

MCSP Alumni Newsletter

Spring 2021



Director's Note

Dear MCSP Alumni,

On April 14, current MCSP students, student leaders, and 2020 and 2021 grads gathered via Zoom to mark the end of the 2020-2021 academic year. I was excited to be joined for the occasion by director emeritus David Schoem, former program coordinator Mya Haynes, and former admin assistant Shane Harrell. Two MCSP RAs, Cat Mykolajchuk and AJ Carter, put together a terrific evening full of gratitude and hope, and I invite you to check out the [slideshow](#) for familiar faces. As MCSP's new director, I was inspired to see the ways MCSP has built such a strong community transcending time and space. Once an MCSPer, always an MCSPer.

At MCSP and everywhere else on the planet, it's been a challenging year. MCSP was not insulated from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on and off campus, the tensions around the presidential election, and ongoing police brutality and racial injustice. MCSP worked to engage our students around these issues, through dialogues, community service, and other [public](#)

[events](#). Check out the other stories and photos in this newsletter for student perspectives on this work.

What stood out to the MCSP professional staff this year, however, was our students' and our student leaders' incredible persistence and resilience in the face of uncertainty and disappointment. Despite experiencing most of their classes via Zoom, students persisted and achieved academically and supported each other through study groups and backpacking parties. Though many of our volunteer opportunities were curtailed for public health reasons, our students provided abundant academic support to middle schoolers in a virtual format and were so successful we plan to continue the program with our partner teacher next year. A spring walk-a-thon both brought attention to the [ongoing water crisis in Flint](#) and provided a way to build community among MCSPer scattered across the globe. Despite Zoom fatigue, students gathered for movies, game nights, yoga, and dialogues online—and were grateful to be part of such a caring community during a difficult year.

As spring begins in earnest here in Ann Arbor, my thoughts turn to new beginnings: to commencement, to summer, to the next academic year. But I'm also grateful to look back on the past year, to appreciate the challenges we've faced, the ways we've grown, and the relationships we've built in spite of it all. To you, our MCSP alumni who carry MCSpirit into the world wherever you go, I extend particularly warm gratitude for your ongoing interest and support, and I look forward to connecting with many of you in person when conditions permit.

In peace and hope,

Christine Modey, Ph.D., Director

cmodey@umich.edu



Associate Director's Note

Hello MCSP Alumni!

I hope you and your families are flourishing. We here in MCSP Virtual are doing well. I am renewed to see the Signs of Spring in Ann Arbor.

How wonderful it is this time of year to see small green shoots making their way up to the earth's surface to reach the sunlight.

The warmer breezes, spring showers, and longer days help us to start to Think Spring!

Our caring for our friends, our communities, and ourselves is akin to the care of a devoted gardener tending her plants.

Let us be mindful of the tender green shoots of friendship and community and let us nourish and care for them tenderly so that their roots may go deep and wide.

And as always, remember the words of George Washington Carver, a formerly enslaved person who became a giant in the STEM fields. He said "A weed is just a plant that is growing in the wrong place."

Wherever you are, sow your goodness. They will surely blossom in due season.

Be well,

Wendy A. Woods, M.S.

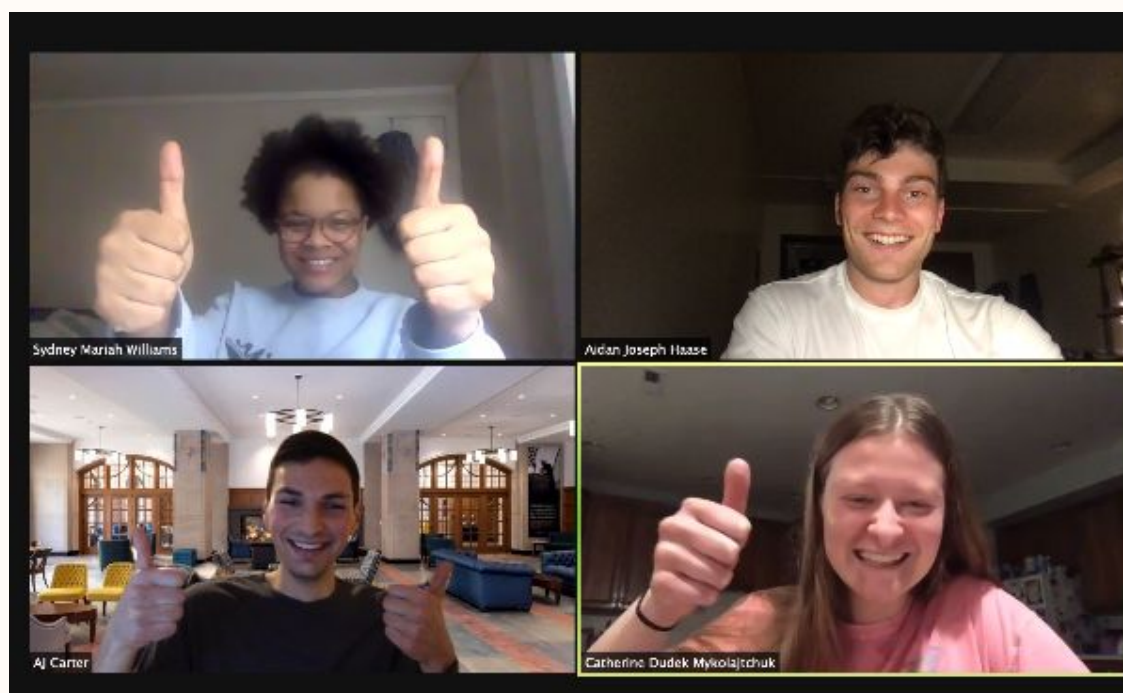
Associate Director / Adjunct Lecturer

Michigan Community Scholars Program (MCSP)

University of Michigan

RA Reflection

by Aidan Haase, MCSP RA



The MCSP community in West Quad has remained so strong during the pandemic, and I am proud of how hard we have all worked to continue to grow, learn, and bond during this time. We started off the Fall 2020 semester with four RAs and around 125 MCSP first-years and sophomore student leaders living in the community; we also had many students and leaders living in Ann Arbor off-campus and at home around the world. We ended the Winter 2021 semester with one RA and around 20 MCSP West Quad residents (with only a total of 150 students living across all of West Quad). Life in the dorms was quite different than past semesters, as there was a limit to the number of residents allowed in a given room with masks mandatory at all times. During the Fall semester all common areas in West Quad were closed, including hall lounges. In the Winter semester, study rooms in West Quad opened back up but everything else remained closed and all students lived in single rooms. Aside from missing out on all in-person activities (low ropes course, Natural Area Preservation, many volunteering events and community building activities), we were able to conduct much of MCSP in a virtual format.

One of the highlights for many of the first-years was ALA 102, with online lectures by Associate Director Wendy Woods and online discussion sections facilitated by the RAs. The first years were able to continue to meet new faces and interact with students living outside of West Quad, in addition to having a space to talk about social identities, privilege, readings, etc. We were also able to do some activities outside as the weather permitted, such as sports, rock painting, walks and ice cream runs, and more. During the Winter semester we were able to have socially-distanced in-person activities inside, and we did some movie nights, game nights, and study nights.

Despite the challenging time, we were still able to have a great year and as a 3rd-year MCSPer, it made me proud watching our community grow in a similar way as in non-covid years. Our new director, Christine Modey has helped so much in shaping our community this year, in addition to Wendy and the rest of the MCSP full-time staff, and we are all so grateful for their support and efforts.

The PACS Team Highlights

by Bill Alt, Program Coordinator for Community Service



Through service and reflection, MCSP promotes community engagement and values deep connections helping our students realize and understand their place in the community and the complexities of justice and solidarity. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has made doing community engagement a challenge, but in laying bare the stark inequities in our world, it has reinforced the necessity of that work. We have had to ask how do we engage with the community when the health crisis prevents contact and direct service? PACS has creatively confronted this challenge this year with flexibility, resilience, and acceptance.

Unable to lead direct service opportunities in the fall, PACS still connected first year students to the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti community. We introduced first year students to a wide variety of community leaders for individual conversations helping students understand the gifts and challenges of this place. Students had conversations with government leaders, education professionals, religious leaders, business leaders, community activists, health-care workers, and social service providers.

We were also able to grow our Scarlett Middle School initiative this year. Because we were not able to visit classrooms in-person, we were constrained by traveling to the school, allowing more students to participate. Over twenty students virtually visited classrooms at Scarlett, building relationships with early adolescent youth and providing additional resources to teachers. We're proud that PACS was honored with the [Michigan Difference Student Leadership K-12 Award](#) for their mentoring work with Scarlett Middle School and Ypsilanti International Elementary School.

With many of our established community partners unable to use volunteers, we explored opportunities to serve remotely. PACS developed a catalogue of virtual service opportunities connecting students with partners such as [Jewish Family Services](#), [Detroit Disability Power](#) and [826 Michigan](#). We also partnered with [Asylum Connect](#), researching resources and services for refugees who identify as LGBTQ.

We culminated our year of service with a virtual walk-a-thon in March to educate about the Flint water crisis and highlight the work of our student developed organization, the [Flint Justice Partnership](#). We challenged ourselves to walk 55 miles (the distance from West Quad to Flint) over thirty days. Using the MoveSpring app, we shared pictures of our walks, information about Flint and the water crisis, and tracked our progress. In the end, we walked over 3,000 miles as a group.

WolveReaders Reflection
by Bill Alt, Program Coordinator for Community Service



Throughout the 2020-21 school year, MCSP's WolveReaders partnered with two 5th grade classrooms at Ypsilanti International Elementary School. Led by student leaders Lydia Goff and Trinity Pryor, WolveReaders had to pivot with the virtual platform. With weekly letter exchanges and biweekly Zoom visits, MCSPers and the 5th graders were able to build strong connections during a challenging virtual school year, in which social interaction has been strained. Lydia Goff, states, "I am so grateful for the opportunity to have served as one of the co-presidents of WolveReaders this year. I had two pen-pals, Liyah and Malani, and enjoyed getting to know them through their letters and our visits on Zoom. Watching the pen-pal relationships strengthen as the school year progressed between my fellow MCSPers and the 5th graders was incredibly rewarding."

Walk-a-thon Reflection
by Jordan Manley, Program Assistant for Community Service



Community and service are the backbone of MCSP, and despite the pandemic and related obstacles, PACS was determined to uphold those important values. Between Zoom fatigue and people living in different states, PACS had to brainstorm ways in to connect with community partners, such as the Flint Justice Partnership, without doing in-person service. In response to the difficulties presented by this unique year, PACS created MCSP's first ever Walk-a-thon. By providing resources and activities related to the Flint Water Crisis, PACS began the discussion and education of this incredibly serious issue, which is a necessary first step to serving the Flint community. The walk-a-thon provided us a way to still engage with our participants and partners outside of a virtual setting. This walk-a-thon helped create a better sense of community within MCSP by encouraging people to get outside and go on walks with one another. We were able share pictures of all the amazing places our walks took us. It was amazing to see all of us come together, no matter where we were physically, during such a disconnected time.

My Year in MCSP

by Cameron Moy, MCSP First-Year Student



Starting college amidst a global pandemic, I had many worries before arriving on campus: how would I meet new friends or find my niche? How would I leave a lasting impact on my community? How would I create a unique college experience? While addressing each of these questions took time and experimentation, MCSP certainly created the positive culture, albeit virtual, I was both looking for and needed. Going into 2020, I knew I wanted to be civically engaged in the presidential election since I would not be 18 before November 3rd. When the opportunity arose, I joined the Voter Engagement Committee, where about six MCSPers worked to increase youth voter turnout in the MCSP and University of Michigan communities. I enjoyed this work so much so that I went on to volunteer at the City Clerk's office, registering Ann Arbor voters. Despite this being a virtual year, MCSP has been the foundation for my college friendships, service, and experiences. I have loved every opportunity to engage with the community and will be returning next year as a peer advisor for community service, where I hope to continue MCSP's legacy of civic engagement and voter turnout work.

Intergroup Relations Council by Christine Modey and Bill Alt



This year's Intergroup Relations Council worked hard to build intergroup understanding around issues of power and privilege in the MCSP community. Their work began even before the school year started and continued right up to the very end, despite changes in leadership and all the challenges of virtual programming.

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in late May 2020, the Intergroup Relations Council invited student leaders and incoming first-year students to a dialogue about this tragic national event. We are grateful to them for opening this important conversation in our community. Later in the summer, IRC student leaders held another well-attended dialogue around educational inequity. And in the fall, they hosted a dialogue around the criminal legal system that first-year participants appreciated as an important part of their time at MCSP. In December, MCSP staff and students gathered to celebrate program coordinator Mya Haynes's master's graduation and to thank her for her three semesters of work with the IRC and peer mentors.

The IRC team transitioned our annual MLK Day Circle of Unity to a virtual format, with engaging performances by Joe Reilly and Julie Beutel, as well as our new program coordinator Samantha Williams, who sang "Lift Every Voice." Students, faculty, and staff contributed to an "[I Have a Dream](#)" video montage, we listened to King's famous speech and audience members shared reflections via [Padlet](#), and we heard civil rights stories from nursing home residents near Boston, who joined our celebration via Zoom.

IRC wrapped up the year with a final dialogue in early April about the Walk-a-Thon, in which almost 40 MCSP students participated and which raised awareness about the Flint water crisis. Participants came to share their reflections about walking together as a community and about the benefits and limitations of the walk-a-thon as a form of community building, advocacy, and activism.

My Year in MCSP

by Atiya Farooque, MCSP First-Year Student



I owe so much of my college experience to MCSP. This year especially, being involved required a lot of initiative. I regularly scoured the emails for opportunities, and my time on campus was so much more fulfilling because of it. I remember doing so many activities, like painting rocks for Growing Hope, playing Among Us with LSA Dean Anne Curzan, and participating in Wellness Wednesdays. It helped me feel closer to other MCSPers in a time where it was really hard to stay connected.

MCSP also exposed me to more long-term initiatives, like WolveReaders, Scarlett Middle School volunteering, 826Michigan, a voter registration job, and Multicultural Council. I think it was important for me to try a lot of different things so that I could find what I was most passionate about. For example, I unexpectedly won a logo competition for the Washtenaw County prosecutor's office that has ultimately led to multiple paid graphic design projects and a summer internship. I didn't know how I could use graphic design as a means to promote social justice until the opportunity was presented to me by MCSP. I am so thankful for all of the opportunities given to me, and I'm excited to continue being a part of MCSP as a student leader in the Intergroup Relations Council!

The PBU Team Highlights

by Journey Stockton, Program Coordinator for Programming Board



The 2020-2021 academic year was one of the most uniquely challenging experiences for the members of the MCSP Programming Board. We initially struggled with low attendance and engagement, as other members of the MCSP community suffered from Zoom fatigue and other challenges related to the virtual school year. Both semesters, the members of the Programming Board became even more creative in order to foster a virtual environment conducive to community-building, and many of the most popular events hosted by PB&U in years prior were adapted to fit within the virtual realm. For example, our Health and Wellness Chair, Lydia Goff, hosted frequent Wellness Wednesday events (e.g., virtual yoga, gratitude journaling, game nights) to allow MCSPers to de-stress and connect with their peers. When safe, PB&U hosted small, in-person events that allowed members of MCSP to connect on a more personal level. Our first-year students joined us during Welcome Week for rock-painting, an activity in which students shared their hopes for the future and visualized MCSP core values. PB&U worked incredibly hard this school year to provide the first-year students with the best possible experience, and although this year was certainly not what we expected it to be, I am immensely proud of the PB&U team for consistently demonstrating their resilience and commitment to fulfilling the mission of MCSP.

South Africa Trip Planned



We're very happy to announce that MCSP has entered into a partnership with the [Global Scholars Program](#), the [UM African Studies Center](#), and [Inkululeko](#), a non-profit organization operating in Makhanda, South Africa, to begin planning for a student experiential learning opportunity in South Africa in May, 2022!

We're planning for a three-week program in Makhanda designed for students from our UM communities to engage in intercultural exchange and service learning with and in support of Inkululeko and its community stakeholders. The planning is just beginning and more details will follow, but we're excited that current MCSP students, student leaders, and on-campus alumni will have this international travel and service opportunity in the coming year.

MCSP intends to provide a full scholarship to each MCSP student selected for the trip, so that cost is not a barrier to participation. If you'd like to support this new initiative, we invite you to [contribute to our Strategic Fund](#). Select the option "I would like to make a comment" on the checkout page and type "South Africa" to earmark your gift.

Look for more updates in the fall!

[Support Trip](#)

Connect with MCSP



We welcome opportunities to connect MCSP alumni with current MCSP students! There are several ways you can get involved:

1. Participate in a panel of "**Careers for the Common Good.**" Each event will focus on a different career and feature a few alums (and possibly other folks, too) who are pursuing that career in a way that lives out MCSP values of civic engagement, service to the community, and diverse democracy. We'd especially like to feature careers our students are most interested in (for instance, medicine, engineering, and business) but if you're doing something else (journalism? education?), we'd love to hear from you, too! Please send me an email at cmodey@umich.edu if you'd like to share your experiences and inspire the next generation of MCSPers!

2. We'd also like to invite you to participate in an **alumni mentor match program**. If you are interested in being matched with a first-year student with similar background or interests as you, please complete this simple [Google Form](#), and we'll get you connected this summer or fall.

3. Finally, we'd love to hear your story! You can email us an **alumni update** at mcsprogram@umich.edu, along with a photo, or you can simply complete this [Google Form](#) and upload your photo there. We'll feature you and your story on our website!



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