

DIVISION OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

BOARD ON CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES
SPRING BOARD MEETING

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, SEMINAR

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

MAY 1, 2024



Dr. Daniela DiGiacomo (she/her), is an Assistant Professor in the School of Information Science at the University of Kentucky. DiGiacomo is a Learning Scientist who uses a community-based approach to study youth learning and development. Her research focuses on the investigation and design of educational environments that center children and youth's lived experiences, interests, and expertise. She works closely with Kentucky school districts, youth organizations, and community-based programs to develop research-practice partnerships aimed at collaboratively improving learning opportunities for young people, especially those from minoritized communities. In particular, DiGiacomo's program of research centers on the importance of student voice, information literacy, and civic engagement as part of young people's development, in and outside of the classroom. Some of DiGiacomo's recent publications have appeared in the journals *Democracy & Education*, *Information & Learning Sciences*, *Educational Researcher*, *Children, Youth & Environments*, *Journal of Children and Media*, and the *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*.



Nick Blumenthal (he/him), is an international food systems youth activist and currently represents national food security interests on the National Environmental Youth Advisory Council to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. As an international consultant to corporate and government agencies, he advises agricultural development projects across Africa, Europe, and Asia. He has previously been invited to address the United Nations Committee on World Food Security on behalf of the international private-sector, elected to represent global youth by peers across six continents, and has engaged with the White House on national food and nutrition security initiatives. As a researcher at the International Food Policy Research Institute and University of Florida, he has been invited to present his work on agricultural development economics and nutritional biochemistry at leading institutions within the U.S. and worldwide alongside research leaders and Nobel laureates alike. Nick represents North America on several international youth agricultural advocacy campaigns, including the NextGen Ag Impact Network

and Act4Food Campaign. He leads global agricultural microfinancing efforts at an international financial technology non-profit foundation and has been invited to speak at numerous multilateral forums around the world, bringing the voices of farmers and youth to policymakers. Internationally, he serves as the global youth representative on the World Food Prize Foundation's Council of Advisors. Within his community, Nick leads local community garden nutrition outreach efforts and serves as the Co-Chair and Student Body Representative for the University of Florida Presidential Food Service Advisory Committee. Nick is internationally recognized as a Schwarzman and Fulbright Scholar.



Jacob Brittingham (he/him), is a freshman at The George Washington University studying political science & human services and social justice. Born in Boswell, OK on the Choctaw Nation Reservation and an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Jacob understands what adversity and perseverance looks like. As a first-generation Native student from a rural area studying in Washington, D.C. he understands how important and crucial it is to use his voice for himself and those who may not be heard. Jacob has experience in working with GW student government officials to present a Native America Heritage Month Presentation & Celebration. He has lobbied before Oklahoma congressional leadership for TRiO Program funding for first-gen, low-income students nationwide. He currently works as a Student Research Assistant for the George Washington University School of Business: International Institute of Tourism Studies' Choctaw Nation Destination Stewardship Project. He serves as the Secretary of the GW SINAR (Students for Indigenous & Native American Rights) Organization and as a legislative assistant for the GW Student Government Association Committee of Community, Advocacy, and Inclusion. Jacob is passionate about raising awareness for underrepresented communities, especially in the politics & government field. Being a Native student at a private university with less than .5% Indigenous population, he understands how important it is to include every voice at the table.



Raima Dutt (she/her), is an advocate for equitable education, driven to uphold democratic principles. Attending Jefferson County Public Schools since Kindergarten, she has noticed flaws in the system that have allowed a select group of students to succeed, while the rest fall behind. Dutt serves as a Cross-Org Coordinator & Research Lead for the Kentucky Student Voice Team (KSVT), directing a team of 100+ students. She joined during the construction of KSVT's Race to Learn Survey, serving as an analyst on over 10,000 Kentucky middle and high school students' responses to a survey on race, ethnicity, and school climate. She quickly jumped in to help with other statewide educational research projects. Her team's research has been presented at over 10 local and international conferences. Her vision extends out of KSVT as well. As a Team Captain of the Louisville Youth Philanthropy Council, she guides a team of 15 Louisville students to create a team mission, conduct 7 interviews, and grant \$10,000 to a local nonprofit. Additionally, Dutt serves as the Chair of the Kentucky Department of Education's (KDE) Commissioner's Student Advisory Council—working with KDE staff and the Education Commissioner to develop agendas for the council that provides feedback to improve KY public education. The council produced *A Focus on School Safety* policy brief, outlining preventative student recommendations. Within her school, Dutt is a Captain of the Speech Team, President of Girl Up, and a Kentucky Governor's Scholar. Dutt is a senior at duPont Manual High School.



Folashade Epebinu (she/her), is a student majoring in general engineering. She began her student advocacy and leadership journey in her 9th-grade year and since then has brought her advocacy from the county level as a Workshop Coordinator with the Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association to the state level as the current Secretary of the Maryland Youth Advisory Council. Her advocacy initiatives span from advocating for affordable childcare which won her the title 2024 Montgomery County Councilmember of the Day, to other areas including athletics, youth mental health and well-being, STEM education, career readiness, and persevering/protecting the environment. From her previous advocacy experiences, and most recent experience as a Senate page to the Maryland General Assembly, Folashade has gained immense knowledge about legislation and the legislative process. Fueled by her passion for elevating student needs, Folashade has provided testimony to state and federal legislators, and her local board of education on numerous topics including financial literacy, increased emotional intelligence education in the health curriculum, driver education, increasing mental health and well-being resources, and more. Furthermore, she has represented the student voice as a student representative on various committees in Montgomery County including the Superintendent's Budget Advisory Committee, MCPS Health Curriculum Advisory Committee, and the MCPS District-Wide Assessment Committee.



Jordyne Lewis (she/her), is currently serving her 3rd term on Sandy Hook Promise's National Youth Advisory Board, advocating for gun violence prevention and working to promote awareness for suicide and mental health. She has written an article for Teen Vogue, lobbied on Capitol Hill for violence prevention funding, and spoken on multiple panels and town halls, including the Center for American Progress' Gun Violence Prevention Summit last December. She is president of her school's SAVE club, her FFA chapter, and co-president of Mu Alpha Theta. In her free time, she likes to bake, garden, and spend time with family and friends. She will be a freshman at Elon University in the fall, where she has been accepted into their

Accelerated 3+1 Business Degree Program.



Gabbie Listana (she/her), is the Vice-Chair of the San Francisco Youth Commission. She represents her home district, District 6. Born and raised in San Francisco, she developed a passion for youth advocacy in the city at a young age, eventually joining the Youth Commission in 2020 at 12 years old. This term is her fourth term on the San Francisco Youth Commission. Some issues she has focused on throughout her time on the commission include LGBTQ+ youth housing and education, language access in schools and city services, food and nutritional insecurity, combating youth drug use, and increasing youth civic engagement. Outside of the Youth Commission, Gabbie is a member of Dear Asian Youth's National Policy Team as an Education Policy Associate. Additionally, she is currently a sophomore in high school. At school, she is part of her school's Varsity Policy Debate team, choir, theater, and is a leader in her school's Filipino affinity club. Gabbie hopes to pursue a career in public policy to give back to her community and uplift disadvantaged

individuals, especially youth.



Don McClain (they/them), aka “Don the Don”, is a youth advocate, entrepreneur, and multifaceted artist who attends the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute and plans on attending Morgan State University in the fall of 2024. At BPI they take on numerous leadership positions such as the Violet Club’s (a [Violet Project](#) Cohort) Secretary. Outside of school, as someone who happens to be Queer & Non-binary, they use their voice and artistic ability to uplift their fellow peers & promote healthy community relationships! Part of their advocacy entails being an example for youth who want to do something other than the well-known jobs that interest everyone but them; they do this by dismantling stereotypes and being their true, dancing, artistic self. As the President of Johns Hopkins University’s Center for Adolescent Health’s Youth Advisory Board, they lead a team of growing youth working to fight against the social inequities their communities face, while also running their own social media management company, [The D.O.N. Way](#), which aims to help entrepreneurs manage their social media presence and connect with their target audiences. They are an example of a “leader of leaders”. And they want YOU to know that it’s okay not to be OK!



Anopa Musoni (he/him), is a Kentucky Governor Scholar who firmly believes in the power of young people to inspire change in their local communities and to contribute towards a more just and inclusive world. A graduate of the Leadership Lexington Youth Program (LLYP), Anopa is currently serving on the Kentucky Department of Education Commissioner’s Student Advisory Council, a position he is using to amplify the voices of students across Kentucky. As a first-generation immigrant, his background has also helped him develop a passion for helping students from underprivileged groups. Through his leadership in the Brotherhood mentoring program at Lafayette High School, Anopa has helped to educate teachers and other students about the challenges facing minority students, especially those from immigrant and refugee families. Through his involvement with the Kentucky Student Voice Team, where he serves as the Podcast Coordinator and a Board member, Anopa has led the “Get Schooled” podcast initiative, which was created as a platform for Kentucky students to talk about the challenges they face in their schools and communities in general.



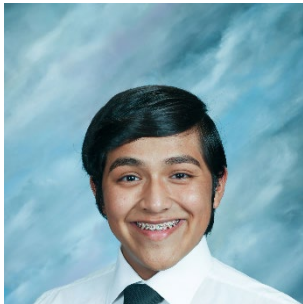
Minhal Nazeer (she/her), joined the Kentucky Student Voice Team (KSVT) in November of 2021, joining on as a project member facilitating the development of the Race to Learn Report. This report was aimed to gauge how students felt about conversations surrounding race and ethnicity in their schools, and it elicited 10,725 responses from 114 of Kentucky’s 120 counties. It later went on to be presented to the Kentucky Board of Education, University of Kentucky’s Civil Rights Institute, the National Center for Families and Learning, and more. Now, Minhal serves as a Co-Cross Organizational Coordinator and Research Lead at the KSVT, as well as an Editor for their journalism platform, the New Edu. Their newest research report, Time to Talk, serves as a follow up to Race to Learn, exploring student stories on racial and ethnic exclusion in their schools. With the New Edu, Minhal has authored 5 articles while editing and mentoring other student pieces along the way. Beyond KSVT, she serves as a Founder and Leader of her school’s first Social Justice Club. She is also a United States Senate Youth Program Finalist, representing Kentucky at their annual Washington Week as 1 of 2 delegates who will go on to receive a scholarship from the foundation.



Chelsea Osei (she/her) serves on the Board of Education as a Student Board Member. In addition, she serves as a Board Member for her school's Student Equity Action Committee and a Founder of the AP Advisory Board. Outside of school, she was chosen as one of the two delegates for the United States Senate Youth Program for Illinois, and she is an Executive Director for Living Room Conversations' Youth Council. In her free time, she enjoys baking, playing tennis, and conversing with new people.



Maddie Powell (she/her), is pursuing a degree in Agricultural Education at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. She serves on the National 4-H Young Alumni Advisory Committee and the National 4-H Work Readiness Leadership Team. During her time in 4-H as a Junior Leader and Indiana 4-H Teen Teacher, youth development became a passion of Maddie's. She was a content contributor and panelist in the 2022 Helping Youth Thrive, Positive Youth Development Academy, National Conference for 4-H Professionals focused on Creating a Path to Youth Emotional Wellness: A 4-H PYD Academy on Youth Mental Health. Maddie has traveled to Washington, D.C., numerous times, advocating for our youth and agriculture to our nation's leaders. Maddie knows firsthand the importance of teaching her peers and our youth important life skills in healthy living, leadership, and civic engagement. As a resident assistant in the Honors College, she takes the time to have conversations and create programs that build confidence and a solid foundation in her residents' daily lives. She provides the resources to become engaged in the world around them locally, nationally, and beyond. Maddie strives to help others be the best version of themselves by providing the skills and resources to all.



Jerry Torres (he/him), born and raised in Pasadena, California, is a sophomore standing attending Pasadena City College. He was a part of multiple organizations that centralize their ideologies on college bound opportunities and resources for underrepresented youth of color and marginalized communities. He is in proud productions of Pasadena City College's TRIO Programs such as Upward Bound Math Science and SSS. Outside of his academics, he dedicates the majority of his time to Pasadena City College's Puente Project as their student assistant. Previously, Jerry held the position as a Research Fellow for the Los Angeles Scholars Investment Fund (LASIF) Action Research Fellowship led by the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University for redesigning the next iteration of LASIF by using student's experiences on college access in our communities. He feels empowered by his communities and believes in uplifting marginalized youth to strive for excellence and breaking institutionalized barriers.



Trinity R. Tyson (she/her), is currently a freshman at Napa Valley College pursuing an AS-T degree in Business Administration and is expected to graduate in 2025. Her commitment to social issues is demonstrated through her role as a Student Assistant in the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) at Napa Valley College, where she plays a pivotal role in supporting campus-wide inclusivity initiatives. Previously, Trinity was a Research Intern with the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities at Stanford University. Here, she contributed significantly to a research project to improve student experiences and outcomes within the Sequoia Union High School District. Her responsibilities included conducting interviews, analyzing data, and presenting findings to key stakeholders, highlighting her strong analytical and communication skills. Beyond her academic and professional pursuits, Trinity volunteers for the KSwish Foundation, helping organize basketball clinics and fundraise for scholarships for families impacted by cancer and other hardships. Her dedication to service also extends to her involvement with the E.Q.U.I.P Club (2018-2022) and local community events. Trinity's leadership and commitment to service make her a distinguished participant in educational and community-oriented initiatives.



Dashia Wright (she/her), is currently a master's student in counseling psychology at the University of Kentucky. She supports the Neighborhood Healers Project in Lexington, KY where they equip local leaders with mental and participated in a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project as a high school student in Richmond, CA. Before starting her master's program, she worked as a research assistant in Professor Emily Ozer's YPAR lab group at UC Berkeley's School of Public Health. In this role, Dashia supported a state-wide initiative to scale up youth voice/YPAR impact on CA state policy. She has facilitated YPAR technical assistance workshops and trainings for students and educators across CA.