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It was great to be back in person this past summer.

The energy and excitement around seeing each other was a positive vibe that hopefully sets the tone for a memorable 2022-23 academic year. One of the highlights of the MOAA Symposium this year aside from the awesome kickoff party at the Skyfall Lounge that celebrated our 21st year as an organization, was the Rising Stars program.

The Rising Stars program is one of MOAA's signature offerings for our membership. It has grown since it started during the 2018-19 year with 18 participants. Now, there has been 59 athletics administrators that have participated in the Rising Stars program, including this year's cohort.

The MOAA Rising Stars program is designed specifically to support the early career of promising minority athletics administrators through educational sessions and workshops.

MOAA recognizes the need to groom and develop young professionals especially since we are the leader

of recruitment, retention and advancement of ethnic minorities in the athletics industry.

The Rising Stars program is another tangible example of MOAA's intentionality in its commitment of investing in its membership and future industry leaders. A glance at the inaugural cohort reveals that some received promotions, changed jobs, and in the case of Denise Brown, was selected as a MOAA Board Member. Ayanna Tweedy, who was part of this year's cohort, recently accepted a job as the director of athletics at Rose-Hulman.

"I joined Rising Stars because although at the time, I was in the college athletics industry for six years, I felt stuck," Brown said. "I can't even put into words the invaluable impact that Rising Stars has had and continues to have on me. I've received outreach from not only folks that look like me but allies who support the MOAA vision. My network has expanded and grown tremendously and I honestly believe the Rising Stars program played a huge role in that."

Former NACDA intern Precious Birdsong, who is currently the assistant director of facilities and event management at Vanderbilt University, enjoyed her experience of being part of the Rising Stars program.

"My experience was unique considering the challenges of being virtual with the pandemic," Birdsong said. "The Rising Stars program allowed me to step out of my comfort zone while having someone to challenge me. There are a lot of things

that I take from the program that I now implement daily. It was very impactful."

This program is an amazing opportunity for young professionals to receive personalized training from respected industry veterans. Having served as a mentor this past year for UAB Learning Specialist Grace Flowers and DePauw Assistant Director of Athletics Communications Ashleigh Jones was a great opportunity to lend perspective of my journey, learn from them and create a lasting bond.

The mentors of the Rising Stars program are just as valuable as the mentees who participate in it because it's an opportunity to give back, lift others up and cultivate the next generation of leaders in college athletics.

McLendon



Ishita Tibrewal

University of Massachusetts

2021 McLendon Scholar

In May 2021, Adrien Harraway, director of the McLendon Foundation, connected with me on LinkedIn requesting for a time to discuss my application for the McLendon Foundation Postgraduate Scholarship. As I had applied for the scholarship in January, I had forgotten about it until Mr. Harraway's LinkedIn nudge. With nervous trepidation, I called him. The application process made me reflect on my experience over the years, especially with respect to the core values advocated by Coach Mac - Integrity, Education, Leadership and Mentorship.

After informing me that I was one of the eight recipients of this scholarship, we discussed my plans for graduate school. Having been admitted into the MBA/MS dual program in Sport Management at UMass Amherst, I was

apprehensive about meeting my expenses for this program. The \$10,000 scholarship award

was God sent and would help me meet part of my living expenses in Amherst. However, the most valuable part of the McLendon scholarship is not the award money, but the time and resources invested in the awardees by the McLendon Foundation. This investment in the McLendon Scholars, right from day one, will go a long way in enabling us to become future leaders in collegiate sports administration.

The Foundation has supplemented my education at UMass through hosting monthly virtual sessions and workshops, both by staff and partners of the Foundation. These have helped introduce me to new areas of the industry in collegiate and professional sports. Networking opportunities with my cohort, who share similar ambitions and drive to make the world a better place through sports, and interacting with senior sports executives of color has been especially empowering. We learned of the challenges and discrimination they faced while traversing their career paths, and how they overcame these obstacles while climbing the ladder to success.

Leading corporations such as McDonald's, adidas and Pepsi have supplemented the Foundation's

efforts in our professional development. The cohort had access to workshops on personal branding, interviewing skills and writing effective cover letters. These have given me the extra edge when applying for internships. I took the CBS externship opportunity for the cohort to get some NFL broadcasting and operations experience - a completely new sport and area for me.

As a result of my interactions with members of the McLendon Foundation community and the industry leaders, I have realized that my true passion is to work in sports in a role that enables me to use both the left and the right side of my brain - where I can combine my creative and analytical skills. I have a better understanding of my personal self, including the values I hold dear. The McLendon Foundation has helped me become a self-aware and competent young woman of color who is ready to chart her path in the sports industry after graduating from UMass in May 2023.

As I write this article, I am extremely excited about my upcoming trip to Kansas to meet and connect with members of the McLendon Community, and experience a weekend of meaningful networking, stimulating learning opportunities and rapid professional growth prospects.