

# I3: Inclusion, Innovation & Inspiration

Issue 5 | Spring/Summer 2019

Diversity News

IMSD@UB

CLIMB

Meet our Scholars

Announcements

## A Message from the Director

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2019 issue of the I3 Newsletter. We are committed to building a more inclusive community at UB and are excited to share with you the interdisciplinary programs and activities our office has coordinated Spring and Summer 2019.

One event that stands out is UB's May graduation. We are excited to have seen 6 IMSD scholars graduate with their PhDs! We are proud of all of scholars and wish them the best in their next chapter. Take a look inside to see where they all will be heading to next!

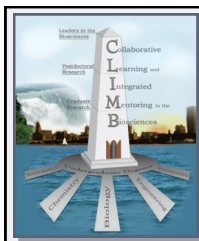
We hope you enjoy this issue! We are proud of our students and excited to share with you their accomplishments.

Thank you for your support!  
Margarita L. Dubocovich, PhD

## A look inside this issue...

**University at Buffalo**  
**Initiative for Maximizing Student Development (IMSD)**

**University at Buffalo**  
**Institute for Strategic Enhancement of Educational Diversity (iSEED)**



**Collaborative Learning and Integrated Mentoring in Biosciences (CLIMB) Program**

## Office of Inclusion and Cultural Enhancement

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## Program Staff

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Director of CLIMB Program;  
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CLIMB/IMSD Senior Coordinator

**Jordan Hall**  
iSEED Coordinator

**Ashley Regling, MA**  
KL2/CTSA Scientific Workforce Specialist

**Anne Gullotti, MA**  
Senior Inclusive Excellence Specialist

**Anyango Kamina, PhD**  
iSEED Scientific Workforce Specialist

**Himangi Marathe, PhD**  
CTSA Education Workforce Specialist

## Diversity News

### Welcome Anne Gullotti to the Office of Inclusion!

Please join us in welcoming Anne Gullotti to our team in the Office of Inclusion as Senior Inclusive Excellence Specialist. Anne holds a Bachelors of Art in History and Classics from UB and a Master's Degree in Museum Studies from the University of Toronto. Anne brings extensive administrative experience having worked here at UB since 2016 where she has held various administrative positions both in the College of Art and Sciences and in the Jacobs School. Anne will coordinate all activities related to diversity and inclusion. She will be acting as liaison for the Departmental Diversity Advocates Group and the Council on Inclusion in Medicine and Science and it's committees.

**Stop by the Office of Inclusion to say hello and meet Anne!**

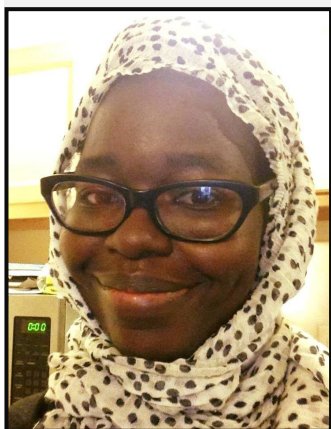


### Diversity and Inclusion Fellowship Award

This opportunity is offered to candidates accepted into the UB medical school whose individual life experiences and perspectives will enhance our community through inclusive excellence.

The 2019 recipient is Santa Anigo. Santa graduated with a BS in Psychology from the University of Miami in May 2009. She will be beginning medical school this fall. Santa's goals for her medical career include eradicating healthcare disparities. Santa brings an unique point of view to the Jacobs School community having a wealth of experience in working with under-served communities facing deportation, incarceration, homelessness and environmental degradation. She plans to continue to understand how intersectional identities can impact underserved communities and their healing journey.

Visit our website <https://medicine.buffalo.edu/oiaace/awards/diversity-inclusion.html> for past recipients or information on how to apply for this fellowship.



### Award of Excellence for Promoting Inclusion and Cultural Diversity

The Office of Inclusion and Cultural Enhancement (OIACE) recognizes students, faculty, and staff in the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (Jacobs School) for their work in creating a welcoming climate of respect and inclusiveness.

Since 2013, the Award of Excellence for Promoting Inclusion and Cultural Diversity has recognized individuals whose actions, example, and efforts contribute to a diverse, respectful environment at UB and in the Western New York Community. A diverse and inclusive campus community enhances excellence in research and academic medicine by broadening and strengthening teaching, learning, and scholarship.

This award, presented during the Jacobs School Annual Faculty and Staff Recognition Awards ceremony, is given to recipients in the following categories: medical students or students in the MD/PhD program; medical residents; doctoral students; clinical or basic sciences faculty and staff.

This year the Community Service Award was also presented to Dr. Oscar Gomez for his exceptional ser-

vice and dedication to providing outreach to diverse communities.

**Visit our website <https://medicine.buffalo.edu/oiaace/awards.html> for past recipients or information on how to nominate someone for the award.**



**The 2019 recipients were:**  
**Dr. Jessy Alexander (Faculty)**  
**Dr. Joanna Barthelemy (Staff)**  
**Dr. Taryn Spencer (Resident)**  
**Karole Collier (MSTP Student)**  
**Rasheen Powell (Doctoral Student)**

# IMSD@UB

The IMSD@UB is a program that *develops student talents, promotes the professional growth of PhD students, and enhances intellectual and cultural diversity in the biomedical and behavioral sciences* at UB. The IMSD@UB began in 2012 with the support of the National Institutes of Health.



### **Congratulations Dr. Melisa Medina, Dr. Emmanuel Yawson, Dr. Lakeisha Lewter, Dr. Jennifer Martin, Dr. Norma Zamora, and Dr. Anthony Jones!**

**Melisa Medina, PhD**, in Biochemistry, received a BS degree in Natural Science from the University of Puerto Rico, Cayey, Cayey, Puerto Rico, in 2013. Melisa joined the PhD program in Biomedical Sciences in 2013. After laboratory rotations in her first year of the program, Melisa joined the laboratories of Dr. Jennifer Surtees and Dr. Mark Sutton in 2014. Her PhD thesis project examined the regulation of Msh2-Msh3 during 5' flap processing. Melisa accepted a Postdoctoral fellowship in the Division of Nutrition at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY.

**Emmanuel Yawson, PhD**, in Pharmacology, received a BS degree in Biochemistry from Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ, in 2008. Emmanuel joined the PhD program in Pharmacology and the laboratory of Dr. Raj Rajnarayan in Fall 2013. His PhD thesis project focused on identifying novel anti-cancer agents targeting epidermal growth factor (EGF) protein-protein interactions. Emmanuel has accepted a Clinical Research Associate position at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo, NY.

**Lakeisha Lewter, PhD**, in Neuroscience, received a BS in Biology from Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD in 2013. Lakeisha joined the PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences and in Fall 2014 and the laboratory of Dr. Jun-Xu Li in Summer 2015. Her PhD thesis project focused on identifying behavioral effects of subtype-selective GABAA receptor positive allosteric modulators. Lakeisha is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Biological Sciences at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA.

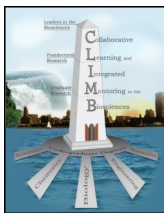
**Jennifer Martin, PhD**, in Pharmacology, received a BS in Chemistry from St. John Fisher College in Rochester, NY in 2014. She joined the PhD Program in Pharmacology and the laboratory of Dr. David Dietz in Fall 2014. The focus of her thesis research was on opiate-induced plasticity in the mesolimbic dopamine system. For this research, Jennifer was awarded a prestigious F99/K00 Diversity Specialized Predoctoral to Postdoctoral Advancement in Neuroscience. Currently, Jennifer is completing the K00 portion of her grant in the Department of Physiology and Biophysics at the University at Buffalo in Buffalo, NY.

**Norma Zamora, PhD**, in Pharmacology, received a BA in Biological Psychology from California State University, San Bernardino in 2013. She joined the PhD Program in Pharmacology and the laboratory of Dr. Pablo Paez in Fall 2015. Her thesis research focused on the function of L-type voltage-operated calcium channels in astrocytes.

**Anthony Jones, PhD** in Neuroscience, received a BS in Biological Sciences from University at Buffalo in 2012 and a MS in Pharmacology from the Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in 2014. He joined the PhD Program in Neuroscience and the laboratories of Dr. Margarita L. Dubocovich and Dr. Raj Rajnarayan in Fall 2014. The focus of his thesis research was on discovery and pharmacological characterization of environmental melatonin receptor modulators. Anthony has accepted a postdoctoral position in the Department of Pharmacology & Toxicology at the University at Buffalo in Buffalo, NY.



## CLIMB Program News



The Collaborative Learning and Integrated Mentoring in the Biosciences (CLIMB) Program at UB provides professional development for students to not only learn, but apply, the essential skills of a professional scientist. This training will help students choose the best research opportunities, write outstanding fellowships and grants, craft publications, confidently present their work, and ultimately, find the best jobs.

### CLIMB Scholar awarded Empire State Fellowship



**Alexandria Trujillo, Pharmacology & Toxicology.** Dr. Trujillo defended her thesis in August 2019, titled *Optimization of a Rhodopsin Targeting Ribozyme Knockdown-Reconstitute Strategy for Autosomal Dominant Retinitis Pigmentosa*. Dr. Trujillo was accepted into the New York State Empire Fellows Program for 2019 - 2021 from New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo. The Empire State Fellows Program is a full-time leadership training program that will prepare the next generation of talented professionals for careers as New York State policy-makers. Engagement in the work of New York State government lies at the heart of the Empire State Fellows Program. Governor Cuomo appoints each Empire Fellow to work directly with a Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, or other high-level policy maker. Each Empire Fellow works at a state office or agency, such as the Office of Children and Family Services, the Department of State, Department of Labor, the Department of Environmental Conservation, or in the Governor's Executive Chamber. Work assignments offer fellows unparalleled experience collaborating with senior officials and participating in the policy-making process.

**Congratulations and best wishes Dr. Trujillo!**

### CLIMB PRO alumna presents at AMIA 2019 Informatics Summit



Marvellous Oke, CLIMB PRO '18, presented research she conducted with Dr. Jason Davies, Assistant Professor in the Department of Neurosurgery, Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, at the AMIA 2019 Informatics Summit in San Francisco, CA in March 2019. Her presentation was titled "Prediction Model: Shunt-dependent Hydrocephalus after Aneurysmal Sub-arachnoid Hemorrhage".

Marvellous returned for a second summer to continue her work on this project with Dr. Davies in summer 2019.

### New Summer 2019: CLIMB UBIDS



CLIMB UP received NIH National Library of Medicine Supplement to create a new division of CLIMB UP: CLIMB Undergraduate Biomedical Inmformatics and Data Science (UBIDS) Education. This grant hosts 12 undergraduate scholars interested in biomedical informatics, data science, and related disciplines.

CLIMB UBIDS offers hands-on research with UB faculty mentors, along with lectures and workshops for professional development over a 10-week period. In addition, CLIMB UBIDS scholars take a deep dive into biomedical informatics and data science in weekly Biomedical Informatics and Data Science Skills Course.

## CLIMB Program News



University at Buffalo

Institute for Strategic  
Enhancement of Educational  
Diversity (iSEED)

The Institute for Strategic Enhancement of Educational Diversity (iSEED) is a university-wide institute that promotes building a culturally and intellectually diverse and academically inclusive community of graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, faculty and staff. The iSEED is focused on excellence in education, engagement in research, mentoring and enhancement of professional development central to the UB mission.

### CLIMB UP for Summer Research at UB



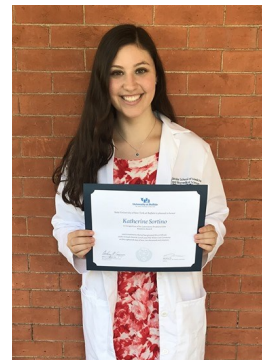
We welcomed 37 students to our CLIMB UP Summer Research Program the summer. iSEED helped fund fourteen (14) of the CLIMB UP students to conduct research and present on their findings during a 10-week summer research experience.

iSEED students participating in CLIMB UP came to us from all over the United States including Arizona, Mississippi, and Puerto Rico.



#### CLIMB Scholars receive Awards from PPBS Program

CLIMB PhD scholars were presented awards for achievements during their first year of the PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences (PPBS). Congratulations to Haley Parker (left) for receiving the Highest GPA Award and Katie Sortino (right) for receiving the Rotation Award. These awards were presented to Haley and Katie during the Annual Awards Lunch & PhD White Coat Ceremony in June.



### CLIMB UP Alumnae Enters UB Medical Class of 2023!

Congratulations and best wishes to:  
**Taylor Meciszewski, 2018**





## Meet our Scholars



### Gloria Aidoo-Frimpong

**Undergraduate Degree:** B.A. in Communications, African University College of Communications, Ghana

**Graduate Degrees:** M.A. in Communication and Development, Ohio University and MPH, Ohio University

**Degree Program:** PhD Program in Community Health and Health Behavior, School of Public Health and Health Professions

**Faculty Mentor:** Sarahmona Przybyla, PhD

**Research Interests:** HIV/AIDS prevention and care, Reproductive and Sexual Health, Health Disparities, Adolescent Health, Sexual risk behaviors, immigrant and refugee health.

#### Q. Why did you choose to pursue a PhD?

I wanted to research the social and behavioral aspects of HIV/AIDS. I love understanding the how and why of issues, and I derive great pleasure from discovering and creating knowledge. I want to become an expert in my field and the thought of obtaining a Ph.D. brings me so much joy.

#### Q. What about your research excites you?

I love it when there are novel findings that are currently not in the literature. I am excited to know the reasons and motivations behind people's actions and in the case of my research, I love it when I find out what makes it easier for people to access PrEP, what factors into their decision-making process and generally their thoughts on the medication. I am excited that my research will help eliminate barriers and improve access to healthcare and medication for those in need and in the long term, help curb the HIV epidemic.

#### Q. What is the reason you came to UB?

UB is an excellent university for study, well respected for its research activities and experienced professors. UB also has excellent funding packages for its students, and finally, I liked the training CLIMB offered.

#### Q. What has been the most beneficial aspect of the CLIMB program?

The sense of community and support I get from IMSD, as well as professional development. I love having peers who are in the same year as myself to discuss ideas and challenges as well as share the journey with. I appreciate having our program coordinators (Joanna and Anyango) who are also available to provide resources, strategies, nuggets of wisdom on how to navigate grad school. Having

the professional development part is also beneficial as it provides hands-on skills with writing an abstract, presenting to a lay audience and other skills not taught within the classroom.

#### Q. What has been your biggest challenge in graduate school?

Adapting to the UB environment. Different schools do things differently so adapting to how things are done here. Another challenge was with coursework. Although I am still in the same field of study, the coursework at this level needs more depth, analysis, and critique. Finally, dealing with microaggressions and learning how to address them has been a challenge.

#### Q. Any advice for new PhD students?

To take advantage of any opportunity or resource available to them to help enhance their skills. The Ph.D. journey is quite lonely, and it helps to have colleagues or a community of people who understand the demands of the program to help you when you are stuck. It is also a good idea to always have extracurricular stuff (gym, yoga, etc) that you engage in to create a balance and keep you productive.

#### Q. What is one thing you like about being at UB?

The CLIMB program, the vast library resources and other programs and activities (like NAVIGATE) to ensure your professional and personal development. UB has very accomplished and knowledgeable professors who enjoy mentoring and teaching students.

#### Q. Is there an accomplishment you are most proud of since the start of your PhD training?

Submitting a paper for publication by the end of my first year in my program.

## Meet our Scholars



### Jamal Williams

**Undergraduate Degree:** B.S. in Biology and Mathematics, D'Youville College

**Degree Program:** PhD Program in Neuroscience, Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

**Faculty Mentor:** Zhen Yan, PhD

**Research Interests:** Studying dysregulatory synaptic mechanisms responsible for cognitive deficits in Alzheimer's disease

**Q. Why did you choose to pursue a PhD?**

My decision to pursue a PhD was in part based on my interest in solving complex problems. I've always been interested in puzzles and to me research is nature's puzzle that scientists are trying to solve. I chose PhD specifically because I knew that this was a career trajectory that would allow me to think deeply about a topic I'm most interested, with the flexibility to pivot rather seamlessly. In a lot of other professions in the sciences, once you commit to a specialty, it's much more difficult to change paths.

**Q. What type of research are you involved in?**

Currently I am researching the role of epigenetics in Alzheimer's disease. More specifically, I want to understand how modifications to the structure of DNA disrupts the communication between neurons needed for proper cognitive function.

**Q. What about your research excites you?**

There is a rapid growth of individuals afflicted with Alzheimer's disease currently totaling about 5.8 million people in the US, and this number is expected to triple over the next few decades. The most debilitating aspect of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, is that those afflicted by these diseases will eventually lose their identity and entire sense of self. Our memories are our most sacred possession and what excites me most about my research is that it will contribute to a larger body of knowledge to preserve these possessions.

**Q. What has been the most beneficial aspect of the CLIMB program?**

The CLIMB program has set me up for success both as a graduate student and as a scientist. Through workshops and training I have gained a lot of tools necessary for a career in scientific research. While there are many parts of CLIMB that I can say were beneficial, the most beneficial aspects was the training in grant writing and scientific communication. Before I came to UB I knew that I had what it takes to work hard and do research, however I didn't realize the gap I needed to fill to communicate this research; CLIMB has helped tremendously with this.

**Q. Do you have any advice for new PhD students?**

First, failure at some point is inevitable, embrace it and figure out early how to overcome it and learn from your mistakes. Second, work hard like you have something to prove. Right now the market for PhD scientists (especially in the academic career path) is becoming increasingly competitive. You have to stand out if you want to make it, and that requires you to work both hard and smart.

**Q. What is the reason you came to UB?**

I am a lifelong Buffalonian, I love this city and although we have 9 local colleges and universities, UB represents the pinnacle of education at the graduate level. If I decide to stay on the academic track, UB is where I intend to spend my career.

**Q. Is there an accomplishment you are most proud of since you started your PhD training?**

I feel that I made the perfect choice of studying under Zhen Yan as my PhD mentor.

## Announcements

Our CLIMB scholars accomplish many great things throughout their PhD careers. Their work garners awards, accepted abstracts, publications and opportunities to present their work at national conferences in their field.

**Emily Sekera, Chemistry.** Emily was awarded the MSACL 2019 US Young Investigator Educational Grant. Educational Grants support the congress attendance of non-commercial individuals who are generally early in their career and have a strong potential for meaningful contribution, as determined by their submitted abstract and grant application.

**Nahyr Lopez Dauphin, Chemistry.** Nahyr presented a poster at the ACS National Meeting & Exposition for Chemistry and New Frontiers in Orlando, FL in April 2019. Her poster was entitled "Evaluation of Fibrous Silica Particles for Liquid Chromatography"

**Natalie Jay, Biochemistry.** Natalie gave a poster presentation entitled "Characterization of Human CYP24A1-Adrenodoxin Fusion in the Deactivation of Vita-

min-D" at the International Scientific Conference on Vitamin D in New York, NY, Great Lakes Drug Metabolism and Disposition in Ann Harbor, MI, and the Department of Biochemistry Research Day at the University at Buffalo in May 2019. Natalie was awarded the Elizabeth Olmsted Ross Award for Outstanding Graduate Poster at the Biochemistry Research Day.

**Xiaoxiao Zhang, Oral Biology.** Xiaoxiao received a Mark Diamond Research Fund grant to fund her research titled "The role of heparan sulfate in cystatin C inhibition of cathepsin K".

**Lauren Shepard, Biomedical Engineering.** Lauren's first author publication titled "Initial evaluation of three-dimensionally printed patient-specific coronary phantoms for CT-FFR software validation" was accepted into the Journal of Medical Imaging in April 2019.

**Ty Santiago, Chemistry.** Ty's NSF GRFP application received an honorable mention for his research to determine the effect of alternating magnetic fields on magnetite doped liposome membrane morphology.

## EOPIM Welcomes Five New Scholars!

### Congratulations LaShon, Renato, Valeria, and Michael!



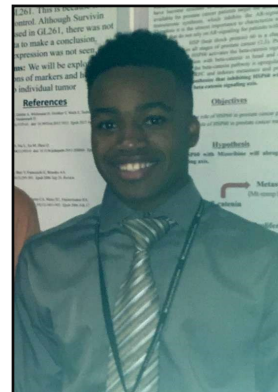
LaShon Webb  
Junior, BS in Biology  
Tugaloo College



Renato Quiñones  
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Valeria Marquez Luna  
Junior, BS in Psychology  
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