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Jeremiah Wilson, DeYonte Sullivan, David Brogan, Audrey Bakerson

Alumni Help Honors Program Celebrate Anniversary

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Four Southwestern Michigan College graduates helped the Honors Program celebrate its fifth anniversary April 19 with a Student Activity Center theatre panel discussion.

SMC's Honors Program has produced 63 graduates since 2016 who went on to study at Utah State University, Indiana University, Michigan State University, University of Michigan, Central Michigan University, Western Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University, Bethel University, Northland College and St. Mary's College.

Audrey Bakerson

"My most memorable experiences were research in calculus and chemistry," she said, "resulting in a presentation at the American Chemical Society in Orlando."

After graduating in 2019, Bakerson, whose parents met at SMC, continued at Michigan State, becoming project director for the MSU entrepreneurship association, starting her own business ("I'm working on getting a patent") and winning first place in the women in entrepreneurship pitch competition.

She continued researching by volunteering as an undergraduate assistant in a laboratory working to discover the effects of the maternal immune system and group B streptococcus infection on the fetus.

“This semester,” the Niles 20-year-old said, “I will be graduating with my bachelor’s in human biology with a minor in entrepreneurship and innovation. My goal is to pursue a master’s in business administration at the University of Notre Dame and continue to grow my business. My time at SMC helped build my confidence as a speaker and make connections that will last a lifetime.”

Bakerson, first runner-up to Miss Niles, competes for Miss Michigan USA May 27-28 in Port Huron. Her brother at MSU and sister at WMU also graduated from SMC.

“Professors care and know things about your family and your life,” the former tutor said. “Seeing all these familiar faces makes it worth coming back.”

“Say yes to opportunities” is her advice to students. “I loved my time here, which really built my foundation to go on.”

David Brogan

The 2018 SMC graduate transferred to Grand Valley State University to complete his bachelor’s degree in secondary education and mathematics.

At GVSU, Brogan student taught in Zeeland Public Schools. Upon graduating in 2021, he returned home to teach seventh grade mathematics at Dowagiac Middle School. “At some point, I think I would love to teach at the college level,” he said.

“The people were my favorite part of SMC,” said Brogan, who worked in the Academic Advising and Resource Center (AARC). “The faculty make it one of the best community colleges around. Take advantage of all the resources offered.”

DeYonte Sullivan

Brogan’s DUHS classmate and a 2017 SMC graduate, learned study discipline at SMC. “I’m happy with what I went through here because it’s paid off. At a university you’re expected to use tutoring services and study groups. I held a campus job as a math and science tutor and was a crew member at McDonald’s. While at SMC, I presented my original research, *Lead Detection Through Hair Analysis*, to the American Chemical Society in San Francisco,” Sullivan said.

Sullivan transferred to the University of Michigan, receiving his bachelor’s degree in biology, health and society, with a minor in community action and social change, last May.

“Through SMC,” Sullivan said, “I was prepared for university-level research. I acted as a research assistant for water analysis in Trinidad and Tobago, partnered with the University of West Indies. I was able to do paid research in Trinidad for six weeks.”

Sullivan’s next opportunity came with U of M’s Injury Prevention Center, one of nine funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “I analyzed data for the System for Opioid Surveillance, a near real-time dashboard used to help locate opioid overdoses,” Sullivan said. “During undergrad summers, I worked in a nursing home to gain medical experience and clinical hours. Currently, I am pursuing a medical neuroscience certificate at Michigan State while studying for the medical college admission test (MCAT).”

Sullivan, who hopes to become a dermatologist, also works as a patient care technician at Lansing’s Sparrow Hospital “to experience new and faster-paced medicine.”

Jeremiah Wilson

Wilson, Edwardsburg Sports Complex facilities manager, participated in the Environmental Research Group and STEM Club, performing science demonstrations at schools. He took advantage of the fifth-year Early Middle College program so “the high school paid for my associate degree.”

He presented research to the American Chemical Society in San Francisco. “It would have been a lot more challenging if I moved two states away right out of high school,” said Wilson, who aspires to an MBA to start an environmental consulting business in Baldwin.

“The professors here are top-notch because they’re not here for a paycheck, but because they want to be and they enjoy it,” Wilson said. “Make connections because they will take you a long way.”

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