

JUNE 2026



VOL.3

GRADINSIGHTS



Congratulations!
CLASS OF SPRING 2026

School of Graduate Studies | 54 Degrees Awarded

Transforming Lives, Advancing Knowledge, Shaping the Future!

“ *Every graduate degree
tells a story.* ”

Every graduate degree tells a story. Some stories begin in small towns across the United States. Others start thousands of miles away in countries such as Bulgaria, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, or Nigeria. Though their journeys are unique, they all converge at one place: the University of Maryland Eastern Shore School of Graduate Studies.

This edition of GradInsights celebrates the remarkable achievements, research, leadership, and resilience of the students, alumni, faculty, and staff who make our graduate community exceptional.

This year, UMES proudly awarded 54 graduate degrees, including 11 doctoral degrees, to scholars whose work is already making an impact in their professions, communities, and fields of study.

We also celebrated a historic milestone with the first graduates from the M.S. in Data Science and Analytics Engineering and the M.S. in Electrical and Mechatronics Engineering programs, further strengthening UMES' growing reputation as a research-focused institution.

The stories within these pages reflect the power of graduate education to transform lives and expand possibilities. They showcase grit, perseverance, innovation, discovery, leadership, and service while highlighting the many ways our graduate community is advancing knowledge and creating meaningful change.

As you explore this issue, we invite you to celebrate these accomplishments and be inspired by the journeys, achievements and aspirations that continue to shape the future of UMES, of our world, and beyond.

Thank you for being part of our story.

Together, we at the UMES School of Graduate Studies are transforming lives, advancing knowledge, and shaping the future!

LaKeisha Harris

Dr. LaKeisha Harris

Dean, School of Graduate Studies



Dr. LaKeisha Harris
Dean, School of Graduate Studies



EDITORIAL TEAM

DR. WELE ELANGWE

Director of Graduate
Student Services
Editor-in-Chief

DR. KELSIE ENDICOTT

Graduate Writing Center
Coordinator
Contributor & Reviewer

MS. UCHENNA NWONYE

Graduate Assistant
Contributor & Reviewer



**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
EASTERN SHORE**
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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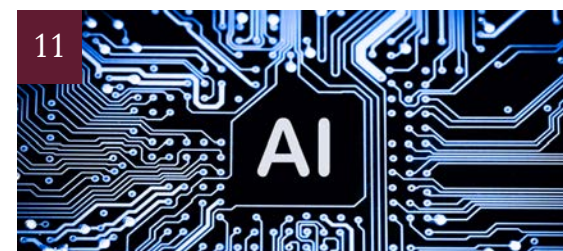
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Celebrating Excellence: Spring Graduates, Class of 2026!

A Milestone Year for Graduate Education

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore Graduate School proudly celebrated the Spring Class of 2026, conferring 54 graduate degrees across master's, doctoral and professional programs.

This year's graduating class included 11 doctoral graduates and marked a historic milestone with the first graduates from the Master of Science (M.S.) in Data Science & Analytics Engineering and the Master of Science (M.S.) in Electrical & Mechatronics Engineering.

Combined with the Fall 2025 graduates, UMES continues to strengthen its research profile and doctoral graduate numbers as the institution advances toward reclaiming Carnegie R2 status.



BY THE NUMBERS

 54 Graduate Degrees Awarded

- 11 Doctoral Degrees
- 43 Master's Degrees

 11 International Graduates representing multiple countries

 Continued Progress Toward Carnegie R2 classification

DOCTORAL GRADUATES



Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Food & Agricultural Sciences

Dr. John M. Ithiru, Ruiru, Kenya
Dr. Euyeon Noh, Salisbury, MD

Organizational Leadership

Dr. Edward J. Brink, Newark, DE
Dr. Kelly Carey, Easton, MD
Dr. Jean Goblinger, Salisbury, MD
Dr. Latoya Jenkins, Queens, NY
Dr. Aleksandra Manolova, Sofia, Bulgaria

Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

Education Leadership

Dr. Jonas Beaubrun, Hyattsville, MD
Dr. Jason Capobianco, Salisbury, MD
Dr. Shelton Handy, Princess Anne, MD
Dr. Tracee Threet-Harvey, East Orange, NJ

HISTORIC FIRSTS

First Graduate of the M.S. in Data Science & Analytics Engineering

Manal Yaoub

First Graduates of the M.S. in Electrical & Mechatronics Engineering

Tamunoene Bamson
Tassnim Mohamed



CLASS OF 2026
MASTER'S DEGREE ROLL OF HONOR

Master of Arts

Teaching (MA)

Alexis A. Kagan, Pocomoke, MD

Master of Education

Career and Technology Education (M.Ed.)

Gerald Kirk, Ijamsville, MD

Sharhonda L. Whitfield, Pikesville, MD

Counselor Education (M.Ed.)

Nicole L. Gale, Princess Anne, MD

Molly E. McCormick, Bishopville, MD

Special Education (M.Ed.)

Grace Godfrey, Salisbury, MD

Tyra B. Oliver, Salisbury, MD

Ada B. Rogers, Salisbury, MD

Master of Medical Science

Physician Assistant Studies (M.M.S.)

Christopher J. Baptiste, Middleburg, FL

Alexis Layton, Delmar, DE

Master of Science

Applied Computer Science (M.S.)

Arya S. Das, Delmar, MD

Iyad Eldin M. Elfadil, Fruitland, MD

Yixiao Ma, Gaithersburg, MD

Chemistry

Ezra E. Cable, Tyaskin, MD

Husham A. Joda, Princess Anne, MD

Sara E. Lahoff, Crownsville, MD

Criminology & Criminal Justice (M.S.)

Lawrence Foreman, Windsor, CT

Cybersecurity Engineering Technology (M.S.)

Mouaye B. Atchimon, Wheaton, MD

Adrian S. Dula, Hampton, VA

Badreldin M. Ahmed Elhaj, Princess Anne, MD

Tesfay B. Gebremedhn, Silver Spring, MD

Rhamad Hawkins-McNeil, Waldorf, MD

Nakia L. Maxie-Hill, Washington, DC

Nadine S.L. Rikam Moudji, Glenn Dale, MD

Daniel Segay, Columbia, MD

Tyler A. Washington, La Plata, MD.

Data Science and Analytics Engineering (M.S.)

Manal M. Yaoub, Odenton, MD

Electrical and Mechatronics Engineering (M.S.)

Tamunoene E. Bamson, Manassas Park, VA

Tassnim W. Abdalla Mohamed, Fruitland, MD

Food & Agricultural Sciences (M.S.)

Sandesh Chapagain, Princess Anne, MD

Jordan E. Frazier, Springdale, MD

Raksha Khadka, Princess Anne, MD

Rumita L. Sanwa, Princess Anne, MD

Elmahi E. E. Mohammed, Princess Anne, MD

Marine Estuarine Environmental Sciences (M.S.)

Isabella A. Beasley, Walls, MS

Christopher A. K. Robinson, Belcamp, MD

Rehabilitation Counseling (M.S.)

Charity U. Akpovino, Lagos, Nigeria

Jonathan M. Drone, Elkton, MD

Chaniqwa R. Gilliam, Chesapeake, VA

Mahogany L. Lester, Virginia Beach, VA

Chinenye E. Oluoba, Lagos, Nigeria

Audrey S. Spence, Princess Anne, MD

Jazmine H. Thomas, Washington, DC



Dean Harris of the UMES Graduate School,
hooding Ms. Audrey Spence,
M.S. Rehabilitation Counseling

It Takes a Village: The Journey of UMES' Electrical & Mechatronics Engineering Pioneer Graduate

by **Tamunoene E. Bamson, M.S.**
Electrical and Mechatronics Engineering

“Behind every late-night study session, research deadline, presentation, and thesis revision has been a strong support system made up of family, friends, mentors, and fellow graduate students who continuously encouraged me to keep going.”



With Dad from Nigeria and other family members

Graduate school has been one of the most challenging and rewarding journeys of my life, and I know without question that I could not have made it through alone. Behind every late-night study session, research deadline, presentation, and thesis revision has been a strong support system made up of family, friends, mentors, and fellow graduate students who continuously encouraged me to keep going.

Throughout my time at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Graduate School, I have learned that success in graduate education is not achieved in isolation. It is built through community, encouragement, and the people who remind you of your purpose during difficult moments.

Whether through words of motivation, prayers, shared laughter, or simply checking in during stressful weeks, my support system helped turn challenges into milestones worth celebrating.

As I prepare to begin the next chapter of my academic journey in a PhD program, I carry with me deep gratitude for everyone who has contributed to my growth both personally and professionally. Graduate school has strengthened not only my academic abilities, but also my resilience, discipline, and appreciation for the people who stand beside us through every season of life.

Looking ahead, I am excited for the opportunities, research, and experiences that await in the future. More importantly, I hope to continue building meaningful connections, supporting others the way I have been supported, and using my journey to inspire students who may one day follow a similar path.



Left: On stage with UMES President, Dr. Heidi Anderson as the first ever graduate of the UMES M.S. program in Electrical & Mechatronics Engineering



Right: With UMES friends and gym buddies, Mercy Amofa, PhD student in Pharmaceutical Sciences and Albert Ofosu, PhD student in Toxicology



A Trailblazer's Triumph: Dr. Latoya Jenkins Earns Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership

by Dr. Wele Elangwe

Director of Graduate Student Services

Dr. Latoya Jenkins officially joined the ranks of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore's Spring Class of 2026 doctoral graduates, earning her Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Organizational Leadership after successfully defending her dissertation in May 2026. Her achievement represents the culmination of years of sacrifice, resilience, and unwavering determination while simultaneously serving in two of the university's most demanding executive leadership roles, first as Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Experience and most recently as Vice President for Presidential Strategy and Chief of Staff.

A visionary and trailblazing leader, Dr. Jenkins made history as the first woman to serve in a vice-presidential role at UMES.

Throughout her doctoral journey, she balanced the weight of executive leadership with the rigorous demands of doctoral research and scholarship, embodying a profound commitment to lifelong learning, servant leadership, and excellence.

Her ability to lead at the highest levels of the institution while pursuing one of academia's most challenging credentials speaks to both her discipline and extraordinary perseverance.

Dr. Jenkins' accomplishments extend far beyond academia. She has been recognized as one of The Daily Record's Top 100 Women in Maryland. She is also a graduate of the prestigious Leadership Maryland Executive Program. These honors reflect her professional impact and the respect she has earned as a leader across the state.

As a wife and mother, earning her doctorate carries even greater significance. Her journey is not only a personal milestone, but a powerful testament to faith, perseverance, and purpose-driven leadership. Through her example, Dr. Jenkins continues to inspire students, colleagues, and the broader UMES community with her tenacity, humility, and steadfast dedication to advancing student success, transformational leadership, and institutional excellence.

The Transformative Power of Education Leadership - Dr. Mfon Nwabuoku's Story

by Dr. Wele Elangwe

Director of Graduate Student Services



Dr. Mfon B. Nwabuoku is an accomplished higher education leader whose work is defined by a steadfast commitment to student success, inclusive excellence, and transformational leadership. A proud alumna of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), she earned her Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership in Fall 2022, further strengthening a professional foundation rooted in service, equity, and student development.

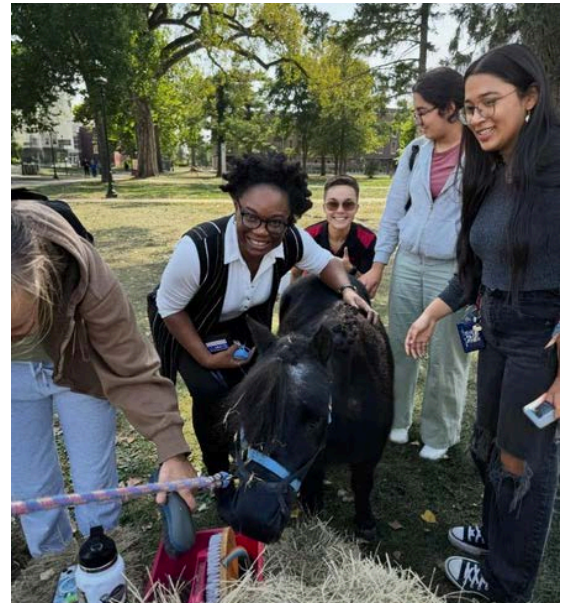
Since completing her doctoral studies, Dr. Nwabuoku has continued to distinguish herself as a dynamic and forward-thinking leader within higher education. Her professional journey reflects a deep dedication to cultivating environments where students feel supported, empowered, and positioned to thrive both academically and personally.

Currently serving as Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life at Lake Forest College in Illinois, Dr. Nwabuoku provides strategic leadership for residential education and student engagement initiatives. In her role, she collaborates across campus to foster inclusive living-learning communities that promote belonging, accountability, holistic development, and student well-being.

Recognized for her student-centered philosophy and collaborative leadership style, Dr. Nwabuoku is passionate about developing innovative approaches that strengthen campus community, enhance the student experience, and advance equitable practices within higher education. Her leadership is guided by restorative principles and a belief in the transformative power of education to create meaningful and lasting impact.

Dr. Nwabuoku's professional accomplishments and continued contributions to the field exemplify the values of excellence, resilience, and service championed by UMES. Her journey inspires emerging scholars and higher education professionals to lead with purpose, integrity, and vision while demonstrating that success is possible even when navigating unfamiliar paths and balancing multiple responsibilities. Dr. Nwabuoku's success reminds us that challenges can become stepping stones and that with vision, hard work, and perseverance, dreams can transcend borders.

The UMES Graduate School proudly celebrates Dr. Mfon B. Nwabuoku as an outstanding alumna whose leadership continues to transform and inspire while reflecting the excellence, resilience, and global impact of a UMES education.



Dr. Nwabuoku at Grinnell College



Dr. Nwabuoku at Lake Forest College

FROM VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS TO COMMENCEMENT

by Dr. Wele Elangwe
Director of Graduate Student Services

“Graduation day was more than receiving our degrees; it was our first opportunity to experience the campus community that gave us so much and supported us from afar”



Daniel Segay and Tesfay Gebremedhn with Dean Harris

For many online graduate students, earning a degree means completing coursework, collaborating with classmates, and engaging with faculty entirely from a distance. Such was the experience of Daniel Segay and Tesfay Gebremedhn, graduates of UMES's Master of Science program in Cybersecurity Engineering Technology.

Throughout their academic journey, Daniel and Tesfay pursued their degrees online, never having the opportunity to experience campus life in person. Their first visit to UMES came just days before graduation, when they arrived for commencement rehearsal. The visit provided a memorable opportunity to tour the campus, meet university leaders, connect with fellow graduates, and capture photographs marking this important milestone.

During their visit, they also met with the Dean of the Graduate School and received special recognition for their achievement. As part of the Graduate School's tradition of honoring all graduates, Daniel and Tesfay were presented with personalized graduate medals bearing their degree and program.

For these graduates, commencement was more than a ceremony. It was their first opportunity to experience the campus community they had proudly represented from afar.



Daniel Segay and Tesfay Gebremedhn visiting the UMES Graduate School for their first time. Amazing!

15TH ANNUAL RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

by **Dr. Kelsie Endicott**
Coordinator, Graduate Writing Center

Theme: Exploring the Impacts of AI on Education, Research, and Society

The UMES School of Graduate Studies hosted the 15th Annual Research Symposium on Thursday, April 16, 2026 in the Student Services Center (SSC) and it was an incredible, awe-inspiring event.



Symposium Winners with the Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. LaKeisha Harris



KEYNOTE ADDRESS



*Mr. Jason Micheal Perry
Founder & CEO, PerryLabs*

Mr. Jason Michael Perry, founder & CEO of PerryLabs, an AI research & development studio, gave an enthralling presentation on the history, development, and future of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

In accordance with this year's theme, presenters discussed a range of AI-related topics, from AI-driven drug design, to adaptive AI education on invasive species, to the use of generative AI to conduct a systematic meta-analysis on leadership development.

Attendees learned about the impactful research that the UMES community is engaged in, and all poster, oral, and 3-minute thesis (3MT) presentations were well-attended. Other highlights included a 360-photo booth, swag, and delicious breakfast and lunch.

We thank Dean Harris, the research symposium planning committee, judges, moderators and all volunteers for their

continued commitment to making this another successful research showcase.

We also express our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Salina Parveen, Acting Associate Vice President for Research for her generous donation to the Research Symposium, which helped make all of the day's offerings possible. And importantly, we thank all presenters and attendees, for without them, none of this would be possible.

We look forward to seeing the positive impacts of the research presented and to next year's 16th Annual Research Symposium!

Symposium Day in Pictures!



Rising with Artificial Intelligence

Exploring Generative and Agentic Technologies Across HBCU Campuses

by **Dr. Kelsie Endicott**

Coordinator, Graduate Writing Center



Dr. Kelsie Endicott

Coordinator,

Graduate Writing Center



Dr. Masoud Moghaddam

Associate Professor

Physical Therapy

“

The study explores how students, faculty, and staff engage with generative and agentic AI technologies.

”

As we well know, generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing the landscape of not only education, but also many aspects of our livelihoods and society.

Dr. Masoud Moghaddam, Associate Professor of Physical Therapy, and Dr. Kelsie Endicott, Coordinator of the Graduate Writing Center, are conducting a study entitled, “Rising with Artificial Intelligence: Exploring Generative and Agentic Technologies Across HBCU Campuses”.

This research project builds on the generative AI work initiated in November 2025, aiming to deepen understanding of this emerging technology and its effects on teaching and learning.

The study employs a cross-sectional survey design examining the following:



STUDY FOCUS

- Baseline familiarity and usage of generative and agentic AI tools
- Attitudes and concerns regarding ethical, academic, and workforce-related implications of AI
- Identify institutional support needs and readiness gaps, and
- Explore role-specific differences between students, faculty, and staff in their engagement with AI technologies.



UNISHMA GHIMIRE RECOGNIZED FOR POULTRY RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

by **Dr. Wele Elangwe**

Director of Graduate Student Services



Unishma Ghimire
UMES M.S. Student in Food and Agricultural Sciences

For the second year in a row, Unishma Ghimire has earned a \$3,000 scholarship from the Delmarva Chicken Association, recognizing both her academic excellence and her growing impact in poultry research. The Master of Science degree student in food and agricultural sciences with a concentration in animal and poultry science is quickly making a name for herself through research that blends science, innovation, and real-world agricultural impact.

Originally from Nepal, Ghimire arrived at UMES in Fall 2024 and joined Dr. Jennifer Timmons' research team as a graduate assistant. Since then, she has immersed herself in projects exploring how heat stress affects pasture-raised broiler chickens and whether early-age thermal conditioning can improve bird welfare, performance, and food safety. Her work also examines salmonella prevalence and gut microbial health, helping provide valuable insights for small- and medium-scale poultry farmers across the Delmarva Peninsula.



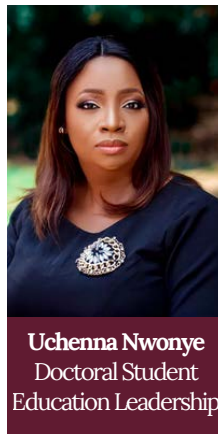
Unishma showing off her medal from the Research Symposium

Beyond her research accomplishments, Ghimire earned third place in the Master's Oral Presentation Category at the 15th Annual Research Symposium, where she presented her research findings. She is expected to graduate in December 2026.

UMES WHERE LEADERSHIP IS LEARNED: REFLECTIONS AS PROVOST'S FIRST STUDENT INTERN

by **Uchenna Nwonye, M.S.**

Ed.D. Student, Education Leadership



Uchenna Nwonye
Doctoral Student
Education Leadership

Leadership in higher education is often discussed in classrooms and textbooks, but at UMES, I had the rare opportunity to experience it firsthand. As the first student intern in the UMES Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, I gained invaluable insight into the work, responsibility, and collaboration required to lead at the highest levels of the university.

Through this internship, I observed how institutional decisions are guided by mission, ethics, accountability, and service. Working closely with Provost Dr. Rondall Allen gave me the opportunity to witness a leadership style grounded in transparency, mentorship, and shared purpose. The experience also enabled me to interview, shadow, and learn from leaders across the university. I am especially grateful to Dr. Willie Brown, Dr. Leesa Thomas-Banks, Ms. Crystal Drayton, Dr. David Balcom, Dr. Namwamba, Mr. Jason Casares, Ms. Joynes-Sturgis, Dr. Ernest England, Ms. Beatrice Wright, Ms. Gertrude Hairston, Dr. Urban Wiggins, Ms. Fawzia Abbas, Dr. Erinn Tucker-Oluwole, Dr. L. Tsai, Ms. Jicola Joynes-Sturgis and many other leaders, faculty, and staff members who generously shared their time, knowledge, guidance, and professional insight. These conversations deepened my understanding of higher education leadership as both strategic and operational.

Being the first ever student intern in the Provost's Office was both an honor and a responsibility. The experience reminded me that leadership is learned through exposure, mentorship, reflection, and service.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Rondall Allen for his guidance, tutelage, and the opportunity to learn from academic leadership at the highest level of the university.

Bringing Cellular Stress to Life Through Interactive Science

by **Priscilla Kini, M.S.**
Ph.D. Student, Toxicology



Priscilla Kini, M.S.
PhD Student, Toxicology



“ **Hands-on science makes complex concepts accessible, engaging, and unforgettable** ”

During the Spring 2026 semester, I had the opportunity to engage students in an interactive science demonstration focused on how living organisms respond to stress at the cellular level. My goal was to make complex biological concepts both accessible and exciting through hands-on learning.

Using spinach and potatoes, we explored the role of the enzyme catalase in protecting cells from oxidative stress. Students observed how catalase rapidly breaks down hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2) into water and oxygen, producing visible bubbling reactions that demonstrated how cells defend themselves against potentially harmful reactive oxygen species. This simple experiment became a powerful way to connect classroom science with real biological processes occurring in living organisms every day.

What made this experience especially meaningful was seeing students become curious, engaged, and eager to ask questions about cellular defense mechanisms and the importance of enzymes in maintaining cellular health. As a graduate student researcher, I value opportunities that bridge scientific research with community engagement and science communication. Experiences like this reinforce my passion for making STEM education interactive, relatable, and impactful for diverse audiences.

This initiative also reflects my broader commitment to scientific growth and outreach, which has recently included being selected to attend the Summer Immersion on Innovative Approaches in Science 2026. I look forward to continuing to promote accessible science education while advancing my research and professional development in the biomedical sciences.



Priscilla Kini speaking to students and engaging them



Priscilla Kini in mid-demonstration

Omagamre EnviToxIn Lab Represents UMES at CPRC SETAC Regional Meeting

by **Dr. Wayne Omagamre**,
Assistant Professor, DNS



Dr. Wayne Omagamre
Assistant Professor
Department of Natural Sciences

“**Engaging directly with researchers and students working on PFAS provided insights that I could not have gained from online resources alone.**”

Sumantee Baidya
M.S. Student

The UMES Omagamre EnviToxIn Lab was well represented at the Chesapeake–Potomac Regional Chapter (CPRC) of the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) Spring Meeting, held on April 9, 2026 at Towson University, Maryland.

The meeting brought together researchers from universities, industry, and government agencies, with strong participation from the Department of Defense, highlighting the growing importance of environmental toxicology in addressing real-world challenges.

Our group attended with a team of eight, including myself, one Ph.D. student, two master's students, and four undergraduate researchers. Also in attendance was Dr. Joseph Pitula, Director of Research at UMES, who serves as the Academia Advisory Representative to the CPRC Board, further underscoring the university's engagement and leadership within the regional scientific community.

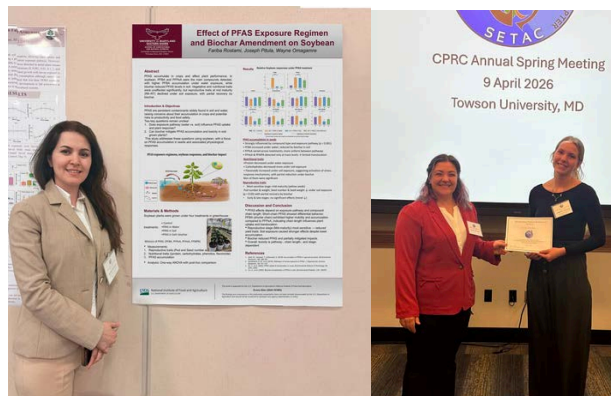
For our undergraduate students (Niesha Jacobs, Nkyhem Stone, Ryann Hudson, and Sabria Adams), this marked their first experience attending and presenting at a scientific conference beyond our campus. The exposure to cutting-edge research, professional presentations, and networking opportunities made it an especially meaningful and inspiring experience. The lab was also recognized for outstanding student contributions. Fariba Rostami, our Ph.D. student, earned 3rd place in the poster presentation category, while Isabella Beasley, a master's student, was awarded 2nd place for Best Oral Presentation.

Reflecting on her experience, new graduate student who began in Spring 2026, Sumantee Baidya, shared: “The conference helped shape how I want to move forward with my project by giving me new ideas I had not previously considered. Engaging directly with researchers and students working on PFAS provided insights that I could not have gained from online resources alone.”

The conference provided a valuable platform for our students to present their work, build confidence, and engage with the broader scientific community. Experiences like this are central to our mission of training the next generation of scientists to think critically, communicate effectively, and contribute meaningfully to environmental and public health challenges.



Team UMES Omagamre EnviToxIn Lab



Left: Fariba Rostani, Ph.D. Student, 3rd Place, Poster Presentation.

Right: Isabella Beasley, Master's student, 2nd Place, Oral Presentation.

Advancing Through Research, Leadership, and Innovation: A Spring 2026 Reflection

by **Freweyni Abhra, M.S.**

Ph.D. Student, Food and Agricultural Sciences

The Spring 2026 semester has been an important period of academic growth, leadership development, and professional engagement for me at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. Throughout the semester, I actively participated in research presentations, leadership activities, outreach events, and student engagement programs that strengthened both my scientific and professional skills.

One of the major highlights of this semester was participating in the Association of 1890 Research Directors (ARD) Conference in New Orleans during March, where I presented my research focused on hemp-insect interactions and the molecular responses of hemp to corn earworm infestation.

I also participated in the HBCU Battle of the Brains competition in Austin, TX. The 24-hour challenge provided an excellent opportunity to collaborate with students from different disciplines, strengthen problem-solving skills, and engage in innovative discussions on science, technology, and leadership.

In April, I participated in the 15th Annual Research Symposium, where I delivered both an oral presentation and participated in the Three-Minute Thesis (3MT) competition. In addition to presenting my research, I also served as a judge for the poster presentation session. It was inspiring to observe young researchers actively contributing to STEM fields, and I congratulate all of the award winners for their outstanding work.

During the Dean's Award for Student Leadership (DASL) Expo 2026, I participated as the Secretary of the Food and Agricultural Sciences Club in a jam-making activity and fundraising initiative that promoted student engagement, teamwork, and community involvement alongside my colleagues. Additionally, as a member of the Entomology Laboratory at UMES led by Dr. Simon Zebelo, I participated in a showcase featuring beneficial insects, forensic insects, agricultural insects, and edible insects. This outreach activity helped educate visitors about the importance of entomology in agriculture, environmental science, and sustainable food systems.

Lastly, I was featured on the official blog of the Network of Applied Pharmacognosy (NAP) under the title "Future of Cannabis Sciences." I was also selected for the Bayer University Mentoring Program (B4U), which will provide valuable mentorship and professional development opportunities as I continue advancing my academic and research career.

Overall, this semester has been a valuable journey of academic achievement, research advancement, leadership experience, and community engagement. Through these opportunities, I continue to grow as a researcher, student leader, and future scientist dedicated to advancing agricultural and biological sciences.



ARD Conference
New Orleans, LA

HBCU Battle of the Brains
Austin, TX

UMES 15th Annual
Research Symposium

Freweyni Representing
UMES at ARD

FAS Club Jam-Making
Fundraiser

“

These experiences have strengthened my passion for research, leadership, and service. I am grateful for every opportunity and excited for what's ahead!

~Freweyni Abhra

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Academic
Growth



Leadership
Development



Research
Excellence



Community
Impact

Polymer Nanocomposites for Enhanced Spacecraft Materials

Supporting NASA's Artemis Program

by Dr. Ananta Adhikari,
Assistant Professor, DNS

During Spring 2026, students Lina Link-Grant and Jalen Ridgeway worked with Dr. Ananta Adhikari on a research project focused on developing advanced materials for future NASA spacecraft. The project explored how specially designed plastics, called polymer nanocomposites, could better withstand the harsh conditions of space, including high temperatures and radiation.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

SPONSOR

NASA-MSTAR
DREAM Project
Mini-Grant

PARTNER

University of
South Carolina - Upstate

FOCUS

Advanced Spacecraft
Materials

APPLICATION

NASA Artemis Program

WHAT TEAM STUDIED

PMMA/CAB/TiO₂-CNT
Nanocomposites



Improved
thermal stability



Enhanced heat
resistance



Greater water
repellency



Potential aerospace
applications



Student, Lina Link-Grant is working in the lab, making contact angle measurements.

The team studied materials made from PMMA (a transparent plastic commonly used in aircraft windows and protective barriers), CAB, and tiny nanoparticles called titanium dioxide-carbon nanotube (TiO₂-CNT) fillers. Students used several laboratory techniques to understand how these materials behave. FTIR analysis showed that adding CAB and TiO₂-CNT changed the chemical interactions within the plastic, confirming successful formation of the new composite material. TGA testing demonstrated that the nanocomposites could tolerate higher temperatures before breaking down, which is important for spacecraft materials exposed to extreme environments (Figure 1). DSC measurements also showed that the nanoparticles affected how the plastic chains moved and responded to heat.

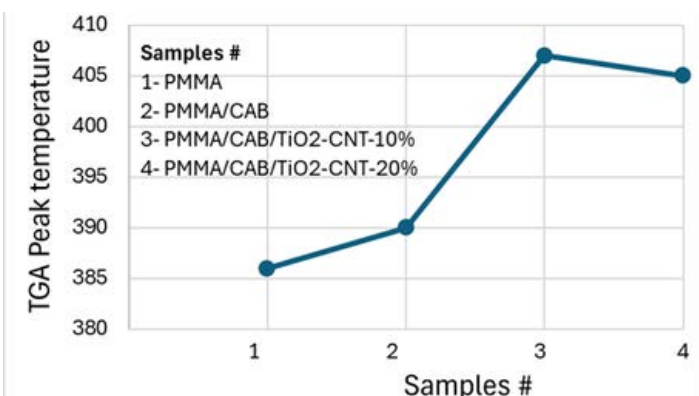


FIGURE 1: Thermal Degradation Peak Temperature for Different PMMA/CAB/TiO₂-CNT Nanocomposites

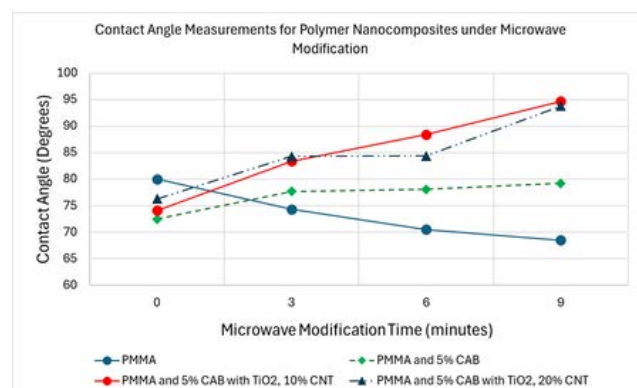


Figure 2. Measurement of water contact angles on PMMA/CAB/TiO₂-CNT nanocomposites modified with microwave heating at different times

Future studies will investigate additional microwave heating conditions and nanoparticle concentrations to further optimize material performance. The project provided students with valuable hands-on experience in nanotechnology, materials testing, and aerospace research while contributing to innovations that may support future NASA Artemis missions to the Moon and beyond.

Leading Through Science: My Journey in Toxicology and Research Leadership

by **Priscilla Kini, M.S.**

Ph.D. Student, Toxicology

This year has been a transformative period in my journey as a graduate student researcher and scientific leader in toxicology. Through research engagement, professional development opportunities, and leadership within the Society of Toxicology (SOT), I have continued to expand my impact both within and beyond the laboratory.

I currently serve as the Graduate Student Vice Representative for the National Capital Area Chapter of SOT (NCAC-SOT).



Priscilla Kini and NCAC-SOT Executives

This leadership role has allowed me to advocate for graduate student involvement, support professional networking initiatives, and contribute to programs that promote scientific collaboration and career development among emerging toxicologists. Through this position, I have engaged with scientists, researchers, and trainees across multiple institutions, strengthening both my leadership skills and professional network within the toxicology community. I also serve as a committee member of the Graduate Student Leadership Committee Subcommittee, where I contribute to initiatives focused on graduate student engagement and professional growth. As part of my ongoing research, I was selected to receive the Birth Defects Research and Prevention (BDRP) Travel Award for the June 16, 2026, meeting. This recognition supports my participation in scientific exchange and highlights my commitment to advancing research in biomedical and toxicological sciences.

Additionally, I was honored to be accepted into the Summer Immersion on Innovative Approaches in Science 2026 program. This opportunity will allow me to explore innovative scientific methods, strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration, and continue developing as an emerging scientist and future leader in research.

THE NEXT CHAPTER BEGINS: UMES AND BEYOND

by **Charity Akpovino, M.S.**
Rehabilitation Counseling

Reflecting on my journey through the Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling program at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, I feel immense gratitude for this enriching experience. It marks a significant milestone, both academically and personally. It represents the convergence of two worlds, my Nigerian professional roots and my growing identity as a practitioner here in the United States.

Much of my graduate experience unfolded through my role as a Graduate Assistant on the Organization-Wide Positive Behavior Support grant, funded by the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration.

One of the most meaningful contributions I was part of is the development of a new professional microcredential curriculum on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, co-led by Dr. LaKeisha Harris and Dr. Bryan Gere at UMES. I had the privilege of sitting in every planning meeting, helping shape decisions about course content, structure, and accessibility for families, direct support professionals, and administrators alike. Watching a curriculum grow from conversations into a plethora of modules has been one of the most formative experiences of my graduate education.



Charity Akpovino, M.S., off to the next chapter!



Charity Akpovino, M.S.

In addition, this work connects directly to a manuscript I co-authored: Pre-Service Professionals' Knowledge of Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities, currently submitted for publication. Both the research and the curriculum reflect the same conviction, that supporting people with IDD effectively requires not just technical knowledge, but cultural humility and person-centered values embedded at every level of practice.

Furthermore, I am proud to have authored and co-authored five peer-reviewed publications during my time in this program, with my research focusing on topics such as mental health equity, culturally responsive counseling practices, health promotion strategies, and chronic illness and disabilities.

These interests are not merely theoretical; they are reflections of the communities I have served and continue to serve. This scholarly trajectory has opened doors I once only dreamed of, including acceptance into two fully funded PhD programs that will allow me to continue this work at the highest level.

The Myth of Balance

IN COMPUTER SCIENCE AND RESIDENCE LIFE

by **Beryl Malomo, B.S.**

M.S. Student, Applied Computer Science



Beryl Malomo with friend and Colleague, Diamond Liles

“
Balance isn't about having it all. It's about setting your priorities right before the storm hits.
”

I want to start off by saying something unconventional: there is no such thing as balance. I know, it sounds shocking. But passing through this Spring 2026 semester taught me that trying to keep everything perfectly balanced is a trap. Instead, it is all about setting up your priorities right before the storm hits.

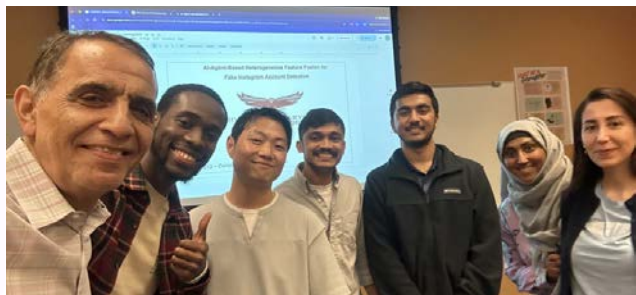
Since January 2025, I have had the privilege of serving as a Community Manager in Wicomico Hall. Balancing that role with graduate studies in Applied Computer Science, specifically diving into machine learning, computer network security, and launching my thesis journey has been an intense ride. Going into this

semester, I thought the road ahead was straightforward. I expected everything to go exactly as planned.

It really didn't. Life is constantly changing, and while the world changes around us, we often forget that we must evolve and adapt, too. In technology, things move at lightning speed. In Residence Life, you must be constantly sharp and aware of what's happening around you. When both worlds collide, it is incredibly easy to get swept off your feet.

The only way you don't crumble is by anchoring yourself. For me, that foundation is my faith in God. When the semester got heavy, I slowly drifted into worry and panic. But He made a way for me to pick myself back up, and He did it through the people He placed around me.

That turnaround started with a simple act: asking for help. It is so easy as graduate students to become loners, thinking we have to carry the entire weight of our worlds by ourselves. Sometimes, independence is required. But there is no shame in reaching out.



Beryl, Classmates and Professor, Dr. Haydar

I had to learn that I need community more than community needs me. I found that strength in places like the classroom, where my computer network security professor, Dr. Haydar, constantly pushed me to stay sharp and excel when the technical load felt overwhelming. I found it in the Office of Residence Life, working alongside friends like Diamond Liles, who reminded me of the power of strong support when handling the daily chaos of student housing.

To my fellow grad students walking this tightrope: you don't have to be perfect, and you don't have to do it alone. Ground yourself in who you are, lock in your priorities, and never be afraid to lean on the people around you. We are all evolving together, and we are more resilient than we think.



UMES Graduate Student Earns First Place at ARD Research Symposium

“The experience at ARD was so unique compared to other conferences I’ve attended, and even though it was very large, with 19 universities in attendance, they structured it in a way that made it very intimate. It truly felt like a celebration of students in research.

- ISABELLA BEASLEY

M.S. Student in Marine Estuarine Environmental Sciences

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) was proudly represented at the 2026 Association of 1890 Research Directors (ARD) Research Symposium and Biennial Conference, where graduate student Isabella Beasley earned First Place in her division for Graduate Oral Presentations.

The ARD Symposium brought together students, faculty, researchers, and administrators from 19 universities across the nation to celebrate research excellence, innovation, and collaboration.

For Beasley, the conference provided a valuable opportunity to practice presenting her thesis research and receive meaningful feedback.

“I was especially honored to receive first place in my division for Graduate Oral Presentations. This recognition means a great deal, especially at a stage so big, and reflects the support, feedback, and encouragement I’ve received along the way.”

Beasley also emphasized the lasting impact of the experience beyond receiving the award.



FIRST PLACE WINNER

Graduate Oral Presentation

Graduate Category: Bioenergy, Natural Resources, and Environment

Title: Environmental Contaminants and Vector Behavior: PFAS Effects on Mosquito Ecology

“Overall, this conference was a powerful reminder of the value of collaborative research, the importance of building support networks between and within institutions, and how diverse perspectives strengthen our work.”

- Isabella Beasley



Isabella Beasley (second from left) is congratulated by UMES President, Dr. Anderson (Center), Dr. Kairo, Dean of SANS and her Advisor, Dr. Omagamre (Right).

From One Stage to the Next:

How UMES Gave Me a Platform I Never Knew I Would Have

by **Chinenye E. Oluoba, M.S.**
Rehabilitation Counseling



“I did not anticipate the depth of what this institution would make possible.”

Chinenye showing off her winning medals from the Symposium!

When I arrived at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore as an international student from Nigeria, carrying a background in Food Science and Technology and a deep faith that I was meant for something greater, I did not anticipate the depth of what this institution would make possible. UMES did not simply provide an education. It provided a platform, a community, and a calling.

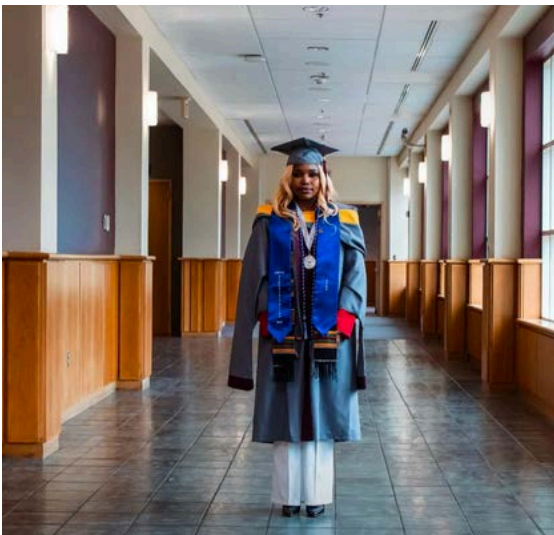
The 2026 academic year has been a defining chapter. I won the 3-Minute Thesis competition at the 15th Annual Research Symposium for the second consecutive year, presenting my research on nutrition and food insecurity in women with recurrent stroke. That same research was accepted for presentation and potential publication in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior at the SNEB 2026 International Conference in Washington, D.C. — my first international conference as a presenting scholar. I was also nominated for the ACES Outstanding Graduate Student Leadership Award, nominated for an SNEB award, inducted into the National Society of Leadership and Success, inducted into Chi Sigma Iota Counseling Honor Society, and contributed to two forthcoming academic book chapters.



Chinenye, presenting at the UMES 15th Annual Research Symposium

My clinical internship deepened everything. Working directly with women, children, and individuals navigating substance use disorders allowed me to see rehabilitation counseling from its most practical and human dimension — not as a concept, but as a lifeline. Those experiences strengthened my commitment to serving underserved populations and reinforced my belief that food insecurity is not a peripheral issue for people with disabilities. It is central to their growth, their recovery, and their dignity.

As I begin my doctoral program in Educational Leadership, I carry that conviction forward. I am deeply invested in developing and influencing policies that center the needs of underserved populations — women, children, and individuals with disabilities — ensuring that the systems meant to serve them are built with them in mind. UMES gave me the platform. The world is next.



Chinenye, proud M.S. graduate in Rehabilitation Counseling!

ADAPTIVE EMPATHY: THE NEWCOMER'S CHALLENGE

by **Samuel Kikile, M.S.**

Ph.D. Student,

Electrical and Mechatronics Engineering



**“In the end,
wisdom lies
not only in what
we say, but in
knowing how,
when, where,
and to whom we
say it.”**



Samuel Vincent Kikile

Coming to a new country is not always easy. At first, the obvious things may seem to be the biggest challenges: adjusting to the weather, learning the rules, and finding one's place in a new career path. Sometimes, however, the hardest lessons have no manual or guide. They are hidden in everyday conversations, ordinary words, and simple interactions. A newcomer quickly learns that familiar words may not always mean the same thing. Words learned in one's own country may carry different connotations in another. These differences may seem negligible; however, they reveal how sophisticated communication can be, even in its perceived simplicity. Words carry culture, and meaning often depends on the listener and their environment.

If simple words can be misunderstood, then deeper forms of communication are even more delicate. For instance, a compliment or joke intended to be harmless may be perceived in an entirely different light. In such moments, the newcomer may feel confused and wonder what form of communication best fits the new environment. In a society where people are increasingly aware of issues such as harassment, abuse, discrimination, sexual misconduct, and personal boundaries, people may respond with caution, even when no harm is intended. Communication is powerful, and so is its effect within the context of social interactions. For a newcomer, learning becomes indispensable. It re-

minds us that people interpret words through the lens of their own experiences. In a society where certain actions have caused real harm, people naturally pay close attention to tone, context, language, and boundaries.

For the newcomer, the lesson is not isolation. Rather, it is to learn with humility: to observe, listen, ask questions, and understand how communication works in the new environment. Good intentions matter, but so does the way words and gestures are received. Society also has a role to play. Newcomers need guidance, patience, and empathy. Not every mistake comes from bad character; some come from cultural differences, unfamiliar expectations, or a simple lack of awareness. When people explain rather than condemn, teach rather than shame, and listen before judging, they create room for growth and belonging.

Adaptive empathy, therefore, is a lesson for both sides. The newcomer learns to communicate with awareness and respect boundaries, while society learns to consider context, intention, and character before rushing to judgment. In the end, wisdom lies not only in what we say, but also in knowing how, when, where, and to whom we say it. A good society protects people from harm while also giving sincere people room to learn, adjust, and belong.

Graduate School and CAAS Collaborate to Connect Students with Graduate Opportunities

by Dr. Wele Elangwe

Director of Graduate Student Services



Group photo of Graduate Fair participants and UMES Graduate program representatives

EVENT SNAPSHOT



Date
March 5, 2026



Attendance
100 Participants



Location
UMES SSC

The UMES Graduate School partnered with the UMES Center for Academic Access and Success (CAAS) to host a successful Graduate Fair on March 5, 2026, as part of the UMES & University System of Maryland (USM) Mentor Summit and Graduate Fair. The collaboration was initiated in November 2025 through the efforts of Ms. Crystal Brinson and Dr. Edward TerCraig of CAAS to create an opportunity for students to explore graduate education and career pathways at UMES.

The Graduate Fair welcomed approximately 100 participants from UMES and other universities from the University System of Maryland. Faculty, staff, and student representatives engaged attendees in discussions about admissions requirements, application deadlines, funding opportunities, research experiences, and career pathways.



Also participating in the Graduate Fair was the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Professional Research Experience Program (PREP) through the Hopkins Morgan HBCU Consortium. As a member institution of this consortium, UMES collaborates with NIST to provide workforce development opportunities in STEM fields.

Through this collaborative effort, CAAS and the Graduate School strengthened UMES's commitment to expanding access to graduate education and empowering students to pursue advanced academic and professional opportunities.



GRADUATE PROGRAMS REPRESENTED

- Organizational Leadership
- Education Leadership
- Physician Assistant Studies
- Rehabilitation Counseling
- Toxicology
- Pharmaceutical Sciences
- Food & Agricultural Sciences
- Electrical & Mechatronics Engineering,
- NOAA Living Marine Resources Cooperative Science Center (LMRCSC)
- UMES Graduate Student Government



Dr. DaSilva, LMRCSC



Dr. Velazquez, Rehab Counseling



Food & Ag Sciences



Electrical & Mechatronics Engineering

Keith Bucca Balances Graduate Research and Music Across Maryland's Eastern Shore

by Keith Bucca

M.S. Student, Food and Agricultural Sciences



On any given week, recently married to his true love Roma Bucca, Keith Bucca might be found conducting soil health research in the field during the day and performing live music on the Eastern Shore by night. As a full-time graduate researcher and active musician, Bucca has built a lifestyle that blends science, sustainability, and community connection through music.

Currently focused on regenerative agriculture research, Bucca's academic work centers on improving soil health and exploring sustainable farming practices that can strengthen agricultural resilience for future generations. His research contributes to the growing movement toward regenerative systems that prioritize healthier soils, biodiversity, and long-term environmental stewardship.

Recently, Bucca attended the 50th anniversary of Association of 1890 Research Directors (ARD) in New Orleans and the 15th Annual Research Symposium conference at UMES, where he presented findings from his ongoing research. The event brought together researchers, agricultural professionals, and students to exchange ideas and advancements related to sustainable agriculture and environmental science. For Bucca, the experience reflected the same collaborative spirit that fuels his musical performances throughout the region.

Outside the research world, The Bucca Band is well known around Maryland's Eastern Shore music scene. They regularly perform at local festivals, farmers markets, breweries, and private events, bringing an energetic and community-focused presence to every performance. His ability to balance rigorous graduate-level research with a demanding performance schedule has made him a recognizable figure in both academic and artistic circles.

The Bucca Band performed at the opening of the Spring 2026 Crisfield Farmer's Market, continuing a busy spring lineup of live appearances. Later this month, the Band will also perform at Mystic Fest in Queen Anne's County, where regional artists, musicians, and community members gather to celebrate local culture and creativity.

For Bucca, music and agricultural research are not separate passions but complementary ones. Both are rooted in community engagement, creativity, and creating meaningful experiences that connect people — whether through healthier ecosystems or live performances shared with audiences across the Shore.

As he continues pursuing graduate research while keeping a 3.9 GPA and maintaining an active performance calendar, Bucca represents a growing generation of young professionals finding ways to merge science, art, and community impact into a single path forward.



Keith, the Guitarist!



Keith performing with his band!



The Bucca Band Performed Live at Crisfield Farmer's Market Opening Day, May 23, 2026!

Pursuing Passion with Purpose: The Many Talents of Preston V. Gross, II

by Dr. Wele Elangwe

Director of Graduate Student Services



For many students, finding the right balance between career responsibilities and personal passions can be challenging. Preston Gross, Graduate Admissions Specialist at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), is proof that it is possible to excel at both.

By day, Preston helps prospective students navigate the graduate admissions process and take the next step toward achieving their educational goals. In addition, he serves as Director of the UMES Gospel Choir, where his leadership and musical gifts have touched countless lives. During the Spring 2026 Commencement ceremonies, the choir delivered powerful performances that left many graduates, family members, and guests visibly moved and in tears.

Preston's passion for music extends beyond campus. Performing under the artist name Preston Jonzell, he recently released his latest single, Big God Remyx, adding to a growing collection of inspirational music.

His journey is a reminder that success does not require choosing between a career and a passion. With dedication, discipline, and purpose, it is possible to pursue both and inspire others along the way.



Music Release Flyer of Preston and B-Slade



UMES Gospel Choir with President Anderson

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