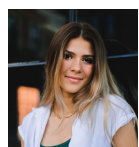


# Meet the 2024 Ralph Bunche Summer Institute Scholars

INDIA SIMMONS | PROGRAM MANAGER, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION PROGRAMS

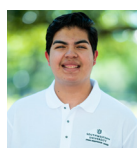
The Ralph Bunche Summer Institute Program (RBSI) is an annual, intensive five-week program held at Duke University under the direction of Dr. Paula D. McClain. RBSI is designed to introduce aspiring political scientists to the world of doctoral study. This is the 38th year of the program. The 2024 institute was held May 26–June 27, 2024. Please join us in congratulating the 2024 scholars!

## NATALIA ADAMS



Natalia Adams is a rising senior at Wake Forest University majoring in politics and international affairs with minors in anthropology and Spanish. She is a four-time Dean's List recipient and has been awarded the Porter B. Byrum and Andrew B. McMerty scholarships. Additionally, she is a member of the Pi Sigma Alpha Political Science Honor Society. Natalia greatly enjoys conducting research and hopes to make valuable contributions to the political science discipline following graduation. She is primarily interested in understanding how policy affects marginalized communities both in the United States and abroad. She has previously researched how United States policy impacted the current humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and most recently conducted research on what affects discrepancies in authoritarian regimes' natural disaster policy. After graduation, Natalia hopes to attend graduate school and gain a specialization in environmental policy, as she is enthusiastic about environmental justice and believes that understanding the mechanisms behind political decisions is essential to creating lasting change.

## ADRIAN GONZALEZ



Adrian Gonzalez is a first-generation student at Southwestern University where he double majors in political science and English. He is currently working on an honors thesis prospectus in which he plans to investigate the rise of MORENA from a social movement to a triumphant political party in Mexico's 2018 elections. As a research assistant for Dr. Emily Sydnor, he has helped develop a paper entitled "Unraveling State Identity in the United States," which will be presented at the MPSA conference. His research interests include Latin American and Mexican politics, social movements, party politics, ethnic politics, voting behavior, and organized crime. On campus, he has had several positions to help achieve and maintain a more inclusive environment, including co-president of the Latinos Unidos organization, treasurer of the Hispanic and Latino Organization, Diversity & Inclusion chair for the Iota chapter of the Kappa Sigma fraternity, and co-leader for the campus' first-generation support program. After graduating from Southwestern University, Adrian plans on attending a PhD program to be able to research and teach

about Mexican politics.

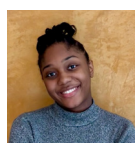
## FERNANDA GONZALEZ



Fernanda Gonzalez is a rising senior at Wellesley College majoring in political science with a minor in computer science. As an undergraduate, she has dedicated the past two years to conducting research with MIT's Election Data & Science Lab (MEDSL).

Her research focuses on the impact of linguistic accessibility on political engagement, specifically by analyzing the availability of online multilingual election-related information for individuals facing language barriers. As a Mexican-American from Texas, Fernanda is motivated by firsthand experiences to bring about positive political change and representation for marginalized communities at the state and local levels. Her research interests focus on Latinx voter turnout and the factors influencing the success of progressive minority candidates in local state politics. She is committed to addressing language accessibility as a significant barrier to political participation, particularly for non-native-English voters who often lack tailored election materials and are frequently overlooked. After graduation, Fernanda hopes to pursue a doctoral degree in political science. She believes that genuine and impactful change starts at the grassroots level and aims to connect her research to meaningful advancements in political representation.

## LAIKA JEROME



Laika Jerome is a rising senior and first-generation student at Hofstra University. She is majoring in political science and global studies and minoring in civic engagement, criminology, and philosophy of law. On campus, Laika is a fellow of the Center for Civic Engagement and has worked on several efforts such as voter registration, comprehensive voter packets, and event planning. In addition, Laika is a member of the Rabinowitz Honors College and a presidential scholar. Throughout her collegiate career, Laika has maintained the dean's list. Additionally, in 2023, she participated as a host for Hofstra's Presidential Conference. Furthermore, Laika has been inducted into Phi Eta Sigma, Pi Sigma Alpha, and will be inducted into Gamma Theta Upsilon. In the future, Laika hopes to embark on research connecting past phenomena of political extremism in the US and the rest of the world to modern ones. She is also interested in research regarding the politics of countries in Africa and Asia. Upon graduation, Laika plans to pursue a joint JD/PhD degree.

## HAYDEN JOHNSON



Hayden Johnson is a rising senior double majoring in political science and French at Loyola Marymount University. Recently, he presented a study on the intersection between location and racial identity, where he examined whether or not racial-linked fate varies based on (self-reported) locational identity, at the 2024 National Conference for Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS). He currently serves as a peer advisor in the dean's office. On campus, he has been involved in several different multicultural clubs and has helped plan teach-ins which unified different minority student organizations who have faced similar forms of oppression. Hayden holds a strong belief in unity among oppressed groups and that the fight for freedom needs to be a global effort. In his work, he hopes to draw parallels between marginalized groups to fight back against the forces of power. Last summer, Hayden studied in Paris during the protests following the shooting of a 17-year-old boy; this experience allowed him to gain firsthand insight into the global struggles of Black and Brown people. After graduation, Hayden plans to pursue a doctoral degree in political science, to become a professor and writer specializing in critical political theory.

## KENNEDY MCCLINTON



Kennedy McClinton is a junior at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign majoring in political science with a concentration in citizen politics and minoring in journalism. Notable titles such as Political Science Honors Program recipient, Illinois Promise Scholar, and recipient of the President's Award Programs Honors scholarship highlight Kennedy's commitment to academic excellence. Previously serving as a LAS FYE Team intern, Kennedy will resume this role in fall 2025, contributing to creating a supportive environment for incoming freshmen. As a co-lead of Black Students for Revolution, treasurer of UniPlace Community Service Organization, and a Shelley Ambassador for the Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center, Kennedy passionately advocates for equity and inclusion in academic and community spaces. Currently conducting research with Professor Jeffery Mondak on the frameworks of intersectionality as it pertains to the uniqueness of Black women's political attitudes, Kennedy aspires to pursue a master's in African American studies and a PhD in political science. With research interests in political behavior, comparative politics, and African American studies, Kennedy aims to advance the presence of individuals like them in academia, ensuring their voices resonate within communities.

## MAYA MIKELSON



Maya Mikelson is a rising senior at the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor majoring in political science and minoring in data science. While at Michigan, she researched the ratification of human rights treaties with Professor Chris Fariss and developed her knowledge of various quantitative analysis tools including R. As a rising junior, she participated in an NSF-funded Research Experience for Undergraduates Summer Program in Accountability, Behavior & Conflict in Democratic Politics at Vanderbilt University with Professor Emily Ritter. In this program, Maya completed an independent project examining the effect of militarization on interstate conflict. She presented her results from this work in a poster session at the 2023 APSA meeting in Los Angeles, CA. Maya is a data editor for the

Michigan Daily, responsible for leading the Data Team in data analysis, data visualization, and publishing data-based journalism. As part of her work for the Michigan Daily, she received a national 3rd place award for best interactive infographic. After graduation, she plans to complete a PhD in political science focusing on international conflict and security as well as the effects of minority representation and rights and indigenous group's sovereignty on government stability.

## KYSHAN NICHOLS-SMITH



Kyshan Nichols-Smith is a rising senior at Morehouse College where he is studying political science with a double minor in urban studies and international studies. At the college, Kyshan shares his passion for research and quantitative methods as a teaching assistant in a course focused on political science research methods and as a tutor in RStudio. He also works for the Morehouse Community Data Fellowship as a liaison between professors and aspiring student researchers via the Sloan Foundation. Kyshan serves as a research assistant for two projects that are working to publish that focus on Chinese investment in Sub-Saharan Africa and China's role in the global battery supply chain. Outside of neo-colonialism and African development, his primary research interests involve Black American political participation and political disenfranchisement in marginalized communities. He explores these interests in a soon to be published paper written with University of California, San Diego faculty and PhD students entitled: "The Racial Gap over Trust in Elections (and how to close it)." Kyshan is also dedicated to improving levels of political engagement and education among his peers through his service as vice-president of the Morehouse College Democrats and as a field coordinator for HBCU Votes. Upon graduation from Morehouse, Kyshan hopes to pursue a PhD in political science.

## KARIS RIVERS



Karis Rivers is a rising senior at the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor majoring in political science and minoring in quantitative methods in social sciences. Throughout her academic career, she has maintained status as a James B. Angell Scholar, earning university honors for five consecutive semesters, and is currently a member of the Pi Sigma Alpha Political Science Honor Society. Karis is dedicated to social justice and equitable education demonstrated through her participation in campus organizations such as working as a peer mentor for the Michigan Community Scholars Program and a columnist for "Michigan in Color," a section of the Michigan Daily. She currently works as a College Access & Success Ambassador at UM's Center for Educational Outreach where she is able to interact with and guide others from typically excluded backgrounds. Informed by her identity and passion for education, her research interests center on the intersections of the criminal justice system and education and the experiences of marginalized people within these institutions. After graduating, Karis plans to pursue a doctoral degree in political science.

## JESÚS SANCHEZ

Jesús Sanchez is a BA and MA political science student at the University of New Mexico. A 2024 Truman Scholarship finalist and 2024 Clauve Outstanding Senior, Jesús is passionate about basic needs and welfare policy. Jesús has previously hosted a conference, sponsored by New Mexico's Higher Education Department, about food and housing insecurity on college campuses and what student



leaders can do to advocate for the basic needs of their peers. He is also a member of the UNM Political Science Honors program. His previous experience interning for New Mexico's Legislative Education Study Committee and Think New Mexico helped him develop his interest in working in public policy. Jesús has previously done research through the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship about how effective different forms of welfare are at reducing income inequality within a country. After graduation, Jesús intends to pursue a PhD in education policy, with the goal of working for New Mexico's Higher Education Department as a Policy Analyst and advocating for the physical and mental well-being of college students, staff, and faculty.

## BREANNAH SMALL



Breannah Small is a student at the University of Arkansas majoring in political science, journalism, and African and African American studies with minors in legal studies and history. She is an assistant research manager for the University Advanced Research Team (UART), president of the UARK Young Democratic Socialists of America, 2nd vice president of the UARK National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Grammateus of the Phi Theta Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., and is an AAST Study Abroad Ambassador. She is also a member of the Fulbright Honors College. She is working on her senior thesis about environmental racism, inspired by her upbringing in a predominantly Black area with poor environmental legislation. This spring, Breannah had the opportunity to represent her university at the National Conference of Black Political Scientists. Breannah's goal is to obtain a doctoral degree in political science focusing her research on Black diasporic studies, intersectionality, political communication, and political behavior. She hopes to gain expertise and contribute to addressing pressing social and political issues to promote a more just and equitable society.

## CHRISTINA STAFFORD



Christina Stafford is a rising senior at Elon University, majoring in English and political science with a minor in philosophy, and plans to pursue a doctorate in political science. She is a two-time Elon Black Excellence Awardee and a four-time President's List recipient. Christina is an Elon Lumen Scholar, researching the media's influence on US perceptions of prison abolition, hoping to add to our understanding of this complex issue. Her published work for the Center for American Progress, titled "Long-Term Solutions to the Overincarceration of People with Mental Health Disabilities," further highlights the injustices marginalized groups face in the US criminal

legal system. She served as Elon Honor Fellow's Director of Inclusion and Diversity and currently serves as the vice president for the Elon NAACP college chapter.

## JOSEARMANDO TORRES



Josearmando Torres is a rising senior at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a political science major with minors in statistics, data science, survey research, and data analytics. Josearmando is the business director of Penn's Model Congress, the business manager of Penn Political Review, and a research assistant for Penn's Program on Opinion Research and Election Studies, under the guidance of Dr. Dan Hopkins. He is also a recent inductee of Pi Sigma Alpha-The National Political Science Honor Society. Josearmando has focused his undergraduate studies on public opinion and voting behavior. During his senior year, he will dedicate his senior thesis to understanding the dynamics of Gen Z Latino public opinion and voting behavior. After graduating Josearmando hopes to pursue a PhD in political science and specialize in Latino public opinion. Born and raised on the South Side of Chicago to Mexican immigrant parents, Josearmando hopes to give back to his community by increasing the research on Latino voting behavior and Latino political engagement.

## LAILA WADDELL



Laila Waddell is a rising senior at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University studying political science with a concentration in environmental studies. Laila is a student in the honors college and has been on the chancellor's list for three consecutive years. She has been active in campus life through student organizations and her department. She is the president of the Alpha Alpha Zeta chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Society as well as an active fellow in the NCAT Sector of the National Council of Negro Women. Laila is a Spring '24 initiate to the Zeta Alpha chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated. She has been involved in many civic engagement opportunities throughout the Triad area during her college career. During her college career, Laila has contributed to public policy research, particularly in environmental justice and urban planning in disenfranchised communities. Her work focuses on understanding the intersectionality of environmental issues and social justice in North Carolina, aiming to address systemic inequalities through policy interventions. She has presented her research at conferences such as the Pi Sigma Alpha Research Conference and the Johns Hopkins Richard Macksey National Undergraduate Humanities Research Symposium. Laila Waddell hopes to continue her research while earning her PhD in public policy. ■