

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2017 - Student Bios

Miesha Bell



Undergrad: Rutgers University
Major: Political Science, Women's & Gender Studies
Hometown: Bayville, NJ
Assistantship: Residential Life – Assistant Residence Hall Director

“Don't let schooling interfere with your education” -Mark Twain

I was blessed to be born into a family where education and social justice were married very early. As an only child, I was the center of attention and gained my confidence in speaking up and speaking out very early. My desire for education and social justice led me to Rutgers University (New Brunswick), which then led me to Douglass Residential College, an all-women's residential college within Rutgers University. I studied Political Science, Women's and Gender Studies, and Africana Studies during my four years of undergrad.

As an undergraduate, I was very involved on-campus and off-campus. I was heavily involved in Student Life, Residential Life, and Douglass Residential College. I helped in founding a mentoring program for girls in Ghana living in correctional homes, during my time studying abroad in Ghana. I am also a founding member of both #blacklivesmatter -RUNB and #NJSHUTITDOWN. I am currently temporarily working full-time for the ACLU-NJ, until moving to Storrs.

I enjoy reading, writing poetry, and photography. I consider myself someone who cannot be silent in the face of injustice, and I truly believe that education is a beacon of hope for change and social justice. I am excited to continue my education at UCONN! I am officially a scarlet knight, living my life as a HUSKY!

Tyler Benateigha



Undergrad: Colorado State University
Major: History
Hometown: Longmont, CO
Assistantship: Residential Life – Assistant Residence Hall Director

What's up? My name is Tyler, I am a recent graduate of Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. I was born in California but raised in Longmont, Colorado, so heading to the East Coast is going to be a huge change for me! I have literally been there twice, one of those times being for interview days.

In undergrad, I had a really hard time figuring out what I wanted to do. I started as Computer Science, went undeclared, and then was set on becoming a history teacher. When I figured out teaching wasn't a good fit for me, I joined the NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Program. It helped me realize that I had been prepping for a career in student affairs all along! My time as a resident assistant, orientation leader, and first year peer mentor allowed me to discover my love for helping students find their passions and succeed in the college environment.

SA talk aside, I'm super into video games, Netflix, football/volleyball, meeting new people, naps, laughing, dancing/choreography, and secret handshakes. In general, I like to have fun! I still can't believe I'll be heading into a master's program, but I am so stoked to get started! I know I'll meet ultra-cool people and have great opportunities to develop as an SA pro. Go Huskies!

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Jessica Glynn



Undergrad: The College of New Jersey
Major: Political Science
Hometown: Middletown, NJ
Assistantship: Leadership Office

My name is Jessica Glynn, and I am a recent graduate of The College of New Jersey where I studied Political Science with a minor in Business Management. I was born and raised on the Jersey Shore (the real one - not the one on TV) in a very large Irish/Italian family. I was heavily involved in Student Affairs throughout my college experience with Student Government, the Mediation Program, the Community Standards Board, and an internship in the Leadership Office, and I couldn't be more excited to start working with UConn's student leaders!

It was about the middle of my Junior year when I realized my true passion was working in Student Affairs, and I can't wait to get started in the field! I'm a true gym rat that loves country music, traveling, reading, eating, and the beach. I know that UConn will open so many different doors for me in the future, and I am so honored to be able to start my journey as a HESA! Go Huskies!

Jonathan Gomez



Undergrad: Sonoma State University
Major: Sociology
Hometown: Santa Rosa, CA
Assistantship: Center for Career Development

Hey Y'all! My name is Jonathan Gomez and I was born and raised in California. I graduated from Sonoma State University with a degree in Sociology. As a first generation student, I have always viewed education as a top priority and see it as my way to a better life. I see myself as a leader who can serve as an inspiration to others who share my similar background. While at Sonoma State I had the opportunity to be involved as a student leader on campus as a Community Services Advisor (aka RA), Orientation Leader, a Summer Bridge Leader for the EOP program and a Campus Tour Guide.

My passion for Student Affairs developed from the positive impact my work was having on students' experiences. I have made it my life long goal to help students think critically and value the impact of diversity on one's own experience and on the world at large, which shall empower them to become leaders for the generations of students who come after them.

On my days off I love to go out and get lost exploring new places! I also like to spend some time singing at the top of my lungs and dancing alone in my living room. I have an addiction to watching reality TV and consider it one of my most important hobbies. I'm a very adventurous person who likes to experience everything that life has to offer especially when it comes to food. I know UCONN will help develop me as Student Affairs professional and will allow me to work with other amazing individuals. I am so excited for this next chapter in my life and can't wait to see what the east coast has to offer. Yay! Go Huskies! HESA Class of '17!

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Lauren Hennes



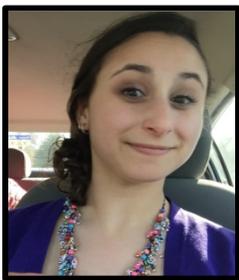
Undergrad: Humboldt State University
Major: Biological Anthropology
Hometown: Turlock, CA
Assistantship: Honors Program

I was born in Medicine Hat, Alberta, but have spent the majority of my life in California. A month after graduating high school, I packed my bags and moved to London, UK where I spent a year working as a receptionist at an international student youth hostel. When I moved back home, I attended community college before transferring to Humboldt State University (HSU) in Northern California, which is nestled right between the redwood trees and the Pacific Ocean!

I graduated in December 2014 with a degree in biological anthropology and a minor in Spanish. One of the highlights from undergrad was studying abroad in Quito, Ecuador as part of my Spanish minor. I was heavily involved in my academic department as an undergraduate through TAing multiple courses and working in the Humboldt Center for Evolutionary Anthropology as a research assistant and lab coordinator. I had originally thought I wanted to be a field research primatologist and spent a summer as a field assistant in the Peruvian Amazon working with two species of wild monkeys, including the very adorable emperor tamarin. In my last semesters at HSU I became involved with the Ambassador Program and realized my passion for student affairs through my work in freshman orientation and as a campus tour guide.

When not working or in class, I can usually be found singing musical theater songs, quoting Parks & Recreation, knitting, crafting, or making a mean loaf of banana bread. I am delighted to begin my journey in student affairs with the UConn HESA program!

Leslie Lawrence



Undergrad: University of Rhode Island
Major: Textiles Merchandising & Design, French
Hometown/State: Connecticut
Assistantship: Student Union / Student Activities

I was born and raised in CT, but I left for college. I went to URI where I studied French and Textiles Merchandising and Design. Having been interested in cultures and foreign languages since I was little, I knew I would study abroad in college, but I had no idea what a profound impact it would have on my life. As a junior, I studied in Paris, France for 4 months. The experience helped me to gain more self-confidence and the ability to laugh at myself. When I returned, I got more involved in campus activities such as the Student Entertainment Committee, Tour Guiding, International Peer Ambassadors, and I helped to facilitate retreats. After graduation, I returned to France to teach English in a middle and high school. These experiences helped me to see how much students gain from stepping outside of their comfort zones and how crucial it is to do something that helps you to develop both personally and professionally. I realized that I wanted to help students have life enriching experiences in college to benefit the way that I did. That was what led me to the field of Higher Education and Student Affairs. After working for a study abroad provider and in International Admissions, I can't wait to learn more about how to give all students the best experiences possible!

Besides being super passionate about studying abroad, I love to bake, (eat what I bake), play soccer and travel. I have been to over 15 countries, speak French and a little German. I also love to laugh. If you're in the same building, you will likely hear me wherever you are! I can't wait to meet all current, former and soon to be HESA students!

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Niimo Nix



Undergrad: Roger Williams University
Major: Psychology
Hometown: Providence, RI
Assistantship: Residential Life – Assistant Residence Hall Director

Although my name is Jeronima Nix, I also go by Niimo Nix. I was born and raised in Providence, Rhode Island so I have come to love everything cities have to offer. I identify as Guatemalan and am very proud of it. None of my grandparents, aunts, uncles, or parents have attended college. I am also the oldest cousin and sister, so I've always had to pave the way for my family. I love everything about soccer because of my family and hold our traditions close to my heart.

I am a graduating senior majoring in Psychology with a core concentration in Global Communications. Throughout my four years here I fully bloomed into the leader I am today. I have been involved in almost everything my university has to offer. From joining the executive board for the Multicultural Student Union my freshman year I have spent three years making as much change through various leadership roles. Some other roles I've had include student and family orientation, academic advising, residence life and housing, and student organizations. It wasn't until this year that I have fought for even more social justice issues.

In my spare time I love watching Netflix, painting, and talking about UConn! From all my experiences, I knew Student Affairs was the field for me. I love everything about student development and empowerment. Words cannot express enough how excited I am to start HESA and I am very proud to be a Husky!

Alyssa Paquin



Undergrad: University of New Hampshire - Manchester
Major: Psychology
Hometown: Litchfield, NH
Assistantship: Orientation Services

My name is Alyssa Paquin, and I am a recent graduate from the University of New Hampshire at Manchester. I was born and raised in New Hampshire, and I am a true New Englander at heart. In undergrad, I was heavily involved with Orientation, First Year Experience, Academic Counseling and Admissions. I love to try new things, especially food, and I am a huge book nerd! I am also excited to continue on my path into higher education and student affairs, and I am looking forward becoming a Husky!

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Lexy Parrill



Undergrad: Indiana University
Major: History
Hometown: Naperville, IL
Assistantship: Leadership Office

Hello everyone! My name is Lexy Parrill. I recently graduated from Indiana University with a degree in History and a minor in English. Although history is my first love I knew that it was never the right career path for me. I was introduced to Student Affairs through my involvement on my campus Union Board and I quickly discovered that Student Affairs was the right fit for me! While a student at IU I was lucky enough to serve 2 terms on Union Board, work as a building manager at the Indiana Memorial Union, coordinate two leadership institutes, and act as co-chief for IU Culture of Care- an initiative focused on fostering student to student care through bystander intervention and educational programming. Each of these experiences have helped me learn more about myself and I hope to help facilitate similar rewarding and educational experiences for others.

Outside of school I enjoy doing anything that gets me out of the house. I like to go on random adventures and explore my surroundings. I also am an avid runner and love doing yoga. Having lived a majority of my life in Naperville, IL I am a proud midwesterner at heart However, I am really excited to explore New England and all the wonderful things UConn and the surrounding areas have to offer! I can't wait to spend the next 2 years getting to know all of you!

Emily Pearson



Undergrad: Boise State University
Major: Visual Arts, Printmaking
Hometown: Buhl, ID
Assistantship: Leadership Office

Hello there! My name is Emily, and I was born and raised in rural Idaho. I grew up around sagebrush deserts, mountains, canyons, rivers, and forests, but I also love big cities. I graduated from Boise State University in 2012 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Arts with an emphasis in Printmaking. My introduction to Student Affairs started as an Orientation Leader and then an Orientation Coordinator. I've worked at Boise State's Women's Center, University Advancement, and as part of New Student and Family Program's mentor program. I was a member of a sorority, involved in service-learning, and an active participant in our university printmaking and art community. I have a very unique journey to grad school, and if anyone is ever doubting the process, I'm definitely someone to ask questions of!

Since graduating, I've been hopping around all over the place. I lived in Austria working as an Au Pair (nanny) and learning German. I served a 10-month term with AmeriCorps NCCC FEMA Corps with a team of young-adults working on disaster preparedness initiatives (and learning how to drive a forklift!). We were stationed in Mississippi, Texas, California, and Georgia, and I loved getting to explore those places. I'll be finishing a yearlong service term with AmeriCorps VISTA in June of 2015, having developed a college to high school mentorship program at St. Mary's College of Maryland in Southern Maryland. I obviously love service-learning and traveling to new places.

I love to read, play nerdy card games, create fun crafts, geek out about TV shows and movies, and adventure out on road trips. I'm a fan of good food, beer, hiking, and laughing (a lot). I identify as a feminist, and I'm deeply interested in social justice movements and fighting for equality/equity in our society. I'm SO excited to be starting at The University of Connecticut in the fall, and I can't wait to get to know everyone! Go Huskies!

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Yihra Peralta



Undergrad: The University of Massachusetts- Boston
Major: Sociology, Early Childhood Education
Hometown: Springfield, MA
Assistantship: Residential Life – Assistant Residence Hall Director

My name is Yihra Peralta, and I graduated from The University of Massachusetts Boston where I majored in Sociology and Early childhood Education with a concentration in administration and supervision. I was born in Texas but moved to The Dominican Republic with my mother at the age of two. I am fluent in Spanish and go to the Dominican Republic whenever I have the chance to. I was born in the States but my heart belongs to mi Republica Dominicana. I wanted to be a teacher so my first year of college I was a corps member at Jumpstart. I returned to Jumpstart my second & third year of college because I loved it so much. My third year of college I also got involved with the Office of Student leadership and community engagement, where I was able to lead a service trip to Washington DC focusing on homelessness & the injustice in the urban education system. I fell in love with higher education after attending leadership and watching how much fun my facilitators were having I realized “wow I can do this.”

Outside of work I love to dance (bachata all the way), travel, shop, and spend time with my family and friends. I also love food even though I am not the best cook. I am so excited to be attending UConn and to continue to do what I love! #HESA #GOHUSKIES!

Hana Polonsky



Undergrad: University of Connecticut
Major: Psychology, Pre-Med
Hometown: Stamford, CT
Assistantship: Asian American Cultural Center

My name is Hana Polonsky and I graduated from UConn in 2008. After graduating with a degree in Psychology and Pre-Med, I joined the NYC Teaching Fellows and earned my Masters in Education from CUNY City College. I taught middle school science for many years in underserved urban communities in the Bronx and Hartford, CT. As an educator, it has been the most rewarding to mentor students and prepare them for college and young adulthood. My interest in higher education came after looking back on my own college experience. I want to give back and be a part of providing the developmental opportunities and sense of community that were provided to me as an undergraduate. I am passionate about education and equal opportunity. I'm excited to return to UConn and start a career in Higher Education!

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Christian Price



Undergrad: Mississippi State University
Major: Political Science, Pre-Law
Hometown: Vicksburg, MS
Assistantship: First Year Programs – Peer Education

My name is Christian Price. I was born and raised in Mississippi and attended Mississippi State University and obtained a bachelor's degree in Political Science/Pre-law. During my collegiate career, I was heavily involved in alumni relations, Greek life, worked as a summer Resident Assistant, and served on the executive programming committee for MSU's Annual Greek Leadership Conference. After doing some soul searching, I realized that I did not want to go to law school. The summer of my graduation I moved to Houston, TX, to teach 5th grade mathematics. I've been teaching math in the East End of Houston for 3 years now, and it has been the most challenging, humbling, worthwhile experience of my life. My love for student affairs remained with me even while I was teaching. For the past 3 summers, I've worked for a math camp in New York serving as Director of Residential Life, and I have loved every minute of it! This past fall, while still teaching, I served as a Recruitment Fellow for Teach for America- Houston Corps. These experiences coupled with my witnessing a non-existent connection/alliance/relationship between the elementary school I work for and the university that is down the street from my school led me to HESA.

Things I enjoy: writing, reading, traveling, dance and step (I have taught hip-hop and step for 2 years), blogging, clothes, watching sports (most basketball). I enjoy trying new things (especially food) and meeting new people. I love going to the movies and keeping up with good quality television shows. I'm very excited to start this new chapter of my life!

Sarah Redlich



Undergrad: Wheaton College (MA)
Major: Political Science
Hometown: Cumberland, RI
Assistantship: Community Standards

My name is Sarah Redlich and I am from Cumberland, Rhode Island. I graduated from Wheaton College (a small liberal arts college in Massachusetts) in May 2014 with a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and a minor in Education. I always had a passion for government and thought that would be my career path... until I discovered student affairs my senior year of college!

During my undergraduate years, I had incredibly rewarding experiences advising and mentoring students as a peer academic advisor, resident advisor, and college hearing board chair. I was also very involved in the campus community through on-campus jobs in Admissions, Residential Life, and Student Activities.

After graduation, I began working in the Office of the President at my undergraduate institution. My responsibilities involved event planning for the office and I had the opportunity to help organize the presidential inauguration and manage logistics for the President's strategic planning task force. My work experience in higher education has made me certain this is the field for me. I am really excited to continue my education at UConn and to be a part of the HESA family! Outside of academics, I enjoy politics, strong coffee, tennis, the beach, watching sports, and time with friends and family.

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Tia Roy



Undergrad: Merrimack College
Major: Psychology, Interpersonal Communication
Hometown: Haverhill, MA
Assistantship: Dean of Students / Off-Campus Student Services

My name is Tia Roy, and I was born and raised in Haverhill, Massachusetts. Can't get more exciting than New England! I graduated from Merrimack College in North Andover, MA in May 2015 with a degree in Psychology and Interpersonal Communication. During my undergraduate career, I co-founded and coordinated a nationally recognized first generation college student support initiative called Generation Merrimack. I had the privilege of presenting the program and best practices at 6 regional and national conferences including NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers) Conference & Expo. In addition, I also gained great experience through interning at Northern Essex Community College in Enrollment Services, and working as a Career Peer Advisor at Merrimack College.

I am a graduate of a vocational technical high school, and have a passion for career and professional development, vocational education, student success, and first generation students. My assistantship in the Dean of Student's Office and Off Campus Student Services will add an additional layer to these experiences and interests.

Fun fact: I would love to become a competitive female bodybuilder! Who knows, it might happen? Unfortunately I love ice cream, pizza, and cookies...more than working out. I am a BIG country music fan and I enjoy spending time outside (especially in NH) with my family and friends. I am beyond thrilled to begin my next adventure at UCONN, and to call myself a Husky!

Abigail Smith



Undergrad: Randolph College
Major: Sociology
Hometown: Kingston, Jamaica
Assistantship: Residential Life – Assistant Residence Hall Director

Wa gwan everyone? (Translate: Whats up everyone?). My parents gave birth to me in Ipswich, England but we moved to Kingston, Jamaica when I was six and I refer to this sunny island as home. I decided to come to college in the US as I didn't have a clear career path and the liberal arts model better suited my educational needs at the time. Though it has been hard being away from my family, especially my three younger siblings, this was one of the best decisions of my life. The opportunity to learn in a new country made me view the world and myself from a different lens. I also loved that my undergrad had only 600 students (it's not as bad as it sounds), I was able to develop meaningful relationships with faculty, staff and other students who genuinely cared about my well-being.

Student's affairs became a career path for me when I realized the differences in my college experiences compared to my friends back home, they weren't afforded with the same opportunities and experiences as me and I wanted to change that. Currently I am heavily invested in engagement and leadership through service, I believe that service/volunteering has the ability to solve issues on the micro level and I think that college students can be at the forefront of this effort. In the long run my plan is to return home to Jamaica and engage college students in their communities through leadership which will contribute to improving student affairs in the country and the wider Caribbean.

I enjoy reading, being a feminist, cooking, talking to friends/family back home, being a revolutionary, and catching up with my favorite television shows. I am excited to be a part of the UCONN and HESA family as we learn, grow and play together. Go Huskies!

Higher Education and Student Affairs Masters Program Class of 2017 - Student Bios

Ashley Valentin



Undergrad: DePaul University
Major: Political Science
Hometown: Chicago, IL
Assistantship: Community Standards

Born outside of Chicago, IL I claim the city as a type of hometown. There was no better place for me to discover myself than Chicago! However, before moving to the city for college, I grew up in a small town in Illinois called Genoa.

Coming straight from undergraduate at DePaul University with a Bachelor's in Political Science, minors in History and Spanish I am looking forward to learning about and understanding the University of Connecticut. As a highly involved student at DePaul I fell in love with university atmosphere. My supervisors truly helped me understand what it meant to help and support others. I am excited about serving in the Community Standards Office, a recent internship at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs showed me the ways in which education and government can intersect. I'm hoping to see how a Graduate Degree in Higher Education Student Affairs at UCONN can help me understand how to best work with, for, and ultimately on behalf of students.

When I'm not on the work vibe I enjoy yoga, good conversations, and riding bikes. I have never lived outside of IL so here's to UCONN and the east coast!

Jordan Walsh



Undergrad: California State University-Chico
Major: Psychology, Multicultural & Gender Studies (Option-Women's Studies)
Hometown: Valencia, CA
Assistantship: African American Cultural Center

My name is Jordan Walsh and I graduated from California State University, Chico with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and Multicultural and Gender Studies with an Option in Women's Studies. During my undergraduate career I worked as an Academic Adviser and served as the Commissioner of Diversity Affairs. I also interned with the Gender and Sexuality Equity Center and ran competitively in Cross Country and Track for two years. I am passionate about social justice and talking about dismantling systematic forms of oppression.

I love running and eating lots of sweets! Grey's Anatomy and Scandal are my all time favorite TV shows. I have two older sisters and am very close with my family. I am excited to work towards my Graduate Degree in Higher Education Student Affairs as a UCONN Husky!

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Rebecca Weintraub



Undergrad: Franklin & Marshall College
Major: Sociology
Hometown: West Chester, PA
Assistantship: Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life

My name is Rebecca Weintraub, and I graduated from Franklin & Marshall College in 2013 (don't worry if you haven't heard of it- not many people have). There I majored in Sociology and minored in Women's and Gender Studies. I took on many leadership roles within my sorority, including President, as well as within our campus Hillel. As a leader on campus, I became involved with many committees and working groups collaborating with our Alumni Relations department as well as planning our Baccalaureate Ceremony. It is through my leadership roles and the community campus feel that I knew I wanted to work on college campuses in the future.

After graduating, I was lucky enough to stay in the F&M family, working at the Hillel as the Engagement/Jewish Life Coordinator. This was my first official taste for Student Affairs, and I never stopped wanting more! My position gave me the opportunity to work extremely closely with students in advisory/ supervisory roles and programmatically. It also afforded me to travel to Israel 4 times! Being able to see a campus from both the student perspective and the administrative side has showed me how decisions at the top truly effect all of our students. Having a role within this student/staff relationship sparked my desire to work in Student Affairs even more. While I will be sad to leave the F&M community, I am so excited to travel a little further north and join the HESA family!

Outside of work and school, you'll usually find me at a farmers market, cooking or entertaining. I love being outside and hanging out with friends. I cannot wait to start this new adventure with my fellow HESAs, and experience all that UConn has to offer. Go Huskies!

Garret Zastoupil



Undergrad: University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
Major: Entrepreneurial Management
Hometown: Fargo, ND
Assistantship: Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life

Hi everyone! My name is Garret Zastoupil, and I am a 2015 graduate from the University of Minnesota, Twin-Cities. I have double major in Entrepreneurial Management and Public/Non-Profit Management and a minor in Leadership. I am originally from Fargo, North Dakota (yes, like the movie/TV Show). I became interested in Higher Education and Student Affairs during my sophomore year of college when I took on a student job in our Office of Student Affairs and fell in love with students and the work. During my time as an undergraduate I was also involved with Greek Life, University Student Legal Services, Mortar Board Honor Society, and served as a Teaching Assistant for the Leadership Minor. I am excited to explore issues surrounding masculinity, engagement, and privilege as it relates to college students.

In my free time I enjoy having the hobbies of an old man. I enjoy golfing, antiques (I'm a collector of duck decoys) reading, and spending time at the lake during the summer. While I'll miss my Golden Gophers, I'm excited to join the Husky Family!