UW-Madison student runner up for first National Youth Poet Laureate

Student Profile

Hajjar Baban began finding her voice as a writer the way many people do, recording her thoughts in a private journal. Then one day, as a high school sophomore, she searched online for a poetry slam near her suburban Detroit home.

Many poems and public performances later, Baban is one of five finalists for the inaugural position of National Youth Poet Laureate. The title was bestowed for the first time on April 26 by the literary arts organization Urban Word and leading national poetry organizations.

"Whether I want it or not, my being a first-generation refugee and a child of immigrants is a very big part of my identity," says Baban. "I'm visibly a Muslim woman, and I think that affects me more than just on my own spiritual level."

Graduate Profile
Deshawn McKinney of Milwaukee leaves his undergraduate years having acquired a wealth of honors. A Rhodes Scholar finalist, he was the recipient of both a Truman Scholarship and a Marshall Scholarship—two prestigious national awards that place him among the very top of college students in the country.

McKinney leaves behind a better campus, too. He has worked to promote equity and diversity at UW-Madison and far beyond. An English-creative writing major, McKinney was a PEOPLE scholar and part of the First Wave Hip Hop and Urban Arts Learning Community on campus. His senior year, he served as president of the Wisconsin Union Directorate.

He will be pursuing a master's degree in social policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Read DeShawn's story.

Alumnus Profile

Dantrell Cotton, a Wisconsin Badger and Posse Graduate from the Southside of Chicago, believes in the innate human desire to work cooperatively and live in community.

"Let's learn from each other. Let's thrive together. And let me help to make this process a little more manageable for you," summarizes Cotton's impetus for studying the environment's role in people's lives and his new goal of preparing to teach and lead hands-on at Harvard University.

This fall Cotton will supplement an undergraduate degree in Community and Environmental Sociology and Environmental Studies, and a Master of Science degree in Environmental Resources, with a professional Master Degree in Education that will prepare him to teach and manage resource centers and initiatives. Read Dantrell's story.

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