

# BREAKING BLUES

BLUEFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2025



## BSU's First Cohort of Graduating Honors Scholars

Michael Acheampong, Oliviah Green, Izabella McGuire, Patrice Sterling, and Peyton Whitt

## From El Salvador to Bluefield

A Life-Changing Journey Through Global UGRAD

## Beyond Borders

A Global UGRAD Journey at Bluefield State University

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Breaking Blues provides practical professional experiences to students enrolled in BSU's Humanities concentration in Strategic Public Relations and Communications.

Submissions of success stories of BSU students and Alumni by BSU students are welcomed but their publication will be determined by the Editorial Board which consists of students enrolled in Strategic Public Relations and Communications.

# BSU'S FIRST COHORT

## OF GRADUATING HONORS SCHOLARS

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Michael Acheampong, Oliviah Green, Izabella McGuire, Patrice Sterling, and Peyton Whitt

by Honors Scholar Anthony Bright



Michael is headed  
to Oracle!

**Michael Acheampong** a Computer Science major with a concentration in Software Engineering, exemplifies the spirit of ambition, leadership, and perseverance at Bluefield State University (BSU).

Originally from Ghana, Michael learned about BSU through EducationUSA, which entity's judgment he trusted to help him find a reputable institution that supports international and first-generation students. Since 2021, Michael has been an Honors Scholar and has taken full advantage of the intellectually stimulating and socially supportive environment BSU offers.

Through retreats, seminars, and close mentorship, Michael found a place where he could grow both academically and personally. Surrounded by like-minded peers and inspiring faculty, he developed the confidence and capability to pursue campus opportunities

in tech. BSU became not just a school, but a launchpad for his future. His 3.97 GPA, consistent placement on the President's List, and the array of competitive scholarships he's earned—such as the IBTTA Scholarship, Phi Eta Sigma Character Award, and Thompson/Caldwell Scholarship—attest to his academic excellence and integrity.

Michael's professional experience is nothing short of exceptional. In 2023, he interned with Amazon and Palantir Technologies, gaining hands-on experience in software development, cybersecurity, and data analytics. At Amazon, he worked on innovative solutions that contribute to global-scale cloud services, while at Palantir he engaged in secure data analytics used in defense and government applications.

Earlier in his academic journey, Michael worked as



an IT Technician, installing firewalls, educating users on cyber scam prevention, and assisting firms such as CISCO with vulnerability mitigation. These roles helped him develop not just technical proficiency but also leadership and communication skills. He also participated in the prestigious TMCF Innovation Challenge, at which he led a team to design AI-driven solutions addressing global issues such as food waste and hunger. His conference appearances at Google I/O (all-expenses-paid invitation), the Dell Emerge Summit, and the TMCF MetaScholars Program further honed his perspective on the intersection of technology and social impact.

Beyond the tech world, Michael is a committed advocate for community empowerment and student success. He co-created a mentorship initiative that supported over 80 students in achieving academic and personal goals.

As a Student Government Association Senator for STEM, he championed student interests, worked to improve retention, and helped organize STEM-related programming.

His outreach extended internationally when he served as a panelist for EducationUSA Sub-Saharan Africa, guiding prospective students in their journey to U.S. higher education institutions, preferably BSU!.

Michael is an active member of organizations such as Phi Eta Sigma, the International Student Organization, and Bluefield's Computer Society.

Through CodePath and ColorStack, he gained deeper training in algorithms and interview prep while advocating for greater diversity in tech. With a full-time Software Engineering position at Oracle already secured, Michael plans to specialize in scalable, secure systems and continue his mission to uplift underrepresented students in computing across the globe.

What got him there?

Visit to Holcomb  
Observatory and  
Planetarium at Butler  
University during  
the eclipse:





Invited to attend the Google I/O 23  
conference:



Cybersecurity conference  
(Secure WV) at Charleston-  
learning to pick a lock as part  
of the security  
strategies we learned.



My team and I presented our pitch at the TMCF Innovation Challenge.





**Olivia Green** of Beckley, West Virginia, has made her time at Bluefield State University a powerful testament to balance, purpose, and achievement.

As an Honors College student, Olivia exemplified leadership in academics, athletics, and community service. Her journey through the Honors College enriched her education through an advanced curriculum and engagement opportunities beyond the classroom.

Olivia not only succeeded in her studies but also embraced every facet of university life, thriving as both a scholar and a student-athlete. Her ability to manage rigorous coursework while being a key contributor to the track and field team demonstrates a level of discipline and time management rarely seen. Her efforts helped the women's track and field team earn the distinction of having the highest team GPA in the CIAA during the indoor season—a milestone that reflects both academic and athletic excellence.

Olivia's leadership on campus extended far beyond competition. As a two-year representative on the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) for women's track and field, Olivia served as the voice for her teammates, advocating for the interests and well-being of student-athletes across campus. She was also a

dedicated leader within the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), wherein she played a key role in creating a welcoming, supportive environment. By leading Bible studies and organizing engaging activities, she helped strengthen a sense of community and purpose among fellow student-athletes.

In the classroom, Olivia's dedication was recognized with her induction into the prestigious Alpha Chi National College Honor Society, affirming her commitment to academic excellence and integrity.

Olivia's dedication to personal growth and service also extended into the broader community. Her internship at the West Virginia Spine Center gave her valuable hands-on experience in a professional healthcare setting, while her consistent volunteer work with the media team at Faith Community Church showed her commitment to service through creativity.

Olivia's passion for photography became yet another way she made her mark—her work was publicly displayed at Beckley ARH Hospital, highlighting her eye for visual storytelling. With a strong foundation in leadership, service, and excellence, Olivia Green leaves Bluefield State not only with honors and accolades but with a deep sense of purpose and a readiness to make an impact wherever her path leads.

Olivia, the accomplished photographer!







Olivia, the track and field star!



Olivia Green, the Imaging Science professional!



**Izabella McGuire**, a double major in Marketing and Entrepreneurship, has made her mark at Bluefield State University not only through academic excellence but also as a bold leader and changemaker.

Completing both majors in just three years, Izabella has shown extraordinary drive, strategic thinking, and a passion for innovation. Her journey through the Honors College has been a transformational one—providing access to cultural exploration, leadership seminars, and a community of like-minded scholars. Whether traveling to Washington, D.C. to study world history and artifacts or engaging in community service through the program's point system, Izabella credits the Honors College with expanding her worldview and helping her develop the courage to pursue real-world marketing opportunities.

Izabella's record of accomplishments is as diverse as it is impressive. Izabella helped establish the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) chapter at Bluefield State and went on to win first place at the state level in both Emerging Business Issues and Hospitality Management. She competed nationally and now serves as a West Virginia State Delegate for FBLA—an honor granted to just one student per university.



As Vice President of Communications for FBLA and Vice President of Gamma Beta Phi for two years each, Izabella has sharpened her leadership and communication skills. She also attended back-to-back Gamma Beta Phi National Conferences in 2024 and 2025.

At the professional level, Izabella was contracted by Nationwide Notice to create freelance marketing videos, and her work is publicly featured on their website. She has developed marketing proposals for the historic Granada Theater and helped a local food truck incubator program member—under the auspices of Bluefield Economic Development Authority—design a logo and execute a marketing plan. Additionally, she partnered with Narrow Gate Greenhouse and Floral to build their marketing presence, gaining first hand insight into small business branding.

Izabella's professors describe her as a standout student with the mindset of a CEO. Faculty in the business department have not only supported her ambitious academic schedule but also provided crucial mentorship and networking leads.

Izabella is especially grateful for the university's willingness to accommodate her accelerated graduation plan. As she prepares to launch her marketing career, Izabella dreams of working in digital marketing and eventually transitioning into economic development—possibly with organizations such as BEDA, which have already served as an inspiration.

With a heart for community impact, a mind for strategy, and a portfolio of real-world experience, Izabella McGuire leaves Bluefield State ready to lead, create, and inspire.

Izabella McGuire





Patrice Sterling



**Patrice Sterling** stands as a beacon of excellence and resilience at Bluefield State University. As an Honors Scholar, tech innovator, and community advocate, Patrice's journey is one marked by ambition, service, and success.

With a deep passion for technology and equity, Patrice has turned every opportunity into a platform for growth—not just for herself, but for those around her. Throughout her college career, Patrice has completed multiple high-impact internships with industry giants. From working with Cyborg Mobile and Microsoft in the New Technologist Program to two prestigious internships with Apple, including roles on the WatchOS and CoreOS teams, she's had a front-row seat to the cutting edge of tech. Her work as a project management intern for Rewriting the Code and technical support roles at Bluefield State also highlight her versatility and commitment to mentoring the next generation of technologists.

Patrice's academic excellence has been matched by an impressive list of national recognitions and scholarships. She is a recipient of awards from Google (Generation and LIME Scholarships), the Society of Women Engineers, CrowdStrike, IBTTA, and the ITSME, among others. Patrice has been awarded the Nordson BUILD Scholarship twice and received the Thompson Cardwell Scholarship three years consecutively.

Patrice's accolades reflect not only strong academic performance but also outstanding leadership and service. She has served as President of the Gamma

Beta Phi National Honor Society for two terms and is a proud member of multiple honor societies including Phi Eta Sigma and Alpha Chi. She co-founded the Black Student Alliance at BSU, serving as treasurer and elevating student voices on campus. As a Student Representative of the Honors College for three consecutive years, she helped bridge administrative and student perspectives.

Patrice's passion for equity in tech has driven her to volunteer with organizations such as ColorStack, AnitaB.org, and Rewriting the Code, where she has hosted pre-career fair events and mentored underrepresented students in computing.

Through her work with Passport to College, Patrice supports academically gifted yet socioeconomically challenged students in Jamaica, helping them access higher education opportunities in the U.S.

In recognition of her outstanding impact, Patrice has received the 2024 Gamma Beta Phi Member of the Year Award, the Phi Eta Sigma Leadership Award, the White House HBCU Scholar Award, and the Grace Hopper & AnitaB.org Award for her Caribbean volunteerism.

Patrice has been a featured attendee and speaker at major conferences including Grace Hopper Celebration, AfroTech, the Tapia Conference, and SWE. From Apple's labs to community mentorship programs, Patrice Sterling's journey is one of breaking barriers and building pathways. As she prepares for the next chapter, she carries with her a legacy of service, scholarship, and visionary leadership.



**Peyton Whitt**, a standout senior from Peterstown, West Virginia, is a member of the first-ever Honors College cohort at Bluefield State University. As a dual major in Mechanical Engineering Technology and Engineering Management, Peyton exemplifies the caliber of student leadership and academic excellence that the Honors College cultivates. Living just 45 minutes from BSU, Peyton was well aware of the university's reputation as a regional hub for aspiring engineers. Upon enrolling, he quickly found a home within the Honors College, where he has remained an active member for all four years of his undergraduate career. Throughout this time, Peyton has taken full advantage of the program's academically rigorous courses, cultural immersion activities, and professional development opportunities.

From exploring national landmarks in Washington, D.C. to participating annually in St. Mary's Orthodox Church's World Food Festival, Peyton has experienced a

rich diversity of cultures through the Honors College's programming. His academic environment was further enriched by sharing residential and classroom spaces with peers from around the globe. These experiences helped propel Peyton into elite internship positions with Fortune 500 companies. In 2023, he worked as a reliability engineer at WestRock Paper Mill in Covington, Virginia, ensuring the safety and operational integrity of unfired pressure vessels. The following year, he joined Newport News Shipbuilding as a non-destructive testing engineer, supporting high-stakes welding and inspection operations for U.S. Navy aircraft carriers and submarines. A photo of him beside the USS \*Montana\* (SSN-794) stands as a testament to his contributions.

At Bluefield State, Peyton has consistently demonstrated academic excellence, maintained a perfect 4.00 GPA and earned a place on the President's List every semester. His commitment was further recognized

Peyton next to the USS  
\*Montana\* (SSN-794)



through the Claude B. Dalton Scholarship, awarded to the top engineering technology freshman in 2021–2022. Peyton credits much of his success to the supportive faculty at BSU. Former Honors College Director Dr. Sean Connolly refined his research and writing skills, while Dr. Bonnie Reese instilled in him the art of public speaking and debate. Dr. Rob Merritt's courses expanded Peyton's understanding of literature's impact on society, grounding his technical education in a broader intellectual context.

Upon graduation, Peyton will step into a full-time role as a project engineer with the Beaufort-Jasper Water & Sewer Authority in South Carolina. His long-term goal is to continue growing as an engineer and eventually serve as a project manager overseeing multidisciplinary engineering efforts. With academic prowess, hands-on experience, and a passion for continuous learning, Peyton Whitt is not just graduating with honors—he's leaving a legacy. ■

Peyton Whitt



# RADJIKOU KANE OF NIGER

By Lorelei Oomens

The Office of International Initiatives at our school has welcomed a number of students from all over the world. One of these students is Radjikou Kane, who has come to Bluefield State all the way from Niger.

“I wanted to study abroad because it will open my mind and bring me some opportunities in the future,” he explained. His arrival here was a matter of fortunate chance, as his program did not allow students to choose their destination. However, despite the unexpected location, Kane embraced his time here, bringing vibrant aspects of Niger culture with him. He brought traditional clothing of the Hausa and Touareg ethnic groups, and he presented his culture to students at Bluefield High School, introducing them to the clothing and traditions of a country a world away.

He noted that the transition to American higher education has presented some interesting contrasts; one significant difference is the integration of technology into our classes. Another is assessment methods. “In my country we do not have many quizzes and assignments,” he explained. “The lecturer can give maybe one assignment; some lecturers give none, and at the end of the course, we will have the final exam.” Adapting to the more frequent assessments and assignments here took some time, as did navigating the initial class registration process.”

Despite these initial challenges, Kane expressed immense gratitude for the support he has received from professors and students. “Well, I will say people are very helpful,” he said. “I really appreciate them, especially the lecturers who are ready to help at any time and smile at the students, which is something that I liked the most.”

Though he is immersed in the culture here in West Virginia, he still maintains a connection to his home culture through his faith as a devoted Muslim. He brought his prayer mat to honor the prayer times each day. “Whenever it is time for prayer, I will go



Global UGRAD Radjikou Kane of Niger readies for prayers

and say it in my room. Sometimes I can even do it on the campus. It is really challenging to pray alone, but I do so every single day,” he explained.

His advice to future international students is simple yet profound: “My advice to them is just to be patient and focus on the target that brought them and try to learn with others while being abroad.”

Kane believes that his time studying abroad will have a lasting impact on his future career and life. He specifically mentioned learning practical skills during his time here, such as crafting cover letters and resumes. He also believes that studying in a





Radjickou Kane and Sir Blue



different country has shaped his global perspective, helping broaden his perception of the world. “Before I had limited thoughts about areas of life, but now I understand there are a lot of things that we are far behind in Niger.”

After he graduates, Kane’s immediate career goals are deeply rooted in a desire to serve his community. “My first goal is to become a teacher and serve my country, but I do not want to remain in teaching,” he admitted. “Maybe if I find an industry which is better than teaching, I will go.” He plans to finish his studies back home, since he is only here for one semester, but he would love to come back to the US if given the opportunity. Later in his career, he envisions himself

as a businessman or a higher education professor or administrator.

In closing, Kane shared a personal motivation that drives him. Having grown up in a small village with limited access to quality education, he hopes to one day contribute to improving educational opportunities in rural areas. “It is a really good experience studying abroad, especially in the US, where everyone wishes to come,” he concluded, his words reflecting the sentiments of many international students who seek to broaden their horizons and make a difference in the world. ■



RGK at East River Mountain Overlook which inspires all visitors to look far into the horizon

# FROM EL SALVADOR TO BLUEFIELD

## A Life-Changing Journey Through Global UGRAD

by Lenny García

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My name is Lenny García, a proud Salvadoran student pursuing a degree in Marketing and International Business. In the spring semester of 2024, I had the life-changing opportunity to participate in an academic exchange program at Bluefield State University (BSU), thanks to the Global UGRAD Program. Now, nearly ten months after returning home, I find myself reflecting every day on the extraordinary moments I experienced at Bluefield — moments that have left an indelible mark on my life.

Two essential pillars made my time at BSU truly



Lenny at the US Capitol

special. First, the incredible staff at Bluefield State, whose kindness, openness, and genuine commitment to service created an environment where every student felt supported and welcomed. Second, the friends I made along the way — a beautiful mix of domestic students, fellow international students, and exchange peers from Global UGRAD and Fulbright programs. Together, they formed the perfect combination that made each day more memorable than the last.

One of the most impactful aspects of my exchange was the opportunity to connect with people from all corners of the world. For the first time in my life, my circle of friends spanned across continents, cultures, and backgrounds. What I once only knew through books and theory, I was now experiencing firsthand — learning, laughing, and growing alongside them. This exposure shaped me into a more empathetic and open-minded person, helping me develop a deeper sense of humanity and appreciation for the beauty in our differences.

As my time as a Global UGRAD 2023-2024 came to an end, I officially joined the International Exchange Alumni network, a milestone I will forever cherish. Representing El Salvador before the world was a profound honor, and the knowledge, memories, and friendships I gained continue to shape my personal and professional vision. This journey left me with a broader perspective and reinforced my belief in the power of cultural exchange. Each person who walked alongside me in this process — from program coordinators to professors, friends, and mentors — has become a permanent part of my story. Through it all, I could see God's presence, and I know He will continue to guide my path. As we say in the program, "Once a UGRAD, always a UGRAD."





Lenny in front of Conley Hall, Bluefield State

## BREAKING BLUES



Lenny Alexandra Garcia and 2024 Global UGRADS Emmer, Ilia, Aizat with BSU international student Omulara and FLTA for Arabic Fatima El Ansari at Bluefield High School's multicultural celebrations



2024 Global UGRADS Emmer from Laos, Lenny from El Salvador, Aizat from Malaysia, and Ilia from Ukraine at Bluefield High School's multicultural day celebrations



Coming from a tropical country like El Salvador, adapting to life in West Virginia during winter was both a challenge and an adventure. The climate, the food, and even the way people dress were all so different from what I knew. Yet, this contrast allowed me to discover a whole new side of myself — a Lenny who hiked snowy trails, walked under gentle snowfalls, and even tried skiing for the first time. Even the mountains and trees seemed different, and those little details made Bluefield an unforgettable place for me.

Another highlight of my experience was serving as a cultural ambassador for my country. Every day, I had the chance to show others what Salvadoran warmth and hospitality truly mean. Beyond daily interactions, I was honored to formally present about El Salvador twice at Bluefield High School, and I also had the chance to share my culture during a week-long World Learning Workshop in Washington, D.C. It was magical to see how a girl



At Winterplace, Lenny enjoyed her first experience of snow and skiing!



Lenny at Roanoke airport, having completed her semester of study at Bluefield State University

from a small country, and an even smaller town, could leave a lasting impression on hearts across the globe.

Although I was the only member of my family physically present in Bluefield, I was never alone. My family's dreams, sacrifices, and love traveled with me every step of the way. This was not just Lenny's journey, but the García family's as well. Now, even after returning home, a piece of my heart remains scattered across the world — wherever my friends are, there is a part of me cheering them on and feeling proud of their achievements.

Bluefield State University was more than a school for me; it became a home away from home. And while my Global UGRAD chapter has officially ended, its legacy will continue to shape the rest of my life. ■

# ON TO THE NEXT

## XAVIER JARMON'S STORY

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by Jonah Brower

Xavier Jarmon arrived at Bluefield State University in 2021 with a vision and an unstoppable drive. As a Public Relations major, he knew that success would not come easily. Xavier had to deal with circumstances such as the Covid-19 pandemic which moved many of his classes online his freshman year, but this did not deter his desire to maintain perfect grades. Through it all he embraced every challenge with determination.

From his freshman year onward, Xavier committed himself to excelling both academically and personally, forging a path that would set him apart. Xavier credits a lot of his success to the English classes he took his freshman year. Classes such as Composition 1 and Composition 2 with Professor Mark Botts helped him make every story he wrote stand out.

Balancing academics and extracurricular activities, Xavier became a leader on campus. He joined student organizations such as FBLA and Breaking Blues, which allowed him to write success stories about BSU students and alumni, and develop relationships with professors such as Dr. Jamkhandi and Mr. Botts who helped shape his career. BSU has helped Xavier nurture his ability to communicate effectively and help build professional relationships. These traits and experiences have made him a standout in the Public Relations program.

In the sports' spaces, Xavier thrived in athletics. Though he had aspirations of playing football at a higher level, he focused on developing his skills while staying committed to his studies. He knows that a career in football doesn't last forever, so



Xavier Jarmon #9 in sync with his teammates





Xavier Jarmon, donning the colors reflecting his academic accomplishments, prior to graduation

setting up his professional career has become his focus. His dedication has paid off because he has been offered an opportunity to continue his football career at Arkansas Tech University while pursuing a Master's degree in Liberal Arts.

As he prepares to graduate in the spring of 2025, Xavier reflects on his journey with gratitude. Bluefield State University provided him with a foundation that has set him up for success, and he is eager for the next chapter at Arkansas Tech University. There, he will continue his dream of playing college football at a competitive level and also engage in academic pursuits while fulfilling.

Xavier has built a strong portfolio of experiences, in-

cluding public relations campaigns, event planning, and media outreach. His ability to balance sports, studies, and leadership roles made him a role model for younger students. He encourages others to take advantage of every opportunity available.

Xavier Jarmon's story is one of resilience, passion, and unwavering commitment. As he moves forward, he carries with him the lessons and experiences gained at Bluefield State, ready to make an even greater impact on the football field and in strategic public relations and communications. ■

See @bstatesports Play of the Day, featuring [Xavier Jarmon](#).

# PITCHING TOWARD THE FUTURE

## Jackson Harless Balances Athletics, Business, and Big Ambitions

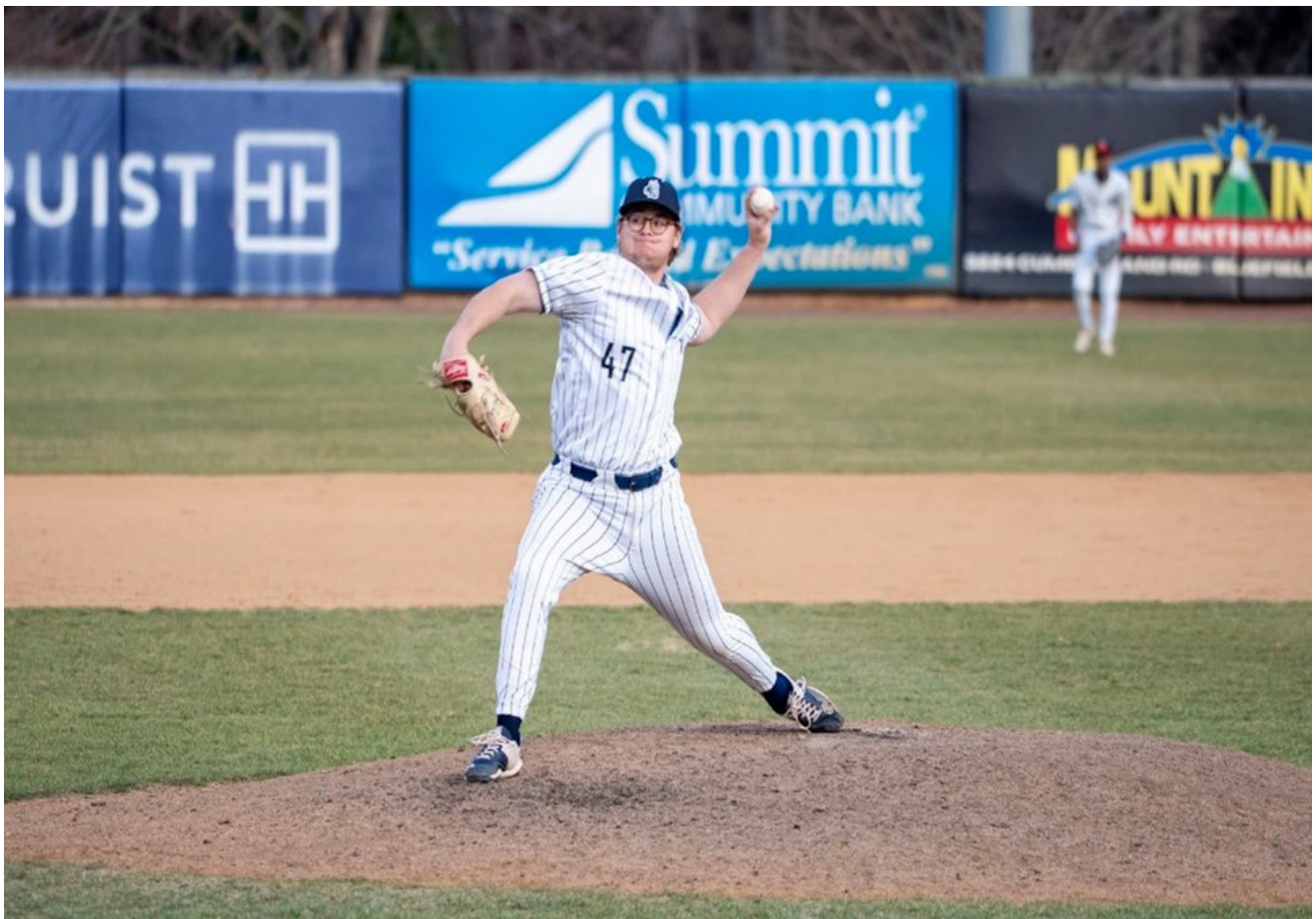
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by Megan Pendergrass

For Jackson Alexander Harless, success isn't just about wins on the baseball field—it's about building a meaningful path that leads back home. A recent graduate of Bluefield State University with a bachelor's in business, Harless is currently pursuing his MBA and setting his sights on law school.

"I've been interested in law ever since I started college," Harless says. "And Bluefield State's resources and the close knit community here have definitely helped me pursue that goal."

Originally drawn to BSU for its athletics, Harless joined both the baseball and golf teams. As a pitcher, he found discipline and focus; in the classroom, he found something even more valuable – connection. He speaks fondly of conversations with faculty, like one with Dr. McMillan, who took the time to share book recommendations and talk candidly about shared interests. "It's personal here," Harless says. "Professors aren't just teachers—they're mentors."



Jackson pitching for Bluefield State!



While Harless values his time at BSU, he reflects honestly on one academic regret: taking too many online classes. “Because of athletics, I leaned toward online courses for flexibility,” he admits. “But I missed out on deeper relationships with some professors. With law school on the horizon, I wish I had more experience in an in-person learning environment.”

Looking ahead, Harless envisions himself returning to his roots. “In ten years, I hope to be back in West Virginia—probably Charleston—doing something important.”

In his final thoughts about his experiences at Bluefield State, Harless circled back to what makes Bluefield State special. “The people here truly care. They support the school, the teams, the projects — not just with money, but with their time and energy. That’s why I believe this place will succeed where others don’t.”

From the pitcher’s mound to the courtroom, Jackson Harless is building a future grounded in purpose — and he’s taking the spirit of Bluefield State with him every step of the way. ■



Jackson greeting Baby Dog and former WV Governor (now US Senator) Jim Justice

# ANTHONY BRIGHT

## A RISING STAR IN ACADEMIA AND INNOVATION

By Omar ALTamimi, 2025 Global UGRAD from Jordan



Meet Honors Scholar Anthony Bright, a name known for innovation and dedication to academics at Bluefield State University.

Anthony's journey began with a decisive moment at the American Legion Virginia Boys State Program, where he discovered his passion for academic pursuits. Captivated by the Honors College program at Bluefield State, he embarked on a path of discovery that defined his future.

In just one semester, Anthony's achievements speak loudly. From founding the Honors College Chess Club to securing the prestigious McNair Scholarship, his commitment to excellence knows no bounds.

Anthony's inventive spirit flourished with the design of a revolutionary chess table, a testament to his creative prowess and leadership. [See Breaking Blues Fall 2024 edition for the full story.]

Anthony's ambitions stretch beyond the campus border. His participation in NASA programs, including the Virginia Aerospace Science and Technology Scholars and the summer 2025 REU Hyper program in Florida, showcases his passion for aeronautics and space exploration. His vision for the Space Net, aimed for clearing space debris, promises to revolutionize environmental sustainability in outer space.

Beyond academics, Anthony finds comfort in poetry and seasonal photography, capturing the essence of nature and emotions. His engagement in community service and leadership roles in organizations like FBLA and Gamma Beta Phi reflect his commitment to making a positive impact.

With everything he's accomplished so far, one clear thing is that Anthony Bright is a name to remember. And he's just getting started. ■



Anthony Bright is heading for the stars



# ERIC TUNSTALL

## A JOURNEY OF GRIT, FOOTBALL, AND THE AIR FORCE

by Xavier Jarmon

Eric Tunstall has always been a fighter. Born and raised in Mobile, Alabama, he grew up with a strong sense of discipline and ambition, instilled in him by his hardworking family. From a young age, he was drawn to football, and by the time he reached high school, his talent on the field had caught the attention of college scouts. His determination and relentless work ethic led him to Bluefield State University, where he earned a spot on the football team as a linebacker.



Eric Tunstall will swap his football uniform jersey for a US Airforce uniform

At Bluefield State, Eric balanced the rigors of being a student-athlete with his academic goals. He studied hard, knowing that football was just one chapter of his life. While his love for the game was undeniable, Eric had a bigger dream in mind, serving his country in the United States Air Force. He admired the discipline, structure, and purpose that came with military service, and he knew that after graduation, his next mission would be to wear the Air Force uniform.

His teammates and coaches respected him not only for his skills on the field but also for his leadership. He was the kind of player who gave his all in practice and held others accountable, pushing them to be their best. Off the field, he was just as committed, excelling in his studies and preparing for his future beyond football. Many nights, while others rested after games, Eric would be in his room studying for upcoming exams and doing homework.

Despite the challenges of balancing sports and academics, he never lost sight of his goal. During his senior year, he met with an Air Force recruiter to finalize his enlistment process. With his degree nearly in hand and years of athletic discipline behind him, Eric knew he was ready for the next step.

As graduation approaches, Eric will reflect on his journey, from the football fields of Mobile to Mitchell Stadium of Bluefield State, and now toward a future in the Air Force. He is proud of how far he had come, but he knew his journey was just beginning. With his helmet soon to be replaced by a military cap, Eric Tunstall is ready to take flight, carrying the same determination that had driven him his entire life. ■



At East River Mountain Overlook: I-r – Dea Basha of Albania, Shanujan Jesurasa of Sri Lanka,  
Noythida Simmavong of Laos Radjikou Kane of Niger, Omar AlTamimi of Jordan;  
back – Brandon Velasquez De Paz of Guatemala

# BEYOND BORDERS

## A Global UGRAD Journey at Bluefield State University

by Dea Basha (Albania) and Jesurasa Shanujan  
(Sri Lanka)

In the spring of 2025, Bluefield State University in West Virginia became more than a campus, it became a home for six students from six different countries: Dea Basha of Albania, Shanujan Jesurasa of Sri Lanka, Radjikou Kane of Niger, Brandon Velasco de Paz of Guatemala, Noythida Simmavong of Laos, and Omar AlTamimi of Jordan.



As Global UGRAD participants, we are from vastly different backgrounds, languages, and cultures. But during our semester together, we discovered a shared purpose: to learn, grow, serve, and build lasting connections across borders.

Together, we're proud to share this article written by the two of us, Dea and Shanujan on behalf of our diverse cohort, reflecting on the experience that has changed us forever.

### **Academic Excellence in a New Environment**

At the core of our experience was the opportunity to engage in American higher education. Each of us selected courses relevant to our majors ranging from social sciences and public administration to international studies, business, and communication.

The pedagogy at Bluefield State emphasizes interactive dialogue, critical thinking, research, and peer collaboration. It encouraged us to not just absorb content, but to contribute our perspectives grounded in our own countries' histories, traditions, and current challenges. Professors were not only academically supportive but curious about who we are and where we are from, making the classroom a culturally rich space for mutual learning.

### **Internships: Hands-On Learning and Professional Growth**

Several of us gained practical experience through internships on campus. As Global UGRAD students, we were given the opportunity to intern in two key offices:

- The Office of International Initiatives, where we assisted with organizing cultural events, promoting exchange programs, and fostering international awareness.
- The Office of Admissions, where we worked behind the scenes of the American college recruitment system, helping coordinate communication with prospective students and learning how access to education is facilitated in the U.S.

These internships gave us meaningful insights into the structure of U.S. higher education, strengthened our communication and organizational skills, and allowed us to contribute to the university community in a real and impactful way.



At the Greenbrier



BREAKING BLUES



Inside The Greenbrier with Christina Sammarco



At the Cascades in Pembroke, Virginia





Atop the Albert Einstein statue in Washington, D.C.





In front of the White House

### **Giving Back: Community Engagement and Volunteerism**

Service is a fundamental pillar of the UGRAD program. One of our most heartfelt experiences was volunteering with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) organization. Meeting retired military personnel, listening to their stories, and sharing our own journeys led to deep and emotional connections.

We also had the privilege to be part of the Career Fair Organizing Committee at Bluefield State, contributing to logistics and hospitality to ensure a smooth and welcoming event for both employers and students.

These acts of service reminded us that even in a short time, we can leave a lasting impact—whether through formal roles or heartfelt human connections.

### **Representing Our Cultures: Diplomacy through Dialogue**

One of the most powerful aspects of our journey was acting as cultural ambassadors. At Bluefield High School, we conducted cultural presentations where we introduced students to our heritage, languages, traditional dress, and values.

Watching students' eyes light up with curiosity—and sometimes surprise—was incredibly rewarding. From food and festivals to education systems and social customs, we broke down stereotypes and built bridges through storytelling. These exchanges reminded us that diplomacy doesn't always happen in embassies; it often begins in classrooms, with open minds and honest questions.

### **Exploring America: Learning Through Travel**

Our semester was also enriched by the chance to explore the diversity of the United States. We visited iconic cities such as New York and Chicago, and the





At Mountaineer Family Entertainment bowling lanes



L-r at the VFW, Bluefield, Virginia: Brandon Velasco De Paz of Guatemala; Shanujan Jesurasa of Sri Lanka; Omar Al-Tamimi of Jordan; Radjickou Aboucarr Kane of Niger; Noythida Simmvavong of Laos; Dea Basha of Albania



## BREAKING BLUES



At the Career Fair, April 9, 2025



Global UGRAD from Sri Lanka Shanujan Jesurasa shared the culture and traditions of his native land.





Bluefield High School students welcomed the Global UGRADS

states of Florida and California, gaining a deeper understanding of America's regional cultures, historical landmarks, and everyday life.

Whether it was admiring art at The Met, standing in awe beneath skyscrapers, or walking along California's beaches, every experience offered a new lens into American society. These journeys taught us that the U.S. is not one singular story—but a collection of many, just like us.

### **Mutual Curiosity: How Domestic Students Welcomed Us**

Throughout the semester, we were met with warmth, curiosity, and friendship by our American peers. US students were excited to learn about our countries and, in turn, were eager to share their own lives with us.

These exchanges—whether during group projects, campus events, or coffee breaks—reminded us of the value of international education: it's not just about what you learn in class, but the relationships you build beyond it.

### **One Journey, Many Stories**

As this life-changing semester draws to a close, we reflect on what we've gained: knowledge, confidence, professional growth, friendships, and a clearer sense of who we are as global citizens.

To the U.S. Department of State, World Learning, and Bluefield State University, we offer our deepest

gratitude. This program gave six students from six countries not just a seat at the table but the tools, courage, and inspiration to go home and create change.

We may be heading back to different continents, but we carry the same message: when people come together with openness and purpose, even the smallest community can become a bridge to the world. ■

# FROM THE MOUND TO THE MISSION

## Colton Roberts' Path from Baseball to Border Security

By Megan Pendergrass

At Bluefield State University, Colton Roberts stands out—not just for his dual role on the baseball field as a pitcher and catcher, but for his unwavering sense of duty beyond the diamond.

A criminal justice major with a concentration in Homeland Security and Terrorism, Roberts is pursuing more than a degree—he's chasing a lifelong calling to serve his country.

Originally from Hatfield, Pennsylvania, Roberts transferred to BSU after his baseball coach at Washington College moved on. The move, he says, was more than just a change of scenery. "I liked the rural feel, the tight-knit community," he explains. "And BSU actually offered a criminal justice degree, which fit better with my career goals."

Roberts' goals are laser-focused: a career in federal law enforcement. He is currently engaged in the process of applying for jobs in four federal agencies, including Border Patrol and the DEA, and is preparing for a polygraph in Washington, D.C. "I've always had this drive to be part of something elite," he says. "I want to protect the innocent, and I feel a responsibility as a patriot to give back."

Part of that drive comes from his older brother, a member of the U.S. Green Berets, and from a shared thrill-seeking nature. "We're adrenaline junkies," Roberts admits with a grin. "I don't want to be behind a desk—I want to kick down doors and lock up bad guys."

Roberts' story is one of focus, resilience, and passion—fueled by a love for country, a bond with family, and a future that lies at the intersection of public service and personal grit. ■



Colton the Catcher





To protect and to serve - what Colton learned during his ATF internship



BLUEFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY  
**12TH ANNUAL**

**HUMANITIES  
CHALLENGE**

**OCTOBER 8, 2025  
10AM - 2PM**

**OTHELLO-HARRIS JEFFERSON STUDENT UNION  
THE HUMANITIES DIG HUMANS**

Area high schools field two teams of three members each  
Tuition waivers are awarded to the winners and runners up



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