

Diversity Influencers 2021



Bryana Harris

Bryana Harris is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Biomedical Engineering. She received her undergraduate degree in Chemical Engineering from Auburn University(AL). Her research at UVA focuses on using a systems biology approach and computational models to understand cardiomyocyte proliferation and maturation. Aside from research, Bryana is passionate about making academia a more equitable and inclusive place for individuals with disabilities

and other historically underrepresented and marginalized communities.



Emma Otremba

Emma Otremba (she/they) is a Master's of Education student in the Educational Psychology: Applied Developmental Science program in the School of Education and Human Development. Before coming to Grounds, she earned her Bachelors of Science in Youth Studies from the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities where she also became a Ronald E. McNair Scholar. Emma is interested in identity development and resilience among LGBTQ+ youth, youth participatory action research, and youth-adult relationships



Jessica McDermott

Jessica McDermott is a Ph.D. student in the Higher Education department. She earned her bachelor's degree in Spanish from Hollins University and studied abroad in Mexico and Spain while in college. Jessica earned her master's degree from UVA and recently served as director of an academic advising office at a university in Florida. There, she sponsored an organization for first-generation college students and facilitated Safe Zone workshops to teach the campus about the LGBTQ community. Her research is on diversity and inclusion in STEM, student flourishing, and the resilience of students of diverse sexual

orientations and racial/ethnic backgrounds. Jessica also loves watching sports and traveling.



Mirella Shaban

Mirella Shaban is a Lebanese woman born and raised in Richmond, VA. She received her Bachelor's degree from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2020, and is currently pursuing her PhD in Environmental Science at the University of Virginia. Mirella is passionate about humanitarian work and is on the Board of Advisors for multiple NPO's & NGO's. She currently sits as the Director of Development for RVA4Lebanon, Director of the Virginia chapter A.D.Y.A., and Board Member of the StaySafe foundation in Lebanon. Within her own organization (S.A.P. @ VCU), she spearheaded education and outreach about food insecurity, food deserts, and unequal distribution of resources and knowledge across socioeconomic borders. Her current research involves co-production of knowledge regarding Arctic permafrost and micrometeorological conditions with the indigenous people of Utqiagvik, Alaska



Naseemah Mohamed

Naseemah Mohamed is a joint post-doctoral fellow at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy and the Global Policy Center. Her current research interests include education and conflict, international development, pedagogical interventions, and political activism. She earned her MSc and DPhil (PhD) in Comparative and International Education Policy from Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, and a pre-doctoral fellowship and AB from Harvard College, where she jointly majored in Social Studies and African Studies and served as President of

the Harvard African Students Association. As a Zimbabwean immigrant and first-generation scholar, issues of diversity and inclusion have been foundational to her personal, intellectual and extracurricular work.



Rachana Bhave

Rachana is a graduate student pursuing her final year of PhD in the Cox Lab in the Department of Biology at UVA. She is fascinated by how animal mating strategies are shaped by their environment and, in turn shape evolution of traits. Learning about how diverse forms evolve and co-exist, even within the same population, in the natural world has influenced her interests in both research and social justice. She believes that equity in academia cannot be achieved without change happening at an individual and structural level across all sections of the society,

starting from her immediate circle of influence - academia. Consequently, she has been involved in grad student advocacy through the Graduate Student and Postdoc Association (GSPA) in Biology, Graduate Recruitment Initiative Team (GRIT) and United Campus Workers of Virginia to help create awareness

regarding the need for a diverse workplace, identify ways to overcome the "leaky" pipeline through the dual goals of recruiting and retaining diverse academics.



Rodrigo Gamboa Pineda

Rodrigo Gamboa Pineda speaks five languages and he finished his BA in International Relations at ITAM, the Mexican MIT. Once he earned his degree he moved to New York City and started his own business in the tourism industry. He also organized concerts in the most emblematic venues of Manhattan and jumped in the professional boxing arena as a promoter/manager until Covid-19 put a pause to that project. He has a special interest in the field of national security, migration and frontiers. He is aware that new strategies to fight the organized drugs cartels are needed due to the high levels of violence that are registered on a daily basis in Mexico due to the high volume of consumption across the border. As a Mexican

citizen and a permanent resident of the United States of America Mr. Gamboa knows that his expertise in both nations give him an advantage to discover new alliances, new ways to fight this cancer and the motivation to have a more connected and peaceful region.



Seanna Viechweg

Seanna Viechweg is a Ph.D. student in the Department of English. She is also a part of the university's inaugural Caribbean Literatures, Arts, and Culture research cluster. Her research focuses on African-American and Caribbean writers, with an emphasis on Black speculative fiction, neo-slave narratives, as well as overlaps with Environmental and Digital

Humanities. After attending Haverford College for her Bachelor of Arts in English and Education, Seanna worked as a Fulbright Student Researcher at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill where she initiated research on Black diasporic futurism. Seanna is also committed to multicultural, culturally relevant, as well as antiracist pedagogy. She looks forward to the ways in which she can continue to work towards diversity and inclusion both in and outside of the classroom during her time at UVA.



Taylor Marhol

Taylor Marhol was born in Green Bay, WI and earned my BS in Biomedical Engineering at the University of Wisconsin - Madison in 2017. Currently, she is a 4th year PhD Candidate in the Biomedical Engineering department at UVA, where she studies cell signaling and heterogeneity in breast cancer. Last year she served as a chair of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on the departmental graduate student board. Outside of work, she enjoys hiking, backpacking, downhill skiing, baking, and spending time with her dog Bruno.



Minglun (Jason) Zhang

Minglun (Jason) Zhang moved to the U.S. from China at the age of 17. He graduated from University of Minnesota – Twin Cities with an undergraduate degree in Chemical Engineering and rotated through various technical, business, operational, and management roles in the oil & gas and retail industry in the next 8 years before entering the MBA and Master in Data Science dual degree program in University of Virginia Darden School of Business and School of Data Science, respectively. During almost all of Jason's professional life, he served in various leadership roles in DEI organizations, from Culture Committee Chair to VP. Jason is excited to continue exploring ways to make meaning impact in various DEI initiatives as a member of the 2021 – 2022 Diversity Influencers Leadership Board.