

# SCHOLARLY PURSUITS

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## Origin Stories





From the Director's Desk 2

MC Scholars Named Jack Kent Cooke  
Transfer Scholarship Semifinalists 3

Where Are You Now? 3

Travel Study at the Swannanoa  
Gathering with Montgomery Scholars 4

From Montgomery Scholars to  
Ernst & Young: Farris Hamad Reflects  
on Educational Experience 6

Building Relationships and Defining  
Himself: Yves Gomes Shares Benefits  
of Montgomery Scholars 7

## GIVING

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

Montgomery College Foundation  
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Rockville, MD 20850

**Thank you so much!**



## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

### Dear Scholars, Parents, and Friends,

Every April, we host a Welcome Brunch for graduating high school seniors who have been accepted into the incoming class of Montgomery Scholars, as well as their parents. The purpose of the brunch is to welcome these students into the fold and give them an idea of what it means to be a Montgomery Scholar. We provide an overview of the program, in which we talk about the rigorous curriculum, the wonderful summer study travel seminar, the camaraderie amongst peers, and the faculty and staff support, in the hopes that this will give these potential new Scholars a taste of what it's like to go through the program and be part of the Scholars family. Of course, there is always a nice brunch spread, for what is family without shared meals?

At the brunch, we invite alumni to share their experiences with the students. I am always amazed at the stories I hear, and this past year's brunch was no exception.

**Farris Hamad '20** and **Yves Gomes '12** shared their journeys through the Montgomery Scholars program and beyond. Their stories were so compelling that many prospective students submitted their Intent to Enroll forms at the event. It was quite the experience to behold.

Farris and Yves have amazing stories, and I would like to share them with you. There are hundreds more stories from over 20 years of Montgomery Scholars graduating, moving on into the world, and making a remarkable difference. It's another reminder that we, the faculty and staff of Montgomery Scholars, are incredibly fortunate to work with these talented students. Farris and Yves capture much of what we hope to see, and I'm excited to hear more from our alumni as they continue to grow and impact our communities for the better.

**John W. Wang, Ph.D.**  
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Joanee Dias



Monica Escalante Escobar



Jimmy Perdomo Pineda

## MC Scholars Named Jack Kent Cooke Transfer Scholarship Semifinalists

Three Scholars have been named semifinalists for this year's Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship. This year, 459 semifinalists were named nationwide from a pool of over 1,600 applicants. The scholarship is granted to students who have shown "exceptional academic ability, leadership, and service." If selected as a finalist, a student earns up to \$55,000 of tuition per year for the next two or three years of their undergraduate education at a four-year school.

This year's semifinalists include Class of 2024 members **Joanee Dias**, **Monica Escalante Escobar**, and **Jimmy Perdomo Pineda**. Congratulations to all three on being considered as semifinalists for this prestigious award!

# WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Here are some of the Scholars from the first 23 classes and their whereabouts. If anyone 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 2009

**Crystal Britto** had a baby boy, Sage Jasper Hsu, in March.

**Javier Peña** recently began a new position as a communications administrator at the Palm Beach County Supervisor of Elections.

### Class of 2010

**Kenia Avendano Hara** obtained a credentialed course instructor position at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She and her husband, Yoshi Hara, are expecting a baby girl in June.

### Class of 2012

**Jonathan Jayes-Green** will graduate with his M.P.A. from Harvard this May. Afterward, he will do research as a Democracy Visiting Fellow at the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard.

### Class of 2020

**Yassin Drammeh** transferred to UMBC in 2021. She finished her bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering as a Grand Challenge Scholar in December 2023. She says Montgomery Scholars changed her outlook on education and life in general, and much of this reflection was done at UMBC.

### Class of 2021

**Audrey Hall** was awarded the Emilia Ferrara Thesis Award while at Georgetown University. Since graduating in spring 2023, she has been working in the mass torts division of a consulting firm in Washington, D.C. She received her paralegal certification from Boston University in February 2024 and is looking forward to starting work as a paralegal in the near future.

**Patty Ibanez**, a full recipient of the Frederick Douglass Scholarship, will graduate from the University of Maryland Robert H. Smith School of Business this spring with a degree in marketing and supply chain management. In August, they will start a full-time project coordinator position at Crowe in Manhattan, New York.

### Class of 2022

**Paulina Martinez** is a senior at the University of Maryland, College Park as a Frederick Douglass scholar, majoring in elementary/middle special education. She is currently student teaching in a fifth-grade classroom in Montgomery County Public Schools. Paulina is a Ronald E. McNair Scholar and presented research last summer and this March at the National McNair Conference. She is president of the Native American and Indigenous Student Union at UMD and is involved with projects supporting Indigenous awareness and advocacy at the university.



Crystal Britto's son, Sage Jasper Hsu



Javier Peña



Kenia Avendano Hara and her husband, Yoshi Hara



Jonathan Jayes-Green





Professor Swift Dickison



Scholars at a music class

# Travel Study at the Swannanoa Gathering with Montgomery Scholars

*Professor Swift Dickison, who has traveled with Montgomery Scholars to Swannanoa for over 10 years, will retire at the end of this academic year. Here he reflects on his time with Scholars.*

If one has had the honor and pleasure of working with Montgomery Scholars at the Rockville Campus, one has had a bit of good fortune. The quality of the program, its dedicated professors, its extraordinary students—these should make one glad to be among the Scholars. My engagement with the program was even more fortuitous, as I fell in with the group in the summer of 2012 at the suggestion of then-Dean Carolyn Terry. She assured me that I would relish the experience of travel study at Warren Wilson College near Asheville, North Carolina. How I really came to accompany the students to the Swannanoa Gathering that summer happened as Professor Clif Collins, who had filled the role the previous year, decided to take his son to the Baseball Hall of Fame, bowing out of Swannanoa and allowing me to join Dr. Cheryl Tobler and other faculty at the Gathering for the first time.

Professor Tobler was central to the success of the travel study program at Swannanoa over the years. Whereas Professor Collins may have discovered the Gathering and suggested that Montgomery Scholars venture to Warren Wilson in the summer of 2011 for 10 days of music classes and field trips, surely it was Professor Tobler who, with her expertise in Celtic and other world music, made the experience a rich and inspiring one.

She was indefatigable in her efforts to organize and implement the summer learning journey for so many students for so many years. It is with gratitude that I dedicate these notes to her. And, though he accompanied the group just that first year, I tip my hat to Professor Collins, who left us so prematurely in 2018. In the spirit of tribute and respect, I retained his innovative assignment asking students to reflect on their experience in North Carolina vis-a-vis their reading of the famous writer Thomas Wolfe's stories about Asheville.

Far be it from me to name all the fine faculty who have accompanied us at Swannanoa over the years, nor could I account for all the excellent classes, taught by world-class musicians and singers from all over the U.S., as well as Scotland, Ireland, and England. I am capable only of conjuring up impressions of the experience, calling up its highlights. I have had the pleasure of collaborating on the travel study journey with the likes of Michael Le Blanc, Lucy Laufe, Cheryl Tobler, Deb Taylor, Joan Naake, and several others, more recently with John Wang and Victor Provost. I have always ridden the bus with the students, considering that journey to be part of the travel study, even the wobbly review that I gave student journals on the ride home. In recent years, we stopped at the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton, Virginia, on the way down, taking in the Igbo Village to hear some djembe drumming, and, as time permitted, wandering through the Irish forge, the English cottage, and the German farmhouse. We would have a bag lunch at the picnic site outside of the museum and reboard the bus, excited to reach Black Mountain and Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa.

After loading our gear into the dorm, we'd hit Gladfelter Dining Hall to eat before making our way to the Pavilion for orientation. This Sunday night precursor to the week of classes is a wonderful occasion, wherein each instructor pops on stage for a minute or two to plug his or her class. Students can decide whether they want to stick with the class they registered for or try another, based on the performances at orientation. Mostly, though, the early showcase

offers a fabulously focused moment of each musician or singer's presentation, and the range of these performances rivals any music shared on the planet on that evening.

Thus has the week begun with an enchanting start to the Gathering. Participants wander through the hedge-bordered gardens and linger under the ancient trees, as players bring out their guitars, fiddles, flutes, and bodhrans, gathering under the jam tents to join in songs and tunes. These instruments will vary according to the week. In any given summer, the Gathering will feature the following weeks of music between early July and mid-August: traditional song, Celtic, old time, guitar, contemporary folk, fiddle, and mando & banjo. Scholars usually attend Traditional Song Week, in part because no expertise with an instrument is involved: one simply sings with others, and the students learn to commune with the voices of masters and neophytes alike, encouraging each other to find fulfillment in song and camaraderie.

As to the privilege of engaging in the Gathering, there is nothing quite like rubbing elbows with world-famous artists inside the classroom and out. One might join Tom Paxton for breakfast, share a joke with Fiona Richie, spend a coffee break with Ranger Doug of Riders in the Sky, or eat lunch with Kathy Jordan of Dervish. Some of these artists could never be approached if one attended a concert at which they performed; yet at Swannanoa, they are generous with their time in class and open to socializing with participants and fellow artists. Typically, they love having Montgomery Scholars students in their classes, enthusiastically welcoming them into the fold.

Of course, Swannanoa is not always sweet songs and roses. My first trip there was met with a deluge, as we hustled our bags into the dorm through perpetual downpour. And one year, the Scholars crew was housed at Ballfields, a dorm in the woods about a mile from the center of campus; toting instruments, if one had brought them, back and forth to classes proved to be an ordeal. Moreover, the mountains can be misty with fog and cool or hot and humid by turns, and the travel study experience can prove to be an arduous one. On the other hand, one could stroll





Scholars learning the Native American flute



Scholars at Biltmore Estate



Scholars at the Swannanoa Gathering

to the Swannanoa River for a dip, roam through the garden or the farm, hike a wooded trail, or bask in the sun on a patio. Always, of course, there would be music: strains of a fiddle, the zephyr of a wooden Irish flute, the mellow arpeggio of guitar strings, and the yearning blend of voices in harmony.

I would be remiss if I reflected on the travel study experience at the Swannanoa Gathering without recalling the highlight of the week for me: performing with Scholars at the Pavilion. This delightful event began one year when I decided to rewrite Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee," replacing some of the lyrics with lines presenting aspects of the Gathering. I would scribble these out, then round up the Scholars for an impromptu rehearsal. I think what really inspired the performance was the fact that Julie Glaub-Weems, coordinator of Traditional Song Week, announced that any group could play at the Tuesday night Hootenanny, enjoying a backup band of instructors. I didn't want such an opportunity to go to waste. So, I strapped on my guitar, approached the mic, and, with the nervous but excited Scholars spread before me just in front of the stage and the world-class backup band behind me, I launched into Haggard's inimitable first line, spun with my own local twist: "We don't smoke marijuana in Swannanoa!" The Scholars joined me, at least in the chorus, which I now forget. The upshot was that the audience surged stage-ward in order to better attend our travesty. And at that moment, the Scholars realized that Traditional Song Week was indeed the bomb.

Other songs followed in other years. I wrote "Hotel Swannanoa," (with apt apologies to The Eagles). Last summer, I penned a version of "Country Road." It was a pleasure to once more have the Scholars filed before me. Even more gratifying was to be backed up by Victor Provost on steel pan, and the infamous Tim Smith, that ubiquitous musical presence at the Gathering, on keys. It was indeed almost heaven. If only I hadn't flubbed my guitar solo.

The student showcase occurs on Friday night at the end of the week of classes, and Scholars have certainly outdone themselves over the years. Whereas they may begin the week sheepishly,

the Scholars are raring to go by Friday, eager to engage in their 15 minutes of fame (more like five or six). More than a few Scholars have virtually blossomed as performers come Friday night, and such hands-on learning seems to have served them well. In fact, many students form fast friendships among the Gathering participants, and I have known a couple of Scholars to return to North Carolina to rejoin those with whom they shared such fulfilling days at Warren Wilson.

Travel study changes one, and, apropos of such transformation, I introduce our students to the work of Thomas Wolfe, whose most famous utterance may be, "You can't go home again." Indeed, although Scholars do return to Rockville once Traditional Song Week has sung its last note of the summer, they do not do so as the same individuals: they have grown. This is partly due to the nature of such hands-on, experiential learning. Students live in the dorms together, support one another in classes, practice songs collaboratively, and perform as an ensemble. Fast friendships are forged at Swannanoa, and we all look back wistfully as we leave the mountains to roll homeward.

It is worth accounting for some of our excursions over the years. Each summer, we have visited the Biltmore Estate, that grand, and admittedly ostentatious edifice constructed for the Vanderbilts in 1895. Still, the immersive activity of filing through the palatial place and ambling around its exquisite gardens is well worth the visit. The landscaping crafted by Frederick Law Olmstead, who designed Central Park in New York, among other magnificent spaces—it seems an education unto itself to behold such wonders. Many summers, we traveled an hour and a half away to Cherokee to visit the Museum of the Cherokee People, wading in the local stream at our lunch stop before exploring the museum and small town. Some years, we were treated to a backroom tour of artifacts, often given by a local who also played the lead role in the outdoor historical drama, *Unto These Hills*, which we would attend. After that performance dramatizing events of the Trail of Tears and Andrew Jackson's removal policy, we would return to a quiet campus at Warren Wilson near midnight, though during Celtic

Week, there were always jam sessions under the tents, down in the Pavilion, and on the back porch of Sunderland.

To comment on Celtic Week would take an essay of its own; I will simply say that whereas Traditional Song Week may engage the smallest number of participants, Celtic Week, which follows Traditional Song Week, amounts to an invasion. Our travel study experience usually kept us on campus during the first three days of Celtic Week, as we would spend the weekend after Traditional Song Week visiting the Thomas Wolfe House in Asheville, exploring the city on Saturday, and remaining on campus at Warren Wilson on Sunday to do our laundry, wander down to the river, make entries in our journals, and steel ourselves for the Celtic invasion on Sunday afternoon. Although we busied ourselves with excursions to Biltmore and Cherokee on Monday and Tuesday of Celtic Week, we would always return to campus to catch whatever exciting music there was. If we were lucky enough to catch a caeli, that raucous Irish dance jam, we would join in, learning the steps and patterns and relishing the infectious thunder of the ad-hoc band formed of Celtic Week instructors.

The magic of Swannanoa is real, and there may be no better moment to recall for such enchantment than the final circle formed in the Pavilion at the end of the week. After the Friday student showcase, when all have performed, the entire camp forms a huge circle. We hold hands, singing "Stand by the Shore." All are involved and share the celebratory but bittersweet moment of departure and diaspora:

"Sisters now our meeting is over, sisters we must part

And if we should never meet again, I'll keep you in my heart.

And we'll stand by the shore, and we'll stand by the shore, and we'll stand by the shore,

And be safe forever more."

The verses carry on: "Brothers, Mothers, Fathers ..." Thus ends the festive week. And the Scholars and professors wend their way homeward, carrying their song lines out into the broader world.

# From Montgomery Scholars to Ernst & Young: Farris Hamad Reflects on Educational Experience



*The following is a transcript of a speech that Montgomery Scholars alum Farris Hamad '20 gave at the Scholars Brunch in April 2023. It has been lightly edited for print. Farris has an accounting degree from the University of Maryland Robert H. Smith School of Business and works for Ernst & Young as an auditor.*

I want to tell you a story about me and my roommate. I've known this man since we were 8 years old. We went through elementary, middle, and high school together, and I've lived in the same neighborhood as him for as long as I can remember. In our senior year of high school, he was applying to several different universities. He would get letters from Duke, Johns Hopkins, UVA—schools I knew I could not afford to attend. At the time, I knew I probably could not even afford to attend an in-state school without having to take out some serious loans.

When I found out about Scholars, I applied on a whim. I remember finding out about it only a week before the deadline to apply, and I remember mulling over whether to apply. Did I really want to go to community college? Or would I rather just go straight to work? I can still picture very clearly all the snow piled up outside on the day that it was due. School was canceled, and I had just finished shoveling the sidewalk. I don't know what possessed me to fill out the application, but something in the back of my mind told me to do it. Any other day, I would have rather been playing video games or reading, but for some reason I spent that day writing my essay. When I finally finished, I had to run to the post office, and I got there only about 30 minutes before it closed.

To make a long story short, I got into the Montgomery Scholars program, and my roommate was accepted into the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

I remember sitting in the Theater Arts Building at the Welcome Brunch in 2018, not knowing what I was getting into. In fact, just the other night I was talking to some friends I made in this program, and we were talking about how the choices we made in life led us to where we are now. I thought to myself, what would have happened if I never submitted that application? Where would I be now if I did not attend school? Without a doubt, coming

to Montgomery College and being part of the Scholars program is the single best decision I have made in my life so far.

I have met my closest friends through Scholars, and I keep in touch with almost everybody I graduated with. Being in a cohort like this and constantly being around the same people week in and week out really helps you to build meaningful relationships. These relationships got me through thick and thin, through the best of times and the worst of times, through trials and tribulations, of which there were many—not to scare you. Being in the Scholars program exposed me to so many experiences that I would not have had access to otherwise. I was able to spend a week and a half in Asheville, North Carolina, and learn about cowboy music from one of the guys who made that song from *Toy Story*. I spent late nights in the library. I learned about music, history, literature, and more from every corner of the Earth, and I had the chance to present my research on stage to my friends, family, and fellow Scholars. This program has undoubtedly graced me with experiences that I will cherish for my whole life.

It also helped to shape my education and professional career. I now fully believe that I was illiterate upon joining the Scholars program. I remember that very first assignment, due on the first Friday of the semester. I was up all night writing it, and when the ink dried on the paper, I was sure that it was a masterpiece. It was my magnum opus. I got a D on that paper, but in the process, I learned and grew. Every setback that I faced was met with so much support from my professors, who really guided me and helped me to learn. And I did learn. I learned as much as I could over the following two years. I learned how to read, write, and think critically. My experiences here shaped me as a scholar, they shaped me as an accountant and, most importantly, they shaped me as a person.

After Scholars, I went on to the University of Maryland. One thing about going to a big school like UMD is that the professors really do not give a damn about you. And that's nothing against them. They have over 400 other students, and they do not have the time to get to know each individual one. Being here in Scholars, however, with just 25 of you, allows you to get close to your peers and your professors. At UMD, I know from experience that to get the professors to care about you, you have to stand out from the pack. You need something to differentiate yourself. It was the skills I picked up in Scholars that helped me differentiate myself. Not being a humanities major, I always stood out amongst my peers at UMD whenever we had a writing assignment. My first couple of semesters at UMD were during COVID, so it was the classic Zoom class, camera off, half-paying attention. I had absolutely no intention of getting to know my professors at UMD, but in the end they got to know me. They got to know me through my writing, and from there, many of them made it a point to speak with me in the minutes before or after class. This continued when we resumed in-person classes. Suddenly, I was able to hold meaningful conversations with my professors. I went from being a very average high school student to excelling at UMD. I don't think I ever got two A's in a row on assignments in Scholars, and at UMD I had straight A's for the first time in my life. I always thought that maybe this change was some switch that flipped overnight, but then I began to realize that it all started with Scholars. Although I did not notice it, the people around me surely did. Scholars taught me to read critically, write thoughtfully, and think purposefully. These skills have transferred into the professional environment seamlessly as well.

I have to apologize for meandering from the original story I was telling. I can talk about friendship and experience and opening yourself to new opportunities and everything Scholars has offered me all day, but the fact is that my roommate and I now have the exact same degree. We work the same job, and we have the same salary. The only difference is that he has over \$80,000 in student loans, whereas I have \$8,000. Montgomery Scholars gave me an education that I would have been otherwise priced out of. I have a degree, I have a good job, and if I could talk to myself from high school, I would not believe where I am now in life.

So, it's for this—all of this. For all the friends I made, for all the great experience I had, for all the skills I learned, and for who I am today that I will forever be grateful to all the amazing people in the Montgomery Scholars program. And I am especially grateful that something possessed me on that snowy day in 2018 to fill out that application.



# Building Relationships and Defining Himself: Yves Gomes Shares Benefits of Montgomery Scholars



*The following is a transcript of a speech given by Montgomery Scholars alum Yves Gomes '12 at the Welcome Brunch in April 2023. It has been lightly edited for print. Yves has a doctor of pharmacy degree from University of Maryland, Baltimore and works as the pharmacy manager at Wheaton Safeway.*

When I was a local MCPS kid at Cresthaven Elementary School, I knew exactly what I wanted to be when I grew up: Spiderman. Spiderman was this nerdy kid named Peter Parker who was good at science but one-dimensional. Then one day he got bitten by a radioactive spider that transformed him into this well-rounded superhero, all without his having to do too much. He got to do the least on his way to success, and I wanted that for myself. Upon making this decision, I proudly came home from school and told my mom that I would be Spiderman when I grew up. She answered with a resounding "No." She wanted me to be a doctor. That is how, 10 years ago, I found myself in the same chairs as you, applying to college, wanting to become a doctor because my mom said so.

After high school, I was accepted into the University of Maryland, College Park, Montgomery Scholars, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and a handful of other local schools. Like most of my friends at the time, we wanted to weigh all our options, but we all wanted to go to school together at UMD. Unlike my friends, though, I did not have legal status in the United States. I was undocumented. It meant I couldn't accept any of my offers, and it also meant that after I graduated high school, the U.S. government deported my parents back to India. They also wanted to deport me, which would have sent me back to a country I had not set foot in since I was a baby. Ultimately, my friends, teachers, and community rallied around me and petitioned the U.S. government to allow me to stay and continue my education. A week after my scheduled deportation date, Maria Adams from Montgomery Scholars called and said they wanted me in their program. They were the only college program bold enough to keep their offer open to me, so I happily and graciously accepted.

Montgomery Scholars was my radioactive spider that gave me powers. But sadly, I quickly realized that I could not get by doing the least. I had to do the most. Scholars pushed me out of my comfort zone so much academically and socially that it enabled me to become well-rounded. My first assignment came back with a big D, with Dr. Furgol's comments

saying something along the lines of, "Yes, it looks like you didn't really try hard on this assignment." I knew she was on to me. It was also the first time a teacher challenged me to do better in school.

Socially, I did not know anyone at MC because all my friends went to UMD. Scholars made it possible to make new friends because there were 25 of us who were going to be stuck spending time together every day. We studied together and commiserated over our sleep deprivation and workload. In fact, in the first week of school during lunch time, I found a familiar face in one of my Scholars classmates and sat at the table with them. After an awkward silence, I just decided to tell them, "Yo, I was going to be deported last week, but then I joined Scholars." To my surprise, they told me that they were in a similar situation. We knew then that there were probably other kids like us at Montgomery College, and we decided to start a club for immigrant rights. And we did. That person became my best friend, and our student club was advised by Scholars' very own Professor Linda Robinson. She supported us in speaking our truth both on campus and in our state of Maryland. We ended up organizing an entire bus load of students from our larger campus community to visit our state government in Annapolis, advocating for a higher education bill for immigrant students that ultimately went into law. Scholars pushed me out of my comfort zone, but also provided an amazing group of peers and professors that would support my growth both in and out of the classroom.

During my second semester, we had an assignment called 20th Century Journal, in which we had to create a character in the 20th century and write their life in the context of world history, world literature, world music, and philosophy. I created an Indian character, and it was the first time in my life when I could learn about my own heritage and history. I remember spending close to two all-nighters writing Dr. Furgol's paper because I was genuinely interested in what I was learning. It was the first and only paper on which I got an A, and it is to this day one of my proudest academic achievements.

I cherish the memories of sitting at Panera Bread with four of the girls from my Scholars class three times a week. We could buy one cup of tea with free refills and sit for hours memorizing organic chemistry reactions and calculus problems. Now, two of them are medical doctors, and the other two are scientists at the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Once I transferred to the University of Maryland to complete my B.S. in biochemistry, I found that school was easy. I was surprised at the amount of writing I had to do in my science classes, namely long chemistry lab reports. However, the tasks did not faze me because I had developed so much writing practice in Scholars. It meant I could reunite with my high school friends, get drunk and crash at their dorms, and still make it to class in time to pass my exams.

Later in my life, whether I was doing interviews for pharmacy school, or presenting research findings as a rotational student in a hospital, I could always refer to my time in Scholars to deliver great presentations. Everyone in medical schools and programs is going to be good at science things. The communication and writing skills I learned through Montgomery Scholars are part of why I was able to stand out.

But I have not forgotten about Spiderman. Uncle Ben told Peter that "with great power, comes great responsibility." My responsibility came from an understanding that I was one of only a handful of undocumented people in the U.S. in 2010 that had protection from deportation and could therefore share my story without fear. My power came from the relationships I had built in Montgomery Scholars both in and out of the classroom, relationships that ultimately taught me to think for myself and define myself in a world that otherwise told me that I was illegal and did not belong.

All of you will have to continue to navigate this world filled with the rise of artificial intelligence, algorithms, fake news, other people's expectations, and your own insecurities. All these things will try to define you and put you in a box. But as long as you find the programs, places, and people that will help you to think for yourself and help you define yourself, you will be on the right track. That's what Montgomery Scholars did for me.

Montgomery Scholars Program Newsletter

# SCHOLARLY PURSUITS

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