

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2016 - Student Bios

Abdul B. Abad



Undergrad: Rutgers University, New Brunswick
Major: Philosophy, minor in Cognitive Science
Hometown: Union City, NJ
Assistantship: Office of First Year Programs and Learning Communities – UConn Connects

My name is Abdul B. Abad, and I was born and raised in New Jersey. I completed a philosophy major and a cognitive science minor at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. My interest in student affairs was motivated by my work as a resident assistant, serving on the selection committee for new resident and apartment assistants, and volunteering at the community standards office. While working as a resident assistant, my hall director told me about the Institute for Recruitment of Teachers Summer Workshop. Through IRT, I was able to apply to eleven schools with the University of Connecticut being my top choice. Within higher education, I am primarily interested in issues of access and retention, the effectiveness of punitive versus rehabilitative models of conduct, theories of moral development, and organizational theory. I am interested in these areas as they pertain to communities of color but more specifically Latino students. In my free time, I compose music, play guitar or piano, watch movies (primarily horror), and play video games.

Ryan Baldassario



Undergrad: Central Connecticut State University
Majors: Political Science
Hometown: Niantic, CT
Assistantship: Higher Education and Student Affairs Graduate Assistant

My name is Ryan Baldassario, and I'm a graduate of Central Connecticut State University. I first got involved on my college campus after joining the Ultimate Frisbee Club the day I moved into my residence hall, and my seemingly endless involvement in campus activities started roughly a few hours later. Student government, orientation, residence councils, youth mentoring, student union operations; you name it and I probably dabbled in it while at CCSU.

After initially going to college to be a high school civics teacher, I shifted to Political Science, all the while never feeling that "fit" I desired in the classroom. No one ever told me about Student Affairs on "Career Day," and I am still somewhat bitter about that. Years of immersion in campus activities, coupled with countless learning experiences passed on by advisors, and it finally clicked. I knew I wanted to be in an educational setting and help students on a daily basis, but not necessarily permanently fixed in the classroom. After seeing the fervor with which my advisors and administrators guided students, including myself, I could tell that I would fit in Student Affairs.

Two weeks after graduating CCSU, I found myself working for the U.S. House of Representatives. As a District Aide to Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty, I loved assisting people and restoring their faith in the government. However, after a federal government shutdown and signing my livelihood away for large coffees and a Blackberry, I quickly realized my passion for Student Affairs surpassed my affinity for government work.

Happily enough, I haven't lost my passion for civics, education, or ultimate frisbee. I'm a nutmegger, born and raised, and I am honored that my journey through the profession of Student Affairs will start at the University of Connecticut. Go Huskies!

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2016 - Student Bios

Megan Brannan



Undergrad: SUNY New Paltz
Major: Art Education
Hometown: Oneonta, NY
Assistantship: Rainbow Center

My name is Meg Brannan, and I graduated from SUNY New Paltz in Spring 2013 where I majored in Art Education. I was born and raised in Upstate New York, but also have family in Toronto Canada, Sherman Texas, and Glasgow Scotland. At my undergraduate institution I was a Resident Assistant, Community Development Assistant, Student Ambassador, and a member of the National Residence Hall Honorary. I have also spent several summers now working with the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth. The program has allowed me to explore several colleges in the central Pennsylvania region, where I now work full time as an Area Coordinator at Lebanon Valley College. At LVC I have become involved with Women's Service and Gender Resource Center, and Freedom Rings our LGBTQ group on campus. I hope these experiences will guide me in my assistantship at the Rainbow Center.

Outside of work I really enjoy journaling, coming up with ridiculous puns, reading everything, hanging out with friends, and watching reruns of How I Met Your Mother (Don't know what to do on Mondays now that the show is over). A fun fact about me is that I have kept a journal since 4th grade, and am on my 8th one.

I am a true ENFJ so I am people focused and love talking about feelings. This is one of the many reasons I love the cohort model at UCONN! I have always lived on a college campus since leaving home in 2009 so I am thrilled to find an apartment in Connecticut, and cook meals at home like an adult... hopefully the novelty doesn't wear off too quickly. August can't come soon enough! Go Huskies!

Virginia Cabrera



Undergrad: Rutgers University
Major: Psychology and Spanish
Hometown: Dover, NJ
Assistantship: Department of Wellness and Prevention Services

My name is Virginia Cabrera. I am a recent graduate from Rutgers University where I studied Psychology and Spanish, and had a minor in criminology. I was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to the state of New Jersey when I was two years old. I am fluent in Spanish and was able to study abroad for a full semester in Valencia, Spain. Throughout college I worked as an Orientation Leader for two years and absolutely loved my job. I fell in love with Student Affairs and working with students! I gained more experience assisting the Center for Global Education by advocating for study abroad.

I am the oldest of three siblings and I take pride in setting a good example for them. Although I am the oldest child, I am also the shortest; I have been 4'11 for a very long time, but am proud of it! During my spare time I enjoy traveling, yoga, zumba, reading, scrapbooking, and simply being outdoors when the weather permits. I am thrilled to be joining the Husky family at the University of Connecticut and start my journey as a HESA!

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2016 - Student Bios

Louis J. Cameron III



Undergrad: East Carolina University
Major: Philosophy; minor in Political Science
Hometown: Gaithersburg, MD
Assistantship: Center for Students with Disabilities

I was born in Würzburg, Germany because my parents were in the Army. Although my mom retired after I was born, my family and I constantly moved around--Georgia, Maryland, Virginia, and then North Carolina. Also, through my mom, I gained a love and desire for traveling...A LOT :) Costa Rica, Spain, Germany, Italy and Portugal were definitely wonderful places. And I have to say my top favorite U.S. cities are Boston, NYC, San Antonio, D.C. and San Francisco. A few fun facts about myself--I love singing, cooking, dancing, reading, and meeting new people. Watching t.v. shows is an important part of my life; therefore, I am a freak when it comes to Netflix/HuluPlus/HBO Go/Xfinity/Amazon. Also...I have a healthy obsession with all things Beyonce! She is amazing, at the top her game, and probably the best in the music business right now. I saw her in concert August 2013 and it was a life-changing experience.

I graduated from East Carolina University, in Greenville, NC, on December 13, 2013 (the same day Beyonce's self-titled, surprise album dropped). So it was a very magical day for me! Originally, I was an elementary education major, but after an intro to ethics course, I was immediately drawn to philosophy. I've loved student affairs and have been working in it since the summer of 2010. I've been involved in areas like freshman orientation, residence life, Dean of Students, student conduct, student organizations, SGA, teaching a freshman seminar class, and working at UCONN summer of 2013 for my NUPF internship. I'm so excited to attend UCONN and #TurnUpForHESA! Go Huskies!

Aisha Folkes



Undergrad: Temple University
Major: Strategic Communication (Public Relations)
Hometown: Franklin Township, NJ
Assistantship: Assistant Residence Hall Director

Originally from Central New Jersey, I am blessed to have been raised by Jamaican parents who instilled culture and values into my upbringing. After growing up in a small, yet culturally diverse, town I ventured off to North Philadelphia for my four years of undergrad. I discovered my passion for student affairs early on through my involvement in residential life, leadership programs, my campus' student union, and various multicultural student organizations. However, it was not until I discovered the NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Program that I was able to verbalize my passions into a future career path.

After graduating May 2013 I dedicated a year of full-time service with City Year Rhode Island attacking our nation's high school dropout crisis by working to keep students in school and on track to high school graduation. I'm excited to enter the field of student affairs to continue to serve underrepresented populations. It is my hope to pay it forward by providing similarly powerful experiences and opportunities that shaped me into the young lady I am today. I'm excited to be at a platform where I can continue to impact the lives of others.

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2016 - Student Bios

Natalie Hershberger



Undergrad: Juniata College
Major: Communication
Hometown: Woodbury, PA
Assistantship: Vice President for Student Affairs Office

In 2009 I graduated from Juniata College, a small liberal arts college in central Pennsylvania, with a bachelor's degree in Communication. As an undergraduate, I was heavily involved in Student Activities, Residential Life, and Admissions. After graduation, I spent three years working on-and-off at a camp and conference center in the woods of central Indiana. Being a camp director has been one of my life's highlights. In the fall of 2013, I returned to Juniata where I've been working full-time as a Residence Director and coordinator of a first-year transitional program. My undergraduate experience sparked my interest in Higher Education and Student Affairs, but the last two years of professional work have solidified my desire to pursue this master's degree. After attending and working at a college of 1,600 students, I'm looking forward to a very different experience at UConn. I'm an introvert with extroverted tendencies. My introverted side loves to stay in and watch Netflix, but I'm also up for (almost) anything if it involves exploring new things/places and hanging out with others.

Alberto Jacome



Undergrad: University of New Mexico
Major: Architecture
Hometown: Barranquilla, Colombia
Assistantship: Residence Education

"Nothing in the world can take the place of Persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent." – Calvin Coolidge

I was born and raised in the sunny city of Barranquilla, Colombia (Same city Shakira was born!). In 2009 I moved to the States, more specifically Albuquerque, New Mexico to pursue my Bachelor's degree in Architecture. My passion for Student Affairs started my freshmen year when I was elected President of our Hall Government. During my four years at UNM I was heavily involved with Residence Life, Greek Life, Student Government, Student Activities, Global Education Office (Office of International Programs and Studies), and Alumni Relations. By the end of my Junior year, I knew I wanted to be a Student Affairs Professional, I can't see myself doing anything else!

I love traveling, trying new food, and the outdoors. As a true "Barranquillero" nothing makes me happier than lying by the pool/beach tanning. I love the summer time and staying active. I am a true extrovert and anybody who knows me will tell you I am always full of energy. I am excited to start my journey at UConn. Go Huskies!

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2016 - Student Bios

Erin Jewell



Undergrad: Gonzaga University
Major: Business Administration
Hometown: Oak Harbor, WA
Assistantship: Careers for the Common Good

My name is Erin Jewell and I am a born and raised Pacific Northwesterner. I graduated from Gonzaga University with a Bachelor's in Business Administration, concentrating in Marketing and Human Resource Management. While at Gonzaga I was involved with Freshman Orientation, Residential Life (as an RA), Volunteer Services, Student Life and the Career Center. Post-graduation, I have been working in the non-profit sector in Seattle, first directly with cancer patients and their families, but most recently with an international healthcare organization. The calling for student affairs came when I realized that I wanted to help others, at a student level, explore the various opportunities that exist in an educational environment for academic, professional and personal growth.

While I love the world of non-profits and know that I will always remain involved in some capacity, I am very excited to begin my assistantship in the Careers for the Common Good to help current students gain exposure to careers paths that positively impact society. I am thrilled to be beginning this new chapter in my life and look forward to the opportunities, support and challenges that are to come.

As I make the cross country journey, I plan on exploring all that New England has to offer in my free time. I love exploring the great outdoors (and coming from the Evergreen state cannot wait to see the Fall), crafting, reading, baking, finding new ice cream shops and traveling. Lastly, GO Huskies!

Michael Malenfant



Undergrad: Bryant University
Major: Management
Hometown: Lakeville, MA
Assistantship: Student Union & Student Activities

Hello everybody, my name is Mike Malenfant and I just graduated from Bryant University with a degree in Management. Before Bryant, I grew up in southeastern Massachusetts in a small town known as Lakeville, MA. Entering my undergraduate career, I always planned on working in the "corporate world" while I was young and then retiring into teaching business to high school students after I gained real world experience. This passion for connecting with people led me to involvement on Bryant's campus ranging in Orientation, Student Center Operations, Greek Life & the Leadership Development Program. Each of these experiences at Bryant allowed me to realize what was most important to me, and allowed me to find my path to a career in student affairs. Some say that student affairs actually runs in the family, my sister is also in the field, with a focus in residence life.

In my free time, I enjoy playing basketball, travelling, meeting new people and hearing their stories, as well as trying all different types of food. I am so excited to take the next step in my student affairs journey and am extremely proud to soon call myself a UCONN Husky!

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2016 - Student Bios

Huong T. Nguyen



Undergrad: Washington & Jefferson College
Major: Psychology
Hometown: Reading, PA
Assistantship: Women's Center

Originally from Reading, PA, I have always been a Pennsylvania girl. My hometown is about an hour away from Philadelphia, but I attend college just 45 minutes south of Pittsburgh. So, I know the PA turnpike pretty well! I am a graduating senior at

Washington & Jefferson College, majoring in Psychology and minoring in Business Administration. My involvement at my institution stemmed from my participation in the Leadership and Service Institute (LSI), which is a freshmen pre-orientation program. Through this program, a supportive group of administrators and colleagues was fostered. I became immersed in co-curricular activities, such as an Orientation Leader, a Resident Assistant, and a transfer-student mentor. I was also afforded the opportunity to create my own student organization, the Diversity Programming Board, which implemented educational and recreational programming meant to create an inclusive environment for diverse populations. Moreover, my involvement as a NASPA NUPF fellow and an AAUW National Student Advisory Council member served as catalysts in my aspirations for a career within the field of Student Affairs in Higher Education. My passions lie in women's rights, educational accessibility, and global education.

Outside of the academic sphere, I love to paint, draw, and anything to do with the fine arts. I have a love for food and crafting. Most of all, I hope to travel the world until I am old and broke. I am thrilled to attend UConn as part of the wolf pack!

Dominic Ortiz



Undergrad: Seattle University
Major: Strategic Communication
Hometown: San Francisco, CA
Assistantship: Assistant Residence Hall Director

My name is Dominic Ortiz, and I am from the foggy city of San Francisco. I am a recent graduate of Seattle University where I obtained my degree in Strategic Communication. In my four years at Seattle U I kept myself pretty busy! I was involved in various positions on campus- I was a Third Year Resident Assistant, an Orientation Leader for the International Student Center, and a Student Government Representative. I was also involved with athletics as a member of the Cheerleading Team! It was through my student leader positions that I found my love for Student Affairs and the career that I want to spend the rest of my life working in!

I am very excited to be attending the HESA program at UConn this fall because I know it will prepare me for a rich and highly successful future in the field. The West Coaster in me is also very excited to experience all that New England has to offer me and the many adventures I plan to take part in. In my spare time I enjoy dancing, choreographing, painting, and playing various video games. I know that UConn will provide me many opportunities to partake in the activities that I love and for that, I am happy to become a Husky!

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2016 - Student Bios

Alessia Satterfield



Undergrad: University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Major: Sociology
Hometown: Southington, CT
Assistantship: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences – Alumni Relations

I was born and raised in the great state of Connecticut and departed the east coast to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for my undergraduate degree. I graduated from UNL in 2011 with a degree in Sociology and a passion for the Cornhuskers! After completing my undergraduate work I was fortunate to join the Alpha Chi Omega Fraternity Inc. staff as a chapter consultant where I worked with undergraduate women predominately in the Midwest and Pacific Northwest, where I got to explore new states and new food!

After a year of travel I transitioned into the role of Educational and Leadership Initiatives Coordinator for Alpha Chi Omega Fraternity Inc. During the two years I held this role I resided in Indianapolis while developing programming surrounded around personal branding and leadership development, managed a national accreditation and awards program and facilitated programs for both collegiate and alumnae women.

Outside of my passion for Greek life, I enjoy running, yoga, cooking and cheering (loudly) for the Cornhuskers! I am humbled and incredibly excited to be back on the east coast and attend UConn while I continue to explore the wonderful worlds of Higher Education and Student Affairs.

Michelle Scali



Undergrad: Bryant University
Major: Applied Psychology
Hometown: Reading, MA
Assistantship: Student Activities Programs Office

My name is Michelle Scali and I grew up in Reading, MA. I've spent the past four years attending Bryant University, completing a major in Applied Psychology with minors in Business Administration and Communication. Some of my favorite campus involvements have been Greek Life, the Linked Through Leadership program, the psychology association, and Omicron Delta Kappa honor society. I love to travel and had the opportunity to study abroad in Florence, Italy during my junior year. I chose to enter this field because my favorite parts of my Bryant experience have been my involvements and the relationships that I have formed as a result. I love food (and cooking), watching movies and reading. I can't wait to spend the next two years with you all!

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2016 - Student Bios

Michael Thompkins



Hometown: Westampton, NJ
Undergrad: Towson University
Major: Mass Communication and Psychology
Assistantship: Assistant Residence Hall Director

“When you come to a fork in the road, take it!” – Yogi Berra

My name is Michael Thompkins and I am a 2014 graduate of Towson University in Towson, Maryland. I received my Bachelor of Science degrees in Mass Communication (Journalism track) and Psychology and I was also a member of the Honors College. During my time as an undergrad, I was involved in multiple aspects of student leadership, including Residence Life, Student Government, University Residence Government, LeaderShape and Presidential Ambassadors. Needless to say, I spread myself pretty thin, but I learned how to balance my time and get things done effectively. I am originally from South Jersey and I love my state! From beaches, to hoagies to Bon Jovi, I have a lot of Jersey pride!

When I first started at Towson, I wanted to be a news anchor and tell other people’s stories, but a part of me felt that I wasn’t building a strong connection with the people I met. That’s when I decided that I really wanted to work with people in a more meaningful way. I attended the LeaderShape Institute in 2013 where I created my vision to live in a world where young people can feel free to be their true selves and act on their passions. This was the moment when I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in student affairs where I could make positive impacts on students.

I want to experience as much as I can at UConn and begin my journey as a student affairs professional. I cannot wait to see more of New England and make great memories with the members of my cohort. Go Huskies!

Robert Valentín



Undergrad: DePaul University
Major: Secondary Education History
Hometown: Wheaton, IL
Assistantship: Assistant Residence Hall Director

I grew up in Wheaton, Illinois which is a suburb of the city of Chicago (This means I'm not from the city, but once you're outside Illinois, you just say you're from Chicago). I graduated from DePaul University in Chicago with a major in Secondary Education History.

I originally planned on pursuing a life in secondary education, teaching history, physical education and coaching cross-country and Track & Field. After a year of being an RA and serving in a multitude of leadership roles at DePaul, I knew I needed to change career paths. Student affairs has had such a profound affect on my growth as a person. I know that a life of serving students in a similar manner; guiding their growth and development, is exactly what I want to do with it. I cannot wait to get started!

I am thrilled for the academic and social journey that the University of Connecticut will bring me and I am excited to begin working with Residence Education!

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2016 - Student Bios

Lauren Way



Undergrad: Ithaca College
Major: French and Francophone Studies
Hometown: Gorham, NY
Assistantship: Assistant Residence Hall Director

I am originally from Gorham, New York, a small town in the Finger Lakes Region of Upstate New York. I graduated from Ithaca College in 2011 with a degree in French and Francophone Studies. At IC I was a Resident Assistant and Apartment Assistant for 3 years, and I also studied abroad for a semester in Avignon, France. Following my graduation from Ithaca I lived and taught English in Bordeaux, France for a year. After moving back to the US I accepted a job as a Residence Director at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, a large public institution about 20 miles north of Atlanta. I absolutely love working in Student Affairs, and I am so excited to continue growing and find my niche in the field at UConn!! I'm pretty adventurous, and I love playing Ultimate Frisbee, CrossFit, traveling, being outdoors, reading, cooking, and baking! GO HUSKIES!!

Amy Wickham



Undergrad: Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada
Major: History, Minor in Sociology
Hometown: Peterborough, Ontario, Canada
Assistantship: Assistant Residence Hall Director

Hi my name is Amy! I grew up in small town Peterborough, Ontario, but I've been living in Ottawa for the past five years completing my undergrad at Carleton University with a Bachelor of Arts in History with a minor in Sociology. I am very excited to be starting my journey at UConn in the fall and to be moving to Connecticut and the United States! As an international student I hope to be able to see as much of the New England area as possible!

I stumbled upon Student Affairs and more specifically Res Life the summer after my second year of University while working as a Summer Programming Assistant within Carleton's Department of Housing and I haven't turned back since! Residential Life taught me the true meaning and importance of community, support and personal growth and has shown me the very real impact that can be made in the lives of our students. Working with Student Affairs professionals has opened my eyes to a whole other side of the University experience. It is the continued dedication and support of this department that inspired me to pursue a career in Student Affairs and Higher Education; with the goal of being able to facilitate for others the same sense of community, support and opportunities for personal growth, that were provided to me.

I am so excited to begin my assistantship in Residential Life and the HESA program at UConn and to work on such a large residential campus! I love the idea of a cohort model and can't wait to work with others who are as passionate about Student Affairs as I am! Outside of work and school, I love traveling, photography, country music and watching movies! Go Huskies!

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2016 - Student Bios

Christina (Tina) Wiese



Undergrad: The University of Rhode Island
Major: Accounting, Minor in Leadership Studies
Hometown: Voorhees, NJ
Assistantship: Center for Career Development

I was born in Kentucky, but moved every few years when I was younger (Kentucky, Texas, North Carolina, and New Jersey), so going to college was another opportunity to meet new people and explore a new beginning. I graduated from The University of Rhode Island (URI) with both bachelor's and master's degrees in Accounting and a minor in Leadership Studies. I was extremely involved in leadership activities, the College of Business Administration, and the Catholic organization on campus. I also participated in other various groups and events at URI, but the most exciting and fulfilling experiences I had were through mentorship and student development. Knowing I would likely end up in higher education at some point in my life, I explored and built a career in accounting.

After college I worked as a Tax Accountant for PricewaterhouseCoopers, LLP (PwC) in Boston, Massachusetts for two years and have worked for four years as a Tax Accountant II for The TJX Companies, Inc. (TJX - parent company for TJ Maxx, Marshalls, and Homegoods). At PwC I was heavily involved in campus recruiting for URI and while at TJX I have consistently returned to campus to aid the current students. The past two semesters I have taught an online career development course for junior business majors at URI which has confirmed my decision to pursue a career in higher education and student affairs. I love meeting new people, helping students, reading, hiking, exercising, trying craft beers and new wines, cooking, and traveling. I cannot be more excited about attending The University of Connecticut!

Nancy Wong



Undergrad: The Pennsylvania State University
Major: Bachelor of Arts in Psychology
and a minor in Sexuality and Gender Studies
Hometown: Savannah, TN
Assistantship: Puerto Rican/Latin American Cultural Center

My name is Nancy, and I am from a small town in Tennessee. I am the third out of 4 children, which meant I was definitely the middle child. I would personally also say that I am the black sheep of my family. I ended up going to Penn State after deciding that I needed to step outside my comfort zone. I majored in psychology and absolutely loved my experience at Penn State. I was very involved with diversity initiatives, leadership, and service during my undergraduate years. During my senior year, I became a NUFP fellow, and I realized that higher education was my calling.

I love eating food, dancing, meeting new people, and exploring. I had the opportunity to study abroad while I was in high school, and I learned a lot about the differences between the European countries that I visited. I try to exercise at least 3-4 times a week because it's my stress reliever. My favorite form of exercise right now is AcroYoga, which is a mixture of acrobatics and yoga. I hope to continue it even after I move to Connecticut.

I am excited to finally be going back to graduate school after taking a year off. I have no doubt that this will all be amazing. Go Huskies!!