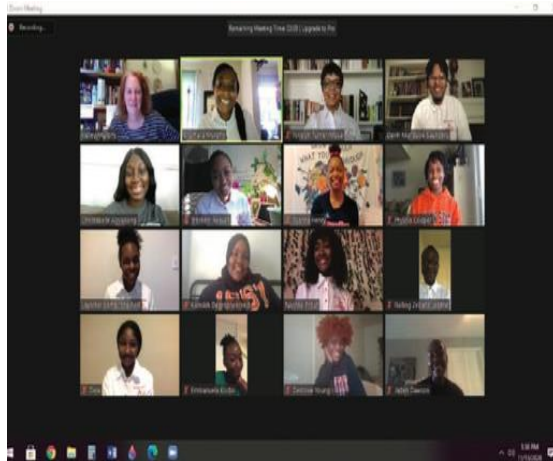
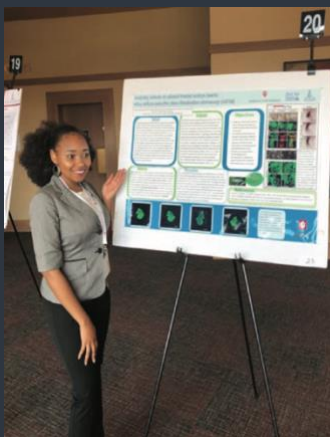
## Cohort 5 Graduation Ceremony-- (5/6/21)



A celebration of Cohort 5 and farewell took place on May 6, 2021. The graduation ceremony was held virtually this year and welcomed parents, family, friends, and ASCEND affiliates to view presentations of all the research projects. The event concluded with awards and remarks from the program administrators and directors.

## Celebrating Scholars.....

- 2021 Graduates – Christabelle Agyapong, Seanasia Baronette, Layshel Kemp, Destinee Young, Kayla Mercer, Jordan Dawson, Maya Purnell, Devin Saunders, Nashae Prout, Alexis McKoy.
- Award winners at symposium & conferences: Chyna Roger (Cohort 6) received the MSU Psychology Department's Carrol S. Perrino Scholarship.
- Graduate School acceptance & admission: Alexis McKoy (Cohort 6)- School Psychology/Eds at College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA; Christabelle Agyapong (Cohort 5) – NIDDK program at National Institutes of Health; Destinee Young (Cohort 6) – M.S program in Human Computer Interaction at DePaul University in Chicago, IL; Devin Saunders (Cohort 4) – Nutritional Science program at University of Arizona; Ismael Bouso – Biomedical Engineering/ PhD at UC Davis; Jordan Dawson (Cohort 4) – MS in Applied Anatomy at Case Western Reserve University; Maya Purnell (Cohort 4) – Masters in Nursing at the University of Maryland; Nashae Prout (Cohort 5) – Toxicology (Ph.D.) at the University of Rochester.
- 2021 Summer Internships: Ayanna Henry- Focused Physio (Milburn, NJ); Chyna Roger – Umaryland SOM; Dai'Shona – JHU School of Medicine; Deja Caton – Cornell University, Emmanuel Kodjo – Umd SOM; Ezinne Onyedum – Maryland DNR, Jaden Dawson – JHU Institute for Computational Medicine; Kamilah Degraphenreed – University of Maryland Baltimore County; Myia Robinson – Morgan State Univeristy; Phylicia Cooper – Johns Hopkins University.
- Cohort 6 Scholars- Alexis MsKoy, Ayanna Henry, Chyna Roger, Dai'Shona Jones, Destinee Young, Emmanuela Kodjo, Ezinne Onyedum, Jaden Dawson, Kamilah Degraphenreed, Kayla Mercer, Myia Robinson, Phylicia Cooper.



What: The Diversity Program Consortium (DPC) is a network of institutions, led by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), to increase training and mentoring and to enhance individual access in biomedical research careers. This initiative aims to transform institutional culture and biomedical training and mentoring nationwide.

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### Professional Development

- [Morgan State online professional/personal enrichment courses](#)
- [UC Davis Center for Neuroscience](#)
- [Doctoralnet - Masters and doctoral professional development services.](#)

## Where are they now?



Kojo Yeboah II is an **ASCEND Scholar Alumni**. He is currently enrolled in the MD program at the American University School of Medicine in Nicaragua.

Have content you want to be featured in the newsletter? We want to hear from you!

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