

# High Expectations, High Standards, Excellence



**ANNUAL UPDATE  
2022-2023**



OFFICE OF  
MULTI-ETHNIC  
STUDENT EDUCATION

## A Message from the Director



**OUR MISSION** at OMSE is to increase multi-ethnic students' GPAs and rates of retention and graduation. The way we do that is what makes us truly unique.

OMSE's programs are based on a robust curriculum that elevates students. But we also provide a strong sense of community within the larger university. We create a space where multi-ethnic students feel empowered every day to bring their authentic selves to campus to do their best and be their best.

Our goal is to create an environment where it's almost impossible for them to fail. And it works: not only are our students excelling more than their counterparts at other institutions, their retention and graduation rates are surpassing other students here at the University of Maryland.

I'm pleased to share that the university recognized our value by providing OMSE with additional funding this year, and we experienced tremendous donor support on Giving Day. You'll learn more about our work in this report and hear from some of the students, alums and parents who bring our programs to life.

I'm very proud that, together, we're creating a more empowering student experience and a brighter future for thousands of young people who will go on to share their amazing gifts with the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Christopher A. Lester".

Dr. Christopher A. Lester  
Director, Office of Multi-ethnic Student Education



### ABOUT US

OMSE is proud to offer services and programs that enhance the learning experience and promote academic success for undergraduate students. Most of the students we serve are American Indian, Asian American, Black, African American, Hispanic, LatinX or multi-racial.

As an academic unit under the University of Maryland's Office of Diversity and Inclusion, OMSE recognizes the value of the multiple histories, beliefs and ethnic backgrounds of our students and works with faculty and staff to support ethnic diversity and inclusion at the university.

### OMSE MISSION

To serve undergraduate multi-ethnic students to increase rates of matriculation, retention, graduation and overall GPA.

OFFICE OF MULTI-ETHNIC STUDENT EDUCATION  
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### MEET THE TEAM

DR. CHRISTOPHER LESTER, director  
TUNJI SAWYER, assistant director  
DUSTIN CHIN, business manager  
RACHEL DOWNS, administrative assistant  
JOVANY JOYA, coordinator  
HARITA PATEL, coordinator  
VIVIAN TUNG, coordinator

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS:  
Winston Broadbell, Claudia Castillo, Xin Chen, Saul Flores, Leticia Ramirez Granados, Anthony DeNeal Jones, Imani Mayo, Maxwell Morris, Zam Mozumder, Sarahi Villasenor Hernandez, Emmanuel Wanjala

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## Alum Spotlight



### NHAYA VAIDYA

Currently living in Germany, Nhaya Vaidya is working as an English teaching assistant while on a prestigious Fulbright scholarship. She's eagerly looking forward to a visit from a friend she met through her involvement in OMSE programs. "That's the kind of friend you make. They fly across an ocean for you," she said.

Nhaya started her studies at the University of Maryland in 2018 and graduated with a dual degree: government/politics and journalism,

with a minor in German studies. A member of the German Honor Society and the Government Honor Society, she received two journalism scholarships. Following graduation, she earned her master of arts in international relations as part of the university's 4+1 program.

It was through her invitation to join the OMSE Academic Excellence Society (OAES) as an undergrad that Nhaya first learned about OMSE. She became an active member of OAES, including serving in an executive board position and as president for two years. After completing her undergraduate work, she chose to continue with OMSE as a graduate assistant for a year.

"I liked growing my leadership skills and working my way up, seeing the back end of all the organizational work and becoming really good friends with the board," she said.

Looking back, she feels that her involvement with OMSE was a key part of her university experience. "Having an office of all multi-ethnic people is really rare to find," she commented. "I almost didn't join and I'm very, very glad I did!"

## OMSE POINTS OF PRIDE

The impact of OMSE programs stretched far and wide during the 2022-23 school year.

### ENROLLMENT

**829** students enrolled in OMSE programs

### SPRING GRADUATES

**246** Multi-ethnic seniors recognized at spring graduation reception

### TUTORING

**477** tutoring sessions provided by OMSE Tutors

### UNIVERSITY PARTNERS PROGRAM (UPP)

**93** completed their UPP certificate requirements

### GIVING DAY DONOR RECORD

**1,151** individual donors

### GIVING DAY DONATIONS

Total amount of money raised on Giving Day Spring 2023:

**\$100,000+**

## OMSE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE SOCIETY (OAES)

As an honor society for undergraduate multi-ethnic students, OAES acknowledges, nurtures and rewards academic excellence. Students accumulate points in professional development, social justice leadership, diversity awareness, community service and service to society. Members must have 30 or more credit hours and at least a 3.5 cumulative grade point average.



## College Success Scholars Program

**IN THE UNITED STATES**, Black and Latino males who attend predominantly white institutions of higher learning are significantly less likely to graduate within six years compared to their white classmates—a gap of 51.5% compared to 70%, according to The Education Trust.

In contrast, the participants of OMSE's College Success Scholars (CSS) program have consistently achieved graduation rates upwards of 90%. "You can see the value the program brings to these young men," said Alkia Jones, chairperson on the Parent Board of Directors. "It teaches them to believe in themselves and not be limited in what they can accomplish."

What makes CSS so effective? When Dr. Christopher Lester, OMSE director, created the program back in 2007, he built a curriculum that emphasizes resiliency, agency, purpose and brotherhood—qualities that provide a strong foundation for success. An active parents' group helps support program needs through event support, advocacy, fundraising and even providing care packages to students during exam week.

The program begins with a six-week seminar for incoming freshmen, who learn about different academic fields, have opportunities to discuss real-world issues and begin connecting with fellow scholars. Each student is then assigned a mentor who provides guidance and support to them throughout the course of their studies. Tutoring services, diversity and leadership workshops, professional development opportunities

and an annual retreat further contribute to the scholars' experiences.

"I've spoken to a lot of parents whose kids have gone to other large, predominantly white institutions and there's not a program like this," said Jones. "Sometimes young men who have done well in high school somehow get lost and don't do well in those environments. A program like this at the University of Maryland is just invaluable."

Christopher Celarie and Miles Barton serve as co-presidents of CSS. Christopher, a physiology-neurobiology major on the pre-med track, values the mutual support inherent in the program. "A lot of my friends in CSS are also in my classes, so I can do homework and study with them," he said. "It just makes it so much easier to go through college. We have a shared struggle, and it makes the burden a little less heavy."

However, his favorite aspect of CSS has been the mentorship. "It's so incredible to see mentees doing well and be able to give them advice I wish I had gotten sooner. It's so nice to be able to pass that knowledge forward and see them be more successful than me when I was a freshman."

Miles, a senior government and politics major, never thought he'd be co-president of anything in college, but now he leads a 20-person team. "CSS makes you feel safe, but it also pushes you to be more," he said. "I think my favorite part has been the opportunities you have to lead within the program. Dr. Lester encourages us to return the good favor to the younger cohorts, to share our success with our younger brothers... CSS gave me a platform to develop my leadership skills and advance a goal that's really moral for me."

### PARENTS SUPPORTING CSS

When parent Eva Celarie first learned about the CSS program three years ago, she was simply curious. Now she and her husband are enthusiastic supporters who attend all the parent meetings.

The parent group serves as a small, welcoming community that provides a shared purpose and opportunities to connect with other parents who have similar backgrounds and concerns. Celarie often translates for other Latino parents with kids in CSS. She explained, "We only see each other for meetings, but once we're there it's like one big family!"

Alkia Jones notes that when parents involve themselves in CSS, their kids tend to stay involved, too. She believes a key to the program's strength is Dr. Lester's triad approach: university staff, student scholars and parents working together toward student success. "The parents do play a pivotal role. I think it's just an amazing formula, because it works."

## Sister to Sister Program

**CREATED IN 2009**, Sister to Sister is a proven program that advocates, educates and connects successful multi-ethnic, undergraduate women. Members take on a mentorship role with first-year students, gaining valuable leadership skills while providing their multi-ethnic university “sisters” with academic and personal support.

For students who crave connection with others on campus who share their experiences and interests, Sister to Sister is an invaluable resource that helps foster a sense of community within the larger sphere of university life.



## La Familia

**LA FAMILIA** is a peer mentoring program that helps first-year Latino students transition to college life and thrive within the university setting. Qualified sophomores, juniors and seniors are paired with mentees, typically in the same major, to help facilitate their academic and personal growth. Should they appear to be struggling, their mentor will quickly reach out to offer guidance or refer them to supportive resources.

Networking events help connect students with internships and jobs in their field of study. In addition, participants engage in workshops, community service events and social gatherings that create a safe, supportive space.

“At a university so large as the University of Maryland, it’s easy to feel lost, especially as a Hispanic and Black student,” said Lourdes Reyes Valenzuela, a senior majoring in public health science. She currently serves a co-president of La Familia. “La Familia gave me that niche with students who have had similar experiences as mine.”

La Familia’s meetings, cultural events and discussion sessions offer opportunities to be with others who understand what it feels like to be a minority student in a predominantly white institution. “La Familia students feel great having a place to fit in on campus, especially transfer students. When they come in, they feel welcome,” Lourdes said.

She added, “La Familia has been a home for me. There’s no other way to put it.”



## Student Spotlight

### MEET ESOHE OWIE



“I remember when I was a freshman being really confused, not knowing where to go or where to find tutoring for my classes,” recalled Esohe Owie, a public health science major who was born and raised in Nigeria. A first-generation college student without extended family in the U.S., her support network was unfamiliar with campus life in this country.

But she gained an additional “family” when she joined Sister to Sister. She had a mentor to help her navigate campus life and connect her with the OMSE tutoring program. Before long, Esohe was recommended for a position on the executive board and has now served as vice president of marketing and technology for two years.

A junior, Esohe is also in her second year of mentoring others. “I’m very fortunate. I’ve had some really nice people guide me at the University of Maryland, and it’s nice to be able to give back,” she said.

She’s found the support within Sister to Sister to be most valuable to her. As an active member, she has been able to grow in both knowledge and confidence. “I’m able to be collaborative, to take on projects. Sister to Sister has given me a nonjudgmental zone to just explore and see what having a leadership role is like,” she explained.

“You don’t know what your college experience is going to look like, especially if you’re first generation or a woman of color,” she added. “I would say Sister to Sister does a really good job of providing access to people who are doing great things. It helps you grow.”

“My mentor has been able to help me stand up for myself in a place where they may see me as different because of my skin color and because I don’t look like most people around me.” – ANGIE SANDOVAL

## The University Partners Program

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND** offers a wealth of resources. But because some students come from families not familiar with college life, they may not know where to find supportive resources—or even that such resources are available. “You don’t even know where to start,” explained senior Danica Choi.

OMSE’s University Partners Program (UPP) helps prevent students from faltering by nurturing them with a series of annual workshops designed to fill in knowledge gaps, such as how to pay for study abroad or master academic citations. Offered in partnership with the University Career Center, University Counseling Center, Education Abroad and University Libraries, the workshops also help students acquire professional development, leadership and diversity skills.

Danica now serves as UPP president. “Doing workshops that target resources on campus that students might not know about is one of the main things we do at UPP,” she said. Each of the eight workshops held each semester typically attracts 60 to 70 participants.

Vivian Tung was in the UPP program as a student for three years. Now that she has graduated, she continues to support the program as UPP coordinator. “I really enjoyed my experience as an UPP student,” she said. “When I see new faces, I want to share the same experience I had when I was a student.”

“Being a part of a program such as UPP, a program that not only values the educational endeavors of ethnic students but also one that heavily emphasizes bonding and community-building, has been very rewarding.”

—EMILY FERNANDES de OLIVEIRA, UPP VICE PRESIDENT

## Service Learning Certificate

**LAUNCHED IN 2020**, the Service Learning Certificate program helps bridge the education gap for multiethnic students, enabling them to build competencies and confidence that will empower them to influence the university community now—and grow into future civic leaders. Unified by a focus on positive change, elements of the certificate program include social justice development, awareness and competency; personal and professional development; social and civic responsibility; and intellectual development.

Peer tutoring is a core service. Although the program is small, participants were still able to offer 178 hours of contact-based tutoring during the 2022–2023 academic year. A screening process ensures that participants are passionate about what they do. And there’s no better way to solidify learning than by teaching others.

“We always welcome students who are driven to serve the community and help other students learn. Every single one of our members contributes so much to the program,” said Kanishka Balamurugan, who is in her second year of the program and now serves as vice president. She added, “Every single time the tutors come into meetings, they all genuinely love it, and I think that’s great. We’re all serving the community, and we all take pride in that.”

## Student Spotlight

### MEET GRADUATE ASSISTANT EMMANUEL WANJALA

Now a doctoral candidate in international education policy, Emmanuel Wanjala knew he wanted to attend school close to Washington, D.C., where many prominent think tanks are based. It was an unexpected boon that enrolling at the University of Maryland also connected him to OMSE.



As an OMSE graduate assistant, Emmanuel coordinates the College Success Scholars tutorial program. He has seen firsthand how students improve their GPAs and homework grades when they consistently attend tutoring. Through intentionality and collaboration with members of the tutoring team, Emmanuel has enhanced the effectiveness of the CSS tutoring program. The number of students using the services, mass courses offered and tutoring sessions have increased significantly.

Emmanuel’s weekly feedback to CSS tutors about their tutoring skills and concerns from scholars has also enhanced the quality of tutorial services. Yet his contributions extend beyond academics. “I’ve been able to build that trust with the students to the level that if they’re struggling with personal problems, such as a family issue or a roommate issue, they are willing to be vulnerable,” he said.

Well on the road to success, Emmanuel has published one peer-reviewed journal article, coauthored two book chapters and presented at three international conferences. He finds it rewarding to see scholars excel, complete their degrees and transition to their careers, and he plans to continue within higher education administration upon graduation.

## RECOGNIZING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations to these OMSE students and graduates who have demonstrated leadership, service and academic achievement. They are true ambassadors, and their pursuit of excellence is a source of pride for our entire university community.



### CSS

#### Amir Ahmed '24

Boeing Co., Liaison Engineering Intern

#### Miles Barton '24

White House Internship Program (Office of Legislative Affairs)

#### Jonathan Camberos '24

Cybersecurity Analyst Internship at Bank of America

#### Victor Nwogu '25

Research and Development Intern, Colgate-Palmolive

#### Jafari Townsell '24

City of Hyattsville, Digital Marketing Intern

### La Familia

#### Sebastian Batanero '24

Internship with Whiting Turner

#### Jonathan Jimenez '25

SHPEP program at Western University in Claremont California

#### Kimberly Gordon '25

FIRE199 Internship in the genome computing group, Dean's list, accepted into the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department Honors Program

#### Lourdes Reyes Valenzuela '24

Dean's list and academic honors for both semesters, joined the BLACK Health Research Lab at the School of Public Health

### OAES

#### Meron Aga '25

Terps for Change Internship - Community Management Intern

#### Ashay Amam '26

Summer Marketing and Special Events intern for High Voltage

#### Charvika Minna '25

Paid Research Internship at the University of Maryland School of Nursing

#### Sanjana Sankar '25

ARLIS Research Internship

#### Cassia Tefera '25

Jheanle Wilkins Delegate Scholarship

#### Aiden Thomas '24

N. Gardner Public Services Award, Intern for USA Agency for International Development, Dean's List

#### Smriti Thomas '24

Naval Research Laboratory Internship - Student Trainee for Bio-Chemistry

#### Yomayra Villatoro '25

Internship at the Children's National Hospital - Clinical Research Intern

#### Ryan Wang '25

Internship with Sands Capital Management - Cybersecurity Intern

#### Jillian Wimbush '24

Internship for SoareSwag UMD - Undergraduate Research Assistant, AGNR Dean's List

#### Elise Young '24

Maryland ROPTA (Reinforcing Overdose Prevention Through Training & Advocacy)

### Sister to Sister

#### Kelsey Afoakwa '26

Process Engineering Internship for CRB Group

#### Tulika Kumar '26

Freddie Mac Computer Science Technology Internship Program

#### Esohe Owie '25

Outstanding Gemstone CONNECT Mentor

#### Jolicia Taylor '26

L3 Harris Technologies Internship, TE Connectivity Internship

### UPP

#### Emily Fernandes De Oliveira '24

Internship - The International Business Machines (IBM) Corporation Consulting, Honors College Citations

#### Timel Rodriguez '23

Master of Arts in International Relations (MAIR) - UMD Grad School 4+1 program

#### Vivian Tung '23

Academy of Academic Excellence Awards (AAEA) - Director's Medal

### AAEA AWARDS

Faculty Awardee: **Josh Davidsberg**

Staff Awardee: **Michelle Udeli**

Mentor Awardee: **Juliana Guerra**

Tutor Awardee: **Nhu Le**

Director's Award: **Vivian Tung**





“In a world that’s often hostile, we hold to our ideals—high expectations, high standards and excellence—to elevate our students. We make sure they have that sense of community and feel connected and supported. We’re not going to let them settle for mediocrity.”

—DR. CHRISTOPHER A. LESTER  
*Director, Office of Multi-ethnic Student Education*



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### HOW YOU CAN HELP

From volunteering and in-kind donations to fundraising and sponsorships, there are several ways to support OMSE programs and students. Visit [omse.umd.edu](http://omse.umd.edu) to learn more.