



## 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 Juxtopia Group/JUICE and Prince George's Community College.



Dr. Jocelyn Turner-Musa

Greetings ASCEND Scholars! This is the second issue of the ASCEND Scholars Newsletter. The newsletter is designed with you in mind! Since the last issue, we have experienced a pandemic, virtual learning, held our first virtual ASCEND Scholar graduation ceremony, and recruited the 6th Cohort of ASCEND Scholars. Through it all, YOU have persevered! We are so proud of you. 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 sixth cohort of ASCEND Scholars started their two-year program, and our fifth cohort started the second year of their program. We are very pleased with our Scholars' accomplishments in many ways.

The ASCEND Scholars will always remain an important part of the ASCEND family, and we count on them to be good ambassadors and liaisons for ASCEND. We know that they have already achieved so much, and, in time, will achieve much more.

Previously, Dr. Farin Kamangar served as the Principal Investigator of the ASCEND Center for Biomedical Research but has now transitioned to a new role. Dr. Kamangar now serves as the Interim Assistant Vice-President for Research at Morgan State University. Dr. Christine Hohmann currently serves as the Co-Principal Investigator for the ASCEND Center for Biomedical Research.



Payam  
Sheikhattari, MD,  
MPH

Principal  
Investigator |  
School of  
Community  
Health and Policy



Christine  
Hohmann, PhD

Co-Principal  
Investigator |  
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

Craig Ferris, PhD  
Maryam Ganjavi, PhD  
Niangoran Koissi, PhD  
Mollie Lange, MA  
Ming Liu, PhD  
Simon Nyaga, PhD  
Jiangnan Peng, PhD  
Alexandr Samokhvalov, PhD  
Ingrid Tulloch, PhD  
James Wachira, PhD

### Near- peer mentors

Oluwatoyin Ajayi (MPH)  
Givania Griffin (MPH)

### Ambassadors

Devin Saunders  
Maya Purnell  
Ismael Bouso (BSc)  
Jordan Dawson

## NEAR PEER MENTOR SPOTLIGHT



Oluwatoyin Ajayi, is a second year Public Health Doctoral Student at Morgan State University with research interests in health disparities, maternal and child health, epidemiology and biostatistics (big data). She currently serves the role as the Program Assistant in the ASCEND Student Training Core and has been serving as a near peer mentor to some of the scholars.

Ms. Ajayi has worked with the ASCEND Scholars on various research projects. In the past she worked on projects such as: Effect of Sleep Quality on Attention (Charleene and Nadia); Adolescents experiences of parental divorce and its effect on stress levels as college freshman (Tyra, Hamidah, Mabinty, Kaaliyah, Thelma and Archibald); College African-American male freshmen and their media-influenced perceptions of female sexual objectification (Damian and Kiana); Assessing the relationship between frequent exposure to community violence and desensitization among students in a historically black university (Breonna, Oluchi, Jyoti and Sydney).

Currently, she is working on the following projects with Cohort 5 Scholars: The Effects of Vitamin E Acetate on Pulmonary Epithelial Cells (Christabelle and Deja) and The Relationship between Anxiety and Athletic Performance in Collegiate Athletes (Layschel).

# 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. Majority of the events this past summer and this Fall focused on mental health. As of Fall 2020, the SRC also has a new faculty advisor, Dr. Lisa Brown 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 current 2020 - 2021 executive board consists of:

- President - Christabelle Agyapong
- Vice president – Nashae Prout
- Secretary – Fopefoluwa Atanda
- Mister SRC – Ismeal Bousso
- Miss SRC – Micaela Fleetwood
- Public Relations & Communications Committee Chair- Perpetua Nkem

### ***Message from the SRC President -***

“My vision for the SRC is for all members to grow in a positive way, come together as one big family, and make a big impact on Morgan State’s campus, and on biomedical research. Stay positive and persevere through the rough times because there is a greater reward at the end and I hope to see you in the SRC!”





# ASCEND IN THE NEWS

## 27th Annual Undergraduate & Graduate Research Symposium (4/15/20)

Due to the ongoing concerns related to the Coronavirus, the 26TH ANNUAL UNDERGRADUATE & GRADUATE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM, hosted by Morgan's biology department was cancelled. As a result, ASCEND scholars were not able to showcase their poster presentations this year. The symposium usually presents work from undergraduate and graduate students where students have the opportunity to answer questions about their research as well as explain aspects of their projects such as methodology, scope, samples, etc.

## 35th Annual Mae P. Claytor/Martin D. Jenkins Behavioral Science Research Conference (4/28/20)

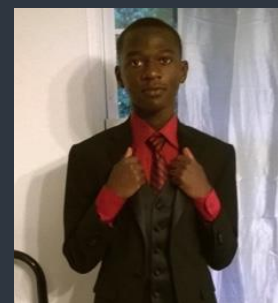
This year's research conference hosted by the Psychology Department was held virtually via ZOOM. This year's theme was "Remember the Times." The keynote speaker was a Morgan State University alumnus, Dr. Lenwood Hayman. Dr. Hayman spoke on "Remembering the importance of the present moment: Recentering during decentering times". There were 21 poster and 5 oral presentations.

Two of our ASCEND scholars, Damion Trotter and Marvellous Oke did oral presentations and Sydney Simpson, also an ASCEND scholar, presented her senior thesis. Oluchi Elendu, Jyoti Maharjan, Sydney Simpson and Breanne Martin (Cohort 5) presented their ASCEND project, "Assessing the Relationship Between Community Violence Exposure and Desensitization."

Marvellous Oke and Damion Trotter (Cohort 5) received the Mae P. Claytor award for Research Excellence.

Marvellous Oke received the Roger K. Williams Award for Academic Excellence.

Sydney Simpson (Cohort 5) received the John E. Richardson for Commitment to Applied Psychology award.



## ASCEND SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

Rolling Zebaze was born in Cameroon and moved to America when he was six years old. He is currently an ASCEND Scholar at Morgan State University, a program funded by the NIH BUILD (Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity) initiative. The goal of the ASCEND program is to prepare students to design and conduct their own research projects. He is currently studying Substance Abuse by testing the neuroimmune response to alcohol in a crayfish animal model. Rolling recently presented at his first scientific conference - the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS) and won an award for Social Behavioral Sciences/Public Health for his research on the effects of wealth on COVID-19 Mortality and Morbidity rates.

## Cohort 4 Graduation Ceremony-- (5/7/20)



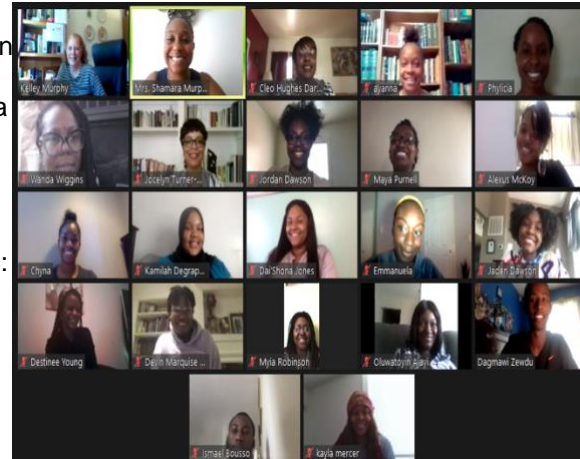
A celebration of Cohort 4 and farewell took place on May 7, 2020. The graduation ceremony was held virtually this year and welcomed parents, family, friends, and ASCEND affiliates to view presentations of all the research projects. The event concluded with awards and remarks from the program administrators and directors.



# Celebrating Scholars.....



- 2020 Graduates – Lydia Johnson, Rolling Zebaze Lekane, Tresherr Reaves, Ismeal Bouso, Adetunji Adeniran-Adetoye, Osaretin Aimufua, Chukwuebuka Eburuoh, Morgan Hall, Oluchi Elendu, Jyoti Maharjan, Breanna Martin, Sydney Simpson, Damion Trotter, Daniel Ugomadi, Kojo Yeboah II, Marvellous Oke, Bolutife Baiyewu, Jade Dodge, Henry Onyedum, Amanda
- Award winners at symposium & conferences: Rolling Zebaze Lekane won awards for his poster presentation at ABCRMS 2020.
- Graduate School acceptance & admission: Chukwuebuka Eburuoah (Cohort 4) – Ph.D program at the University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine of Biomedical Sciences; Morgan Hall - MPH program at the University of Michigan; Kojo Yeboah II - MD program at the American University School of Medicine.
- Layshel Kemp (Cohort 5), Oluwatoyin Ajayi, & Dr. Jocelyn Turner-Musa have published a paper titled "Examining Social Determinants of Health, Stigma and COVID-19 Disparities" in the international journal "Healthcare". <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare8020168>
- Layshel Kemp received the 7<sup>th</sup> Carrol S. Perrino Scholarship Award.
- Christabelle Agyapong (Cohort 5) and Rolling Zebaze Lekane (Cohort 5) participated in the BUILD Research Collaborative (BRC) through San Francisco State University.
- Deja Caton (Cohort 5) did an internship at the State University of New York Downstate Health Sciences University.
- Layshel Kemp (Cohort 5) did an internship at the University of Maryland, College Park.
- Nashae Prout (Cohort 5)
- Seanasia Baronette (Cohort 5) participated in the University of Maryland, Baltimore County BUILD a Bridge to STEM program during the summer.
- Tresherr Reaves (Cohort 5) did an intership at the University of Pittsburgh's Pittsburgh Undergraduate Research Diversity Program.
- 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.



## Cohort 5 Scholars



Cohort 5 Scholars (left to right): Nashae Prout, Tresherr Reaves, Seanaisa Baronette, Rolling Zebaze Lekane, Deja Caton, Layshel Kemp and Christabelle Agyapong.





## Upcoming Events...

### COMING IN JANUARY:

Workshops in  
Summer Internship  
Programs (January  
5, 12, 18 and 26,  
1:00pm- 4:00pm)  
and Graduate School

Programs ( January 7, 14, 21 and 28,  
1:00pm – 4:00pm). These workshops  
are mandatory for all Cohort 5 and 6  
ASCEND Scholars and ASCEND  
Ambassadors. For more information  
contact Ms. Kelley Murphy at  
[kelley.murphy@morgan.edu](mailto:kelley.murphy@morgan.edu).

## Where are they now?



Chukwuebuka Eburuoh is an **ASCEND Scholar Alumni**. He is currently enrolled in the Ph.D program in Integrated Biomedical Sciences with a concentration in Molecular Pharmacology in Physiology at the University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine of Biomedical Sciences.

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

Submit to [ascendscholarnewsletter@morgan.edu](mailto:ascendscholarnewsletter@morgan.edu)

### Professional Development

- [Morgan State online professional/personal enrichment courses](#)
- [JHU Applied Physics Laboratory ATLAS Summer Internship Program, Summer 2021. Application deadline March 31, 2021   
https://www.jhuapl.edu/Careers/ATLAS](#)
- [UC Davis Center for Neuroscience](#)
- [Doctoralnet - Masters and doctoral professional development services.](#)



Supported by  
NIGMS-BUILD TL4GM118974

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

Gillian Silver MPH, CPH  
Program Manager  
ASCEND Center for Biomedical Research  
Morgan State University  
BSSC Room-226-H  
1700 E Cold Spring Lane  
Baltimore, MD 21251  
P: 443-885-3541



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