



Encouraging Entrepreneurship at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Research Team

Amanda Washington Lockett, team leader

Marybeth Gasman

Ndeh “Will” Anyu

Janelle L. Williams

Brandy Jones

Kunal Parbadia

Chris Motley

Partners

BILL & MELINDA
GATES *foundation*

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RUTGERS
Graduate School of Education

Center for
MSIs

The 2019 Guidant Financial¹ State of Small Business Survey reveals an uptick in the number of Black owned small businesses over the last five years. Guidant Financial surveyed approximately 2,700 Black small business owners and found trends that suggest both successes and opportunities for growth in regard to Black entrepreneurship. For example, while 69% of Black business owners reported that their businesses are profitable, 39% of Black small business owners are challenged by a lack of cash flow and capital to begin their business. As the Guidant Financial State of Small Business reveals, African American business owners are growing increasingly confident and feel more fulfilled while working for themselves and creating business opportunities that align with their individual passions. As the number and impact of Black owned businesses continues to increase, it is imperative that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) continue to support the growth of their students who show an interest in entrepreneurship.

¹ Source: <https://www.guidantfinancial.com/small-business-trends/african-americans-in-business/>

What is the Mary Ellen Pleasant Entrepreneurship Program?

During the 2019 Spring semester, the Center for Minority Serving Institutions (CMSI) announced its partnership with award-winning mentorship-based social network, The Whether, to launch the Mary Ellen Pleasant Entrepreneur (MEPE) Fellowship. According to CMSI and [The Whether](#), the MEPE Fellowship was created to teach entrepreneurship principles to students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and was part of a \$775,000 [Innovations in Career Advising](#) grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. During this one-year partnership, 25 MEPE fellows led distribution, one of the most important entrepreneurial functions, at a career-advising startup to help their peers declare majors, prepare for interviews, and explore career paths. These fellows were selected from a network of 17 HBCU partners with a collective population of more than 50,000 students. The 10-week virtual fellowship coached students through a marketing-focused curriculum and challenged them to leverage their entrepreneurial skills discovered through The Whether's scientifically-validated Clarity Assessment. Each fellow was encouraged to introduce their peers and HBCU communities to The Whether in order to build community around career interests and share best practices to maximize their potential.

The fellows recommended that their peers complete The Whether's [Clarity Assessment](#). Clarity is a personality assessment that delivers insights to improve decision making, strengthen relationships, and find career paths. The goal was to help students identify their strengths and values and to understand the types of career paths where they would naturally perform the best.

During the 10-week program, the fellows were responsible for introducing the assessment on campus to professors, student organizations, and peers. Per the grant, their main goal was to gather feedback about their peers' experience with the assessment, while also experimenting with various business principles to maximize their campus reach.

The culmination of our research pointed to one conclusion. That being, mentorship is the number one driver of young, Black adult's access and visibility to opportunities. Particularly, opportunities that they otherwise would not be aware of related to their intended career path. This led The Whether team to develop a more focused experience in their social network product that allowed students of color to connect with industry insiders who have similar backgrounds and goals in a mentorship driven environment.

Who was Mary Ellen Pleasant?



Mary Ellen Pleasant was a very successful 19th-century African American entrepreneur, financier, real estate magnate, and abolitionist who identified as ‘a capitalist by profession’ in the 1890 United States Census.

Pleasant came from humble beginnings being born into slavery. Through smart investments and business dealings, and in partnership with her husband, John James Pleasant, she amassed a fortune estimated to be around \$30 million dollars. She made active contributions to the abolitionist movement and fought for civil rights in California. She also used her influence and wealth to employ Black Americans and freed runaway slaves from the Underground Railroad using her various businesses.

She was well known in abolitionist circles and friend to and financial supporter of abolitionist John Brown. After the Civil War, she took her battles to the courts and won several civil rights victories, one of which was cited and upheld in the 1980s and resulted in her being called “The Mother of Human Rights in California.”

The MEPE Fellowship, named in her memory, embodies her vision, entrepreneurial spirit, and the desire to leverage ones interests and passions when contributing to communities in meaningful ways. Through the MEPE Fellowship program, fellows were empowered to have a significant impact on their campus and their related communities, as well as, an opportunity to showcase their entrepreneurial talent.

Teaching Entrepreneurship in the HBCU Community

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency's (MBDA) most recent Fact Sheet² states that Black-owned businesses account for nearly 9.4% of the nation's businesses.

Furthermore, the MBDA projects that:

By 2044, the nation's prosperity will rely even more on minorities, the fastest growing segment of the population. Entrepreneurship is a sure pathway to wealth creation and a thriving national economy. Today, [all] U.S. minority business enterprises [MBE] represent 29% of all firms but only 11% have paid employees. If MBEs were to obtain entrepreneurial parity, the U.S. economy would realize 13 million more jobs (p.1).

Opportunities, such as the MEPE Fellowship, encourage students to build their entrepreneurial acumen, as well as, the opportunity to connect with the executive team of The Whether. A core principal of this Black-owned company, is to promote and teach the importance of business knowledge and ownership.

The MEPE Fellowship hosted fellows from 17 HBCUs across the country:

Albany State University
Benedict College
Bluefield State University
Claffin University
Clark Atlanta University
Dillard University
Fayetteville State University
Jackson State University
Langston University
Morgan State University
North Carolina A&T State University
North Carolina Central University
Paul Quinn College
Spelman College
Stillman College
Tennessee State University
Xavier University of Louisiana

The goals of programs such as The Whether's MEPE Fellowship, are to help to increase the number of minority-owned businesses, foster business owners who will one day reach back through mentorship, and help to realize entrepreneurial parity within the Black community.

Over the last two decades, there have been myriad programs and opportunities for HBCU students to learn about and engage in entrepreneurship. Efforts from the last few years include *Black Enterprise* hosting the TechConneXt Summit and the BE Smart Hackathon, as well as, the Thurgood Marshall Fund and Opportunity Funding Corp partnership to create the [OFC Innovation](#) and Entrepreneurship Conference. Corporations such as [Google](#) and [AT&T](#) have also contributed to efforts by creating access and opportunities for HBCU students to learn about careers in the tech entrepreneurial space. Many of the 105 HBCU campuses have created curricula and programs to foster their students' business and entrepreneurial growth, recognizing the need to equip burgeoning professionals with an entrepreneurial spirit and technical know-how.

² https://www.mbd.gov/sites/mbda.gov/files/migrated/files-attachments/MBDAVitaltoMakingAmericaGreat_170330.pdf

How did Students Learn about the MEPE Fellowship?

“I most enjoyed the lesson plans [of the program]. I really appreciated how [The Whether] gave us a lesson plan...each week... to build our knowledge of entrepreneurship and how it all works.”

Students were introduced to The Whether and The MEPE Fellowship through their college’s career service administrators, by professors’ recommendations, and through their institutions’ career service platforms. In nearly all cases, students were urged to participate in the MEPE Fellowship program by administrative personnel and motivated by the suggestion that they were a good fit for the fellowship. In fact, in one case, a student mentioned that the university president suggested that she apply. In interviews conducted by CMSI, the majority of students revealed that they were interested in working with The Whether and the MEPE Fellowship not only because someone on their campus believed in their entrepreneurial ability, but also because of the opportunity to network with their peers. Particularly, around career interests and goals holistically captured by the Clarity Assessment.

During an interview about her interest in the MEPE Fellowship, one student shared, “I knew that this [The Whether Community] is something that has to get out there. If I’m this excited, I know other [students] will be excited. Especially those [students] that are struggling with what they want to do.” Many students also stated that they were very impressed by the Clarity Assessment results and felt that their inclusion in spreading the assessment on their campus, coupled with their pre-existing interests in entrepreneurship, would make for a valuable 10-week fellowship experience.

Students shared that they were attracted to the flexibility of the MEPE’s paid 10-week virtual fellowship program design. Numerous students noted that they applied to the MEPE Fellowship because they believed the internship would give them the flexibility to gain entrepreneurial experience, while also remaining in their respective cities. Moreover, they could continue to focus on their school work, as the fellowship did not require a large number of hours. Additionally, per the program’s design, students were highly motivated to connect with professors and senior leaders within their institutions and to assist their peers’ career readiness training. For the majority of selected students, the MEPE Fellowship’s virtual design was unprecedented and allowed them to actively and positively engage in the professional growth of their community while simultaneously garnering entrepreneurial skills that they felt would help their future business endeavors.

“This fellowship opened doors and a lot of opportunities for me. I am happy that I put this on the radar for my school because there are a lot of people who want to do this after me.”

Students' Experiences with Entrepreneurship Before the MEPE Fellowship

The 2019 MEPE cohort was, on average, new to the entrepreneurial world. A small number of members witnessed their parents or close relatives operate businesses throughout their childhood. The majority were not exposed to such businesses and independently became interested in entrepreneurship as a means to further their professional trajectories. Several students were passionate about social issues that they believed could manifest into successful businesses and ultimately desired to turn their passions into entrepreneurial endeavors.

For example, one student noted, "One of my goals is to start a business in financial literacy...doing the program has helped me understand how to structure my business...Doing this program has shown me how hard entrepreneurship is."

The Whether and CMSI Engagement with Students During the MEPE Fellowship

"None of the [other personality assessments] have given me detail by detail lists of what I am. I love the fact that the Clarity Assessment went deeper...I feel like the assessment went in a more in depth [detail] with how I can use my personality traits."

During the 10-week fellowship, students received virtual mentorship from The Whether's executive team. The Whether designed the virtual cohort model around an online platform that allowed fellows to engage with one another. Each fellow was expected to contribute to message threads on a MEPE student portal, and participate in weekly check-ins and group chats. The online platform provided a central, virtual data and information sharing space for the fellows to communicate ideas about their individual start-up growth efforts across their respective HBCU

campuses. By sharing best practices in start-up success, students were able to virtually engage with like-minded, entrepreneurial-interested HBCU students across the 17 participating institutions.

CMSI research associates interviewed participants before and after their fellowship participation to gather insight from students' about how the MEPE Fellowship shaped their interests in entrepreneurship, their exposure and reactions to challenges, their classmates' impressions of their mini start-ups, and their experiences as MEPE fellow virtual entrepreneurs working with an education technology company.

How did the MEPE Fellowship Shape Fellows' Career Aspirations?

At the end of their 10-week virtual fellowship, students reported that simulating the start-up experience was much harder than they initially imagined, but that they enjoyed their fellowship experience. Multiple students noted considerable challenges in their strategies to garner buy-in from their institutions and administrators.

According to The Whether, the fellows' start-up campaigns ultimately resulted in over 13,000 interactions between The Whether and students across the 17 participating HBCU campuses. Additionally, across the 25 MEPE fellows, over 1000 students participated in the Clarity Assessment and over 100 peers posted in their private MEPE learning community portal per week. For fellows, this meant that they were able to fulfill the MEPE Fellowship goal of teaching their peers about the benefits of joining a community of peers to learn from each other. By actively participating in a mentoring and learning community, fellows were able to share their experiences as start-up entrepreneurs on their campuses and promotion of a small business.

There have long been programs that help Historically Black College and University (HBCU) students to build their entrepreneurial acumen. For example, partnerships between the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) Office for Access and Success, APLU's Commission on Innovation, Competitiveness, and Economic Prosperity (CICEP), VentureWell (formerly NCIIA), the United States Patent and Trademark Office and the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) resulted in the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Innovation and Entrepreneurship Collaborative (or HBCU Collaborative). The Capital Builders Center partnered with HBCUs in the District of Columbia to provide a scholarship program focused on management and entrepreneurship for three area HBCUs. The 2019 partnership with rapper Big Sean, The Thurgood Marshall Fund, and Ally Financial, Incorporated created the innovative entrepreneurship program "Moguls in the Making." There are myriad programs, partnerships, and HBCUs that continue to instill entrepreneurial education within their students and in their curriculum.

Aggregate Results of Clarity Assessment

Clarity Assessment is built to identify three dominant Professional Values from nine values that represent career related behavior of professionals based on their motivations, abilities and personality. By identifying the three most important, the Clarity Assessment is able to offer specific, relevant career insights. The values highlighted display the aggregate results of the dominant values for the 25 Fellows. Other insights delivered in the 10-page report include Key Strengths, Caution Areas, Culture Preferences, Model Roles, Areas of Further Study, and leadership traits relating back to these nine Professional Values.

Category	Professional Value	Clarity Assessment Definition
The Reformer	Effecting Change	Effecting Change is concerned with effecting change to things around it - society, rules, policies, and government. Strongly held points of views, opinions and beliefs foster deep commitments and desire to influence others.
The Helper	Helping People	Helping People is concerned with reaching out and assisting others with a need they have. Compassion and empathy create the impulse and commitment to help and resolve issues for others.
The Enthusiast	Motivating Others	Motivating Others is concerned with motivation and showing enthusiasm so others can be entertained and enjoy certain moments in their lives. Exciting displays of expression enables people to enjoy a break from their routines.
The Investigator	Fostering Curiosity	Fostering Curiosity is concerned with analysis, determining underlying reasons and facts. It becomes central to "dig deep" and discover root causes for occurrences so as to answer questions and explain why and how something occurred.
The Achiever	Seeing the Big Picture	Seeing the Big Picture is concerned with integrating findings into a collective understanding. Looking at a range of issues, finding patterns, and understanding impacts of alternative scenarios enables effect planning and decision-making.
The Challenger	Taking Risks	Taking Risks is concerned with generating sufficient energy to create a desired outcome or effect. Overcoming challenge and competing against the elements creates its own rewards of winning and achieving.
The Loyalist	Getting Things Done	Getting Things Done is concerned with action, order, and accomplishment. Building and hands-on work create tangible results, efficiency, and practical sense.
The Individualist	Creating New Things	Creating New Things is concerned with thinking new ideas and sharing visions through artistic means. Designing through innovation and interpretation creates new products and unique works of art.
The Peacekeeper	Keeping Perspective	Keeping Perspective is concerned with keen listening and watching out for balance and ensuring people maintain a respect for life. A care for natural order necessitates observing to guard and protect our resources, peace, nature, and public spaces.

Below are the top Key Strengths and Caution Areas of our MEPE fellows. Key Strengths are positive qualities that are readily seen by others. Fellows were advised that consciously using and capitalizing on their Key Strengths will lead to increased effectiveness in all aspects of their career. On the flip side, Caution Areas are natural outgrowths of Key Strengths. When these outgrowths become too strong, they need to be “reined in.” The Clarity Assessment uses Caution Areas instead of weaknesses for young professionals to be cautious of the negative aspects of their work style and effectively find ways to improve.

Key Strengths

- Change-oriented
- Kind-hearted
- Very inquisitive

Key Caution Areas

- Could be highly judgmental
- Tend to take things personally
- Could hold on to anger

Next steps based on learnings?

Overall, The Whether team learned that mentorship resonates well with students and recent graduates. It was found that they actively participate in group environments for professional development, but experience issues using existing group chat applications. The main issues include conversations becoming hard to track among large groups and maintaining a balance of people who are giving advice and asking for support. It was also clear that they prefer a one-to-many/few-to-many group mentorship.

The team is taking these insights forward to create a new experience around mentorship. The new mentorship-based social network brings together high performing Black college students and recent alumni and connects them with industry insiders from diversity-focused Employee Resource Groups who can share their unique perspectives. The goal is to help young professionals learn from the experience of others to maximize their potential.

Meet the 2019 MEPE Fellows



Biruk Abate is a senior majoring in computer engineering at Jackson State University (JSU). Biruk worked with the Google Ignite CS team to introduce STEM programs to nearby high schools in Jackson, MS and led the JSU NASA Swarmathon, a team that participates in the NASA hosted robotics competition. His passion for

entrepreneurship was sparked when he helped a peer review pitch for a startup investment. Biruk goal is to build a technology ecosystem across his college campus in support of student entrepreneurship. This coming summer, Biruk will intern at FedEx. Biruk was born in Addis, Ethiopia.



Mauriac Alapino is a junior majoring in Nursing at Morgan State University from Suitland, MD by way of Benin, Cotonou. He plans to one day be a neurosurgeon. He is fluent in both English and French.



Ahmed Ali, a first-generation immigrant from Khartoum, Sudan, is a first-generation college student at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, where he is pursuing a degree in Business Information Technology. Upon graduation, he aspires to work in the IoT (Internet of Things) space. He has completed internships at Cisco

Systems and Tesla in Silicon Valley. He is also an active member of the NAACP, National Society of Black Engineers, Association for Computing Machinery, and Men on The Move. Outside of exploring the potential of smart networks, he enjoys playing soccer, traveling with family, giving back to his community, and a good game of chess.



Jameerah Ali, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a double major in accounting and finance at North Carolina Central University (NCCU). Jameerah studied abroad in Bangkok, Thailand focusing on finance courses. She has held the role of the president of NCCU chapter of National Association of Black Accountants and is a proud member

of the Alpha Chi chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Upon graduating, Jameerah plans to pursue her CPA as she begins her career.



Markia Brown is a marketing major at Albany State University. She was born and raised in beautiful Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She loves to shop, step, and sew in her free time. Her goal for her career is to become a marketing manager for a retail company and to own her own business.



Victoria Bryant is a first-generation college student from San Francisco, California. She is currently attending Paul Quinn College in Dallas, Texas, pursuing a B.S. in Business Administration with a concentration in Management. Victoria is currently the Student Government Association Senior Class President, the secretary for a women empowerment organization on campus known as Sisters With Vision, and an active Student Ambassador for Paul Quinn College. Victoria has served as a corporate intern for JCPenney and Liberty Mutual Insurance. She was also one of the first students to experience Paul Quinn College's initial satellite campus expansion that piloted in Plano, Texas in August of 2018. Victoria has experience working with public, private, and community benefit organizations in San Francisco, where she has provided valuable insight on the future development of the city's Southeast sector. Victoria has become a trailblazer in her community by inspiring youth of color to stay in school and pursue higher education. Upon graduating from college, Victoria plans to continue to make an impact in the lives of youth around her through mentorship. Particularly, providing assistance in identifying their mission in life after high school graduation. Victoria is committed to using the valuable knowledge she has obtained to uplift and support as many HBCU students as possible.



Aden Simone Coleman is from Prince George's County, Maryland. She is a junior and currently pursuing her bachelor's degree majoring in Business with a concentration in Marketing at the Morgan State University, located in the inner city of East Baltimore, MD. She believes that marketing is the balance of art and science that analyzes how people interact with products and messaging. The art is the packaging of the messages and channel selection; the science is understanding buyer behavior over time and the results of testing. It is the beauty of mastering that balance, with all of its moving parts, that draws her to pursue a career in the field. Upon graduation, she plans to work as a marketing manager at a tech company and eventually work full time running her own successful business as an entrepreneur and traveling the world speaking, teaching and sharing her knowledge. Aden first learned that she had a passion for business and marketing after competing and winning the Leaders of Tomorrow National MBA Association Harvard-level business case competition representing the Washington D.C. Chapter. She completed

an in depth analysis of Whole Foods, competing against 24 teams. She was then elected 2017 President/CEO of her chapter. She was then tapped to represent them at the LeaderTech Tour in Silicon Valley where she was immersed in technology- based corporate environments like Facebook and Google. During her sophomore year in college, she was one of four international students and one of two U.S. students accepted into the Simon Nehme Entrepreneurship summer school (first cohort) based in Ottawa, Canada. Her team won first place in the school's pitch competition after designing and testing a new startup idea. Since her return from Canada, her love for entrepreneurship has grown and she is now a budding entrepreneur working on her first business venture.



Khalia Fernandez is from Lanham, MD. Khalia is a fourth-year honors student at Morgan State University in Baltimore, MD, currently pursuing a B.S. in Psychology. She spends her afternoons in the Cognitive, Applied, and Perceptual Research Lab at Morgan State to better understand her peers and how she can aid in their success during their matriculation at Morgan. After graduating Khalia hopes to incorporate her passion for psychology and love for research to work in industrial and organizational psychology.



Destinee Filmore is originally from Tampa, Florida. Destinee is a third-year, first-generation student at Spelman College. She is currently pursuing a B.A. in International Studies, accompanied by a minor in Art History. Upon graduation, Destinee aspires to pursue a Ph.D. in Art History and become a curator and published art historian. As a curator, Destinee hopes to create art exhibitions that discuss international themes with artists from around the world and to own and operate her own art gallery. She is also interested in advocating for the accessibility of arts-based education programs for low-income student and students of color. Destinee is honored to represent Spelman College as a Bonner Scholar, Social Justice Associate, and Mary Ellen Pleasant Fellow.



Taylor Ford is from High Point, North Carolina and is a senior majoring in business administration with an entrepreneurship concentration at North Carolina Central University. On campus, she is involved in many organizations and extracurricular activities. This includes the Beta Gamma Sigma Honors Society, the Career Services Center as an intern, the Academic Success and Enrichment Services Department as a Tutor, and the North Carolina Central University Business School Council. Taylor prides herself on being a team-

oriented leader that motivates/encourages others to reach their goals. Taylor has developed these skills by participating in a variety of leadership development programs including the Summer Institute for Emerging Managers and Leaders at the University of California, Irvine/Berkeley and the Goldman Sachs HBCU Leadership Summit in New York, New York. She is also Thurgood Marshall scholar. Taylor's career goals are to be an executive for a Fortune 500 company, and later on become an entrepreneur.



Asante Gadson is a senior majoring in Supply Chain Management a from Prince Georges County, Maryland. He is senior, pursuing a bachelor's degree in Supply Chain Management and Business Administration at Morehouse College. In addition to serving as a mentor to a number of underclassmen at Morehouse College, he has held numerous leadership positions on campus. Always seeking a way to better his community, he has served as Morehouse Student Government Association's Director of Civic Engagement, Mentorship and Outreach Chair of LYTEHouse, and now currently as Vice President and a co-founder of Give a Book; Be a Mentor. Asante enjoys challenges and learning new skills that will make him more competitive in the workforce. Additionally, he aspires to start his own 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that coaches and aids students of color throughout their academic career as well as connect those students with peers and professionals of color who have similar interests. Asante's dream is to bring all HBCUs into the 21st century and re-invigorate the culture surrounding them.



Monica Geter is a psychology major at Benedict College of Columbia, South Carolina. Monica will be graduating with honors in May 2019. She is from Queens, New York. Her future endeavors entail, pursuing a graduate degree in Public Relations, and obtaining various certifications while being active in the field. Being an entrepreneur in the field of PR is a goal of hers. Monica is an active member of ABPsi (Aspiring Black Psychologists), Collegiate 100 of BC, SisterAct, The Sigma Alpha Pi chapter of National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS), and The 20/20 Leaders of America. Monica hopes to aid in the advancement of young individuals who aspire to become future leaders in their communities.



Dorian Holmes is a junior majoring in computer science at North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University. On-campus, Dorian is an active leader including roles as President of the Aggies Cyber Defenders and an e-board member of the Association of

Computational Machinery. He is also a member of the HBCU VC Class 2 Fellow cohort where he is gaining experience in developing a startup ecosystem in minority communities and equipping entrepreneurs with tools to develop strong businesses. During the Summer of 2018, he interned at Facebook in Menlo Park, CA as well as interning with Microsoft in Seattle, WA during the Summer of 2019. Dorian was born and raised from St. Louis, Missouri.



Jabari Hopson is a senior from Kansas City, Missouri, at Morehouse College. He is currently pursuing a B.A. in Business Administration and Management. Upon graduating from Morehouse, he aspires to attend Harvard Business School obtaining an MBA through their 2+2 deferred admissions program. After working as a strategy and operations consultant for some time, Jabari ultimately aspires to establish his own consultant group working with senior executives to develop solutions for their most complex and intricate problems. Outside of professional development, he is interested in becoming a mentor and role model to those in urban communities.



Kanita Hutchinson is a graduate student from Atlanta, Georgia, pursuing a masters degree in agribusiness at Tennessee State University. Kanita has aspirations of working for a company that provides value to its customers through food, research, or traveling. She plans to travel while educating individuals about her passion: agriculture. As an individual, Kanita takes full advantage of what TSU and her community offer to further her education and future endeavors. She strives to break barriers, make change, and create a way for others to apply humanitarian efforts in their communities.



Mya Jacobs is a second-generation college student. More specifically, she's a Dean's List, third-year sales and marketing major at the Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans. She plans to one day oversee a network of her own successful business ventures and non-profit organizations focused on impacting the quality of human life. Some of her recent endeavors include a year-long fellowship with local non-profit, Fund 17, a continuing to be a trailblazing member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., competing at several competitions at the Kelley School of Business, and securing a summer internship with a Fortune 500 company.



Zaire Jenkins was born in Rochester, NY. She graduated from Harding University High School in Charlotte, NC. where she received two scholarships: a \$1,000 academic scholarship from Communities in Schools and a full ride to North Carolina Central University from Project One. Zaire is a sophomore studying psychology and plans to further her education by obtaining a master's degree in psychology to start a career in industrial psychology.



Jasmine B. King is from Vicksburg, MS. She is a junior majoring in political science with a concentration in pre-law at Jackson State University, an HBCU located in Mississippi. Upon earning her B.A., Jasmine aspires to obtain a J.D. and begin a career in the corporate sector.



Lyjiria Lacy is a biology major at Dillard University. She is from Long Beach, California. Her career goals include becoming a physician assistant, getting her Ph.D. in physician assistant studies, and opening up a women's health clinic focusing on the health issues that disproportionately affect minority women. At Dillard University, Lyjiria is a resident assistant, a member of the Minority Association for Pre-Med students, Pre Alumni Council, and the Beta Kappa Chi National Scientific Honor Society.



Somto Nweke is a senior majoring in computer science at Morgan State University. He is tech-savvy and a tech-curious student who likes to use his research skills, Python, and IOS development to tackle challenges. He enjoys creating and implementing business development and strategic plans for new product launches. He has represented Morgan State University at Hackathons and is currently part of the SBDC Business Incubator on Campus. In his spare time, he enjoys researching technical details for new products, listening to music, and developing user interface ideas.



Jai'lyn Richardson is a student at Tennessee State University from Montgomery, AL. She is majoring in business administration with a concentration in supply chain management. She is a member of the Honors College, Golden Key International Honour Society, and Beta Gamma Sigma. She is also a Community Service Scholar at TSU. She has a passion for serving her community, and volunteers with multiple organizations

including Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee. Jai'lyn is now starting to lay the groundwork for her own non-profit organization. She has been able to expand her business acumen and gain an even deeper look into the business and entrepreneurship worlds through various workshops and conferences including the Allen Entrepreneurial Institute, Forte Foundation Women of Color Conference, JP Morgan and Chase Launching Leaders Summit, Bizwomen Mentoring Monday, and the Goldman Sachs HBCU Leadership Conference, Jai'lyn secured an internship during summer of 2019 at a top financial services firm to gain more experience and explore the finance industry.



William "Ben" Rogers is originally from Charlotte, North Carolina and is currently studying business administration with a concentration in management at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina. In addition to being a full-time student, he has also held numerous leadership positions in organizations including President of the Society for the Advancement of Management, President of Collegiate DECA, and was also a co-host on a premier talk and variety show at the radio station on campus. His hobbies include mastering his craft by studying business books, implementing the philosophies of successful CEOs, and analyzing the growth patterns of many of today's most prominent companies. Ben has also completed internships with the Thurgood Marshall College Fund and the Perkins Entrepreneurship Training and Leadership Development Institute. He is currently working with a team of financial advisors as a Financial Representative at Northwestern Mutual in Raleigh, North Carolina. He has many vocational aspirations and believes true success is a journey, not a destination.



Deandra Simpson is a sophomore at Fayetteville State University who is pursuing a B.S in nursing along with a double minor in biology and Spanish. Her plans for the future include attending medical school to pursue an advanced degree and become a dermatologist. Following this, she hopes to eventually utilize her entrepreneurial skills to open a private practice intended providing medical services to a wide range of people with a focus on marginalized and disadvantaged groups.



Carl Wesley Smith is from Macclesfield, North Carolina and is currently majoring in mass communication at North Carolina Central University. Throughout his college career, he proudly served as the president of Students Initiated to Mentor Build & Achieve, Junior Class Senator for the Student Government Association, and member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Upon graduation, Carl plans to utilize his skills by being an entrepreneur and sparking other entrepreneurs to expand their businesses.



Keneisha Deon Wiggan is originally from Portland, Jamaica. She is a goal and change-oriented second year, first-generation student at Clafflin University. Keneisha is seasoned in the arts of management information systems with the ability to think critically and be innovative. She is a leader by heart who strongly believes that “Teamwork makes the dream work.” She also aspires to become a product manager and entrepreneur. During her freshman year, Keneisha interned with Microsoft. The experience was invaluable and allowed her to gain sufficient coding and research skills that will help her build a successful career. She hopes to one day start a company that will be focused on building software programs that can teach anyone who is willing to learn new skills and techniques that they can use to obtain jobs and even a degree.



The Whether

1040 S. Gaylord Street, #26
Denver CO 80209

e: support@thewhether.com

THEWHETHER.COM

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Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions

10 Seminary Place, Suite 110
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1183

p: 848-932-0774

e: rutgers.cmsi@gse.rutgers.edu

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