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LEADERS COUNCIL



University of Miami
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In Loving Memory
Aaron Marckell Williams, B.S.C. '21

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

Aaron Marckell Williams embodied the spirit of a Cane through his unwavering commitment to service, leadership, and community. As a resident assistant, mentor, brother of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., and later as a photojournalist, he used his talents to uplift others and tell stories that mattered. He led with humility, served with purpose, and left a lasting impact on everyone he encountered. Aaron showed that being a Cane isn't just about what you achieve, it's about how you inspire, support, and elevate those around you.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

One of the greatest lessons Aaron likely gained at the University of Miami was that leadership is rooted in service. Through his experiences as a student leader and mentor, he learned that making a lasting impact comes from investing in others. That perspective shaped the way he lived after graduation, using his career in photojournalism not just to document moments, but to amplify voices, preserve stories, and strengthen the communities he served. It was a uniquely Miami experience that stayed with him long after he left campus.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

After graduation, Aaron Marckell Williams continued to embody the values of leadership, creativity, and service that defined his time at the University of Miami. One of his most noteworthy accomplishments was building a career as a photojournalist with The Washington Informer and AFRO, where he used his camera to capture the dignity, culture, and lived experiences of the communities he served.

Aaron was more than a photographer, he was a storyteller who believed every person had a story worth telling. Through his work covering political, religious, and

community events, he preserved meaningful moments and highlighted the people and experiences that often go unseen. His colleagues remembered him for his creative eye, passion for photography, positive spirit, and his ability to bring heart and intention to every assignment.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Aaron's greatest impact was the way he inspired others. He encouraged people to embrace their creativity, live authentically, and recognize the power of their own stories. Whether traveling the world, connecting with people, or capturing moments through his lens, Aaron lived by the belief to "always capture the moment." His legacy is a reminder that success is not only measured by achievements, but by the lives you touch and the stories you leave behind.



Alexander Daniel Walch Rojas, B.A. '23

Outreach Coordinator, Playwise

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

During my first year, I learned that the Ibis is the last bird to leave before a hurricane and the first to return. That immediately resonated with me because it reflects exactly how I move through the world. I stay committed through difficult moments, I show up when people need me, and I'm often the first person others turn to for help.

As a teacher in Title 1 School, I found myself stepping into both literal and metaphorical fires. I was there not only to steady the situation, but also to rebuild. In my professional and personal life, I make decisions carefully, always considering how they affect the people around me, and I often put others before myself.

To me, that's the spirit of a Cane, just like the Ibis. I stay with my community, I don't leave people behind, and I'm always ready to lead. Every opportunity I take and every risk I embrace comes from that same commitment to showing up and standing strong for your community.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

Working with students in foster care as a youth coach with the University of Miami Family Law Clinic's First Star U program taught me that being a strong role model is more powerful than anything you can teach or tell someone. Patience, consistency, and thoughtful actions matter, especially for young people who come from unpredictable environments and have every reason to be cautious around authority. I learned that trust is never assumed; it's earned through reliability.

As a teacher, I was often the first male Latino teacher and one of the youngest my students had, so I had to embody the behavior I wanted to see from them while representing the best versions of myself and community. I built trust with diverse students, families, coworkers, and administrators the same way I learned how to do that with my foster care students: by showing up, following through, and staying steady. That experience shaped how I lead, how I teach, and how I continue show up for others.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

After graduating, I chose to stay in Miami even though it was not where I was born or raised. I wanted to make it my permanent home after realizing that no other place would make me feel like I belonged the way Miami does. Building a strong community here and giving back through local organizations has mattered more to me than any title or accolade. Still, I'm proud of what I've accomplished in the three years since I graduated.

I became the first and only teacher to complete both Teach For America and the Teacher Accelerator Program, and I continue to mentor new educators, including running my own mentorship group. I've taught over 300 students in 3 years, and both times I taught tested subjects, my classes consistently outperformed district averages, even at a school ranked among the lowest in the district. Keep in mind that I had to learn three different curricula in just three years as I taught a different grade and subject every year. I worked with students with disabilities, newly arrived immigrants, and highly advanced learners, sometimes managing classes of almost 40 kids on my own from all backgrounds.

I was nominated for and won Teacher of the Year twice in a row. I was accepted into the Peace Corps, ultimately choosing to pursue a Fulbright, which I'm thrilled to have received. I was also nominated for the Teach For America Excellence in Teaching Award.

Beyond the classroom, I earned an LEE Public Policy Fellowship, working with Miami-Dade District 9 School Board Member Luisa Santos to help write policy that is now being implemented, using my experience as a teacher to shape and build crucial systems. Today, I serve as the only outreach coordinator for Florida's official gambling addiction helpline, leading statewide efforts in a field with very few

dedicated professionals, but a high demand for awareness on a very serious and prevalent issue. In my new role I am still able to give back to community, but at a much larger scale and work with even more diverse populations, while still being an educator of sorts.



Anthony Antonelli, B.B.A. '22, M.B.A. '23

Associate, Blackstone

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

To me, being a Cane means leading with purpose, serving others and embracing every opportunity to make a meaningful impact. Whether through my military service as a Navy rescue swimmer, my career in technology and project management, or mentoring veterans as they transition into the civilian workforce, I strive to uphold the values of integrity, resilience, and collaboration that define the University of Miami. The University has taught me that success is measured not only by personal achievement, but by the positive impact we have on others and the communities we serve. I am honored to carry those values forward and to use every opportunity to create meaningful outcomes for my friends, family, colleagues, and the broader community.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

The University of Miami has shown me the power of bringing people together with different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives to solve meaningful challenges. As a veteran who returned to school, I had the opportunity to learn alongside my classmates from a wide range of industries and cultures, and those interactions broadened the way I approach leadership and problem solving. The University reinforced that the strongest leaders are lifelong learners – individuals who value unique perspectives, adapt to change and invest in helping others succeed. That lesson continues to shape both my professional career and my commitment to service.

What is/are your most note-worthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

After graduating from the University of Miami, my most meaningful accomplishment was building a career where I can create impact while continuing

to serve others. At Blackstone, I contribute to global technology and process improvement initiatives that have helped strengthen the firm's technology operations, enhance user experiences and support measurable business outcomes. Equally important, I have been actively involved in Blackstone's Military Internship Program (MINT) – supporting programming, coordinating events, facilitating mentorship opportunities, and serving as the interns' point of contact. Having made the transition from military to civilian life myself, I take great pride in helping fellow veterans build connections and explore new opportunities as they take the next step in their professional journey.



Caroline Smolkin, B.S. '19

General Surgery Resident, Northwell NS/LIJ

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

Being a Cane is about more than where you earned your degree—it's a mindset. At the University of Miami, I learned to embrace challenges, lead with resilience, and never settle for doing the minimum. Surrounded by people from different backgrounds and perspectives, I developed an appreciation for collaboration, adaptability, and service that continues to shape how I approach medicine today.

That mindset has carried me through general surgery residency, into a research fellowship with the American College of Surgeons, and through earning a master's degree in health services and outcomes research while continuing to pursue a career dedicated to improving surgical care. Whether I'm caring for patients, conducting research, or mentoring trainees, I strive to embody the curiosity, determination, and teamwork that define the Cane community.

The University of Miami taught me that excellence isn't just about personal achievement. It's about using your skills to create opportunities for others and make a lasting impact. I hope to continue representing the Cane spirit by leading with integrity, giving back to my profession, and remaining engaged with the communities that helped shape me. No matter where my career takes me, I will always be proud to carry the values of The U with me.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

One of the most valuable lessons I learned at the University of Miami was that success doesn't require sacrificing the experiences that make life meaningful. I was surrounded by people who were deeply committed to their academics, leadership roles, and future careers while also embracing the vibrant campus community and

enjoying the unique energy of Miami. That balance is something I haven't experienced anywhere else.

Being involved in Greek life, student government, and other campus organizations introduced me to people with different backgrounds, interests, and aspirations. This broadened my perspective, challenged me to become a better leader, and helped me build friendships that continue today. What stood out most was how welcoming and connected the community was despite our different paths.

That perspective has stayed with me throughout medical training and into my career. Surgery demands discipline, resilience, and long hours, but my time at the U taught me that investing in relationships, community, and the moments outside of work isn't a distraction from success—it's part of what makes success sustainable. Looking back, that balance is one of the greatest gifts the University gave me, and it's a lesson I carry with me every day.

What is/are your most note-worthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Since graduating from the University of Miami, I have focused on building a career that combines clinical excellence with research to improve the quality of surgical care.

After medical school, I began my general surgery residency, where I developed the foundation to care for patients through some of their most complex and challenging experiences. Recognizing my passion for academic surgery and healthcare improvement, I took dedicated time from residency to serve as an American College of Surgeons Clinical Scholar. During this nationally competitive research fellowship, I also earned a master of science in health services and outcomes research from Northwestern University, strengthening my ability to use data and evidence to improve patient outcomes.

Throughout this time, I have been fortunate to contribute to surgical research through peer-reviewed publications, presentations at national and international scientific meetings, and successfully obtaining competitive research grant funding. These experiences have allowed me to collaborate with multidisciplinary teams and contribute to projects that aim to improve the safety, quality, and value of surgical care.

While I am proud of these academic accomplishments, I am most proud of the impact they represent. My goal is to build a career as an academic surgeon who not only provides exceptional care in the operating room but also advances the science of surgery, improves healthcare systems, and mentors the next generation of physician leaders.



Ceon Wong, B.S.B.E. '20

Associate, Burr & Forman, LLP

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

Besides my obsession with University of Miami memorabilia like my license plate, the UM helmet in my office, and the UM coasters in my dining room, I think I embody the spirit of a Cane every day.

To me, embodying the spirit of a Cane means approaching each day with a positive mindset, stepping out of your comfort zone, leading with integrity, and demonstrating creativity in the workspace. These are all characteristics I have observed or learned from my colleagues at the University of Miami, and they have been the most valuable skills for me in approaching the legal profession and the novel challenges it can present daily.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

During my time at the U, I was a biomedical engineering student who had no interest in pursuing a career in law until my senior year. Two experiences changed the trajectory of my entire life and career, and make me thankful everyday that I am a Cane! First, during my studies, the College of Engineering required all biomedical engineering students to enroll in a regulatory controls course, which was not customary for similar programs at other institutions. This class was my first experience with the intersection of technology and law/regulations. Throughout this required course, which was unique to the U, I became obsessed with the ways laws were shaping companies developing health care technologies, and quickly made the decision to pursue a career in the legal field or regulatory controls.

Prior to this experience, I joined the University of Miami's First Star College Preparatory Academy as a youth coach/counselor. First Star is a program designed

to bring foster youth to college campuses, so they can get the tools they need to successfully matriculate into a four-year institution after finishing high school. I was passionate about this project, which was an opportunity to help teens from a similar socioeconomic background as myself, and from a similar region (South Florida) understand they could use academia to author their own destiny as I did.

During my time at First Star, Kele Stewart, a professor in the law school, and one of the powerhouses behind this program, asked me whether I had ever considered being a lawyer. At the time I was reluctant to engage with this question, but Kele listed multiple traits and skills I exhibited in my role that would translate to being an excellent lawyer. She was right, but I didn't figure that out until I took regulatory controls later.

These are two perfect examples of lessons and experiences that I could not have gained at another institution. The University of Miami is more than an institution, it is a community offering unique experiences where people see the potential in you and push you to be the best version of yourself.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

I started my legal career at a well-respected full service AMLAW 200 law firm, Burr & Forman LLP, and [I am also proud of] my role as editor-in-chief of University of Florida's Journal of Technology Law & Policy, which was a top ten science, technology, and computing law journal during my tenure as editor-in-chief.

My participation in the inaugural class of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Clinic at University of Florida's law school gave me the opportunity to learn legal fundamentals of artificial intelligence, intellectual property, and data privacy while working closely with innovators and business owners. My participation in the Veterans and Servicemembers Legal Clinic at the University of Florida was a wonderful opportunity to use my legal training to give back to some of the most selfless people in our nation. I was able to build strong client communication skills and develop my advocacy skills under the guidance of an expert litigator. Together, as a team, we used our skills to obtain multiple discharge upgrades for well deserving veterans who were struggling without the benefits associated with being honorably discharged, which they rightly deserved.



Charmaine Mukurazhizha, M.A. '24

Writer, WSVN-TV 7News

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I embody the spirit of a Cane because I am resilient, driven, and committed to making an impact wherever I go. Coming to the University of Miami changed my life forever. I never imagined that I would live out my dream of becoming a journalist and working at a news network in the United States. Even more than that, it gave me the confidence to believe that my dreams were possible.

Being a Cane has allowed me to create opportunities not only for myself, but also for my community back home in Zimbabwe. Whether it was using my TedTalk to share meaningful stories and experiences or building a golf community that encourages young women in Miami to step into a sport where they haven't always been represented, I've learned that leadership is about opening doors for others. The University of Miami expanded my perspective on life. It taught me to dream bigger, embrace every opportunity, and use my voice to inspire others. The spirit of a Cane means leaving every place better than you found it, and that's something I strive to do every day.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

The one experience I couldn't have gained anywhere else was walking into Michelle Kaufman's sports journalism class. Before coming to the University of Miami, I had heard stories about women doing incredible things in sports media, but I never imagined that one day I would be sitting in the classroom of someone I admired so much.

Michelle became so much more than a professor. She became my mentor, my friend, and the voice of reason whenever I felt like giving up. Her class wasn't just

another course it was an open door that completely changed the trajectory of my life.

Because of that opportunity, I covered the Miami Heat, the Miami Dolphins, and the Miami Marlins. I interviewed world-class athletes, stood on professional sidelines, and found myself in rooms that a little African girl from Zimbabwe could have only dreamed of. Those experiences gave me confidence, sharpened my skills, and showed me that I belonged in sports journalism.

The University of Miami didn't just teach me how to be a journalist it showed me what was possible. That belief is something I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Since graduating from the University of Miami, I've been blessed with accomplishments that once felt impossible.

One of my biggest fears throughout college was public speaking. Even after graduation, that fear still lingered. So when I was invited to speak at a TedX event at the University of Miami, it became one of my proudest accomplishments. Standing on that stage with confidence and sharing my story how my community shaped me and the journey that brought me to Miami was a full-circle moment. It reminded me that growth often happens when we step into the very things that scare us.

I also had the incredible privilege of working as a writer at WSVN Channel 7 in Miami. That experience strengthened my writing, challenged me professionally, and gave me a deeper appreciation for the work that happens behind the scenes in a newsroom.

Today, I'm taking a step back to fully invest in what I'm most passionate about: golf. I'm currently pursuing a Ph.D. in sports administration, and my dream is to combine my love for sports, journalism, and international development. I hope to help Zimbabwe qualify for its first FIFA World Cup and to become a golf journalist who opens doors for the next generation of women in sports media.

Every opportunity I've had since graduation has reinforced one lesson: the dreams that once felt impossible are often just the beginning.



Cora McKean, B.S.M.A.S. '22

Research Technician, University of Pittsburgh

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I embody the spirit of a Cane through resilience and the pursuit of lifelong learning. Working as a researcher, I face difficult decisions and failure everyday. My educational foundation at the U taught me that making mistakes is a necessary part of the learning process, and provided me with the confidence to proceed in the face of adversity.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

A highlight of my time at the University of Miami is studying abroad in the Galápagos Islands. This was a truly extraordinary experience that immersed me in local culture and fueled my passion for marine science exploration. This is a unique program that I could not have experienced anywhere else.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

I have conducted marine science research worldwide. From working with remote tribal villages in Alaska to sailing the high seas of the Southern Ocean, I have been a part of vital oceanography and climate science research that will serve as a reference for generations.



Danielle Goldwert, B.A. '21

Doctoral Student, New York University
Research Affiliate, Climate Cognition Lab

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I embody the spirit of a Cane by approaching every opportunity with curiosity and a commitment to making a positive impact. As a Ph.D. candidate in social psychology, I conduct research on how we can use behavioral science to address pressing societal challenges like climate change, helping translate psychological insights into real-world solutions.

At the same time, I believe growth happens outside of work, too. Since graduating from the University of Miami, I've continued pursuing creative and adventurous hobbies—from stop-motion animation to rock climbing, a passion I first discovered during my senior year at Miami. I also believe in giving back to the community that helped shape me. After being honored as a Goldwater Scholar during my junior year, I've had the privilege of serving on the Goldwater Scholarship selection committee, helping recognize the next generation of student researchers.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

One of the greatest gifts the U gave me was the freedom to explore broadly. Through the Foote Fellows Honors Program, I was able to pursue my interests across disciplines, graduating with five minors (philosophy, English literature, political science, management, and studio art) in addition to my degree in psychology.

That interdisciplinary perspective has shaped everything I've done since. It influences my Ph.D. research on the behavioral science of climate action, where

solving complex societal challenges requires insights from many fields, and it continues to inspire my creative pursuits, including filmmaking and painting.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Since graduating, I have been fortunate to receive several national fellowships, including the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship and, more recently, a National Institute of Social Sciences dissertation grant. I have also published 13 peer-reviewed articles in leading journals such as Nature Communications, PNAS Nexus, and Science Advances, and have presented my research at conferences around the world.



Denise Ozturk, B.S.Ed. '18

Senior Manager of Non-traditional Operations & Growth, Fuku

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I embody the spirit of a Cane by leading with resilience, collaboration, and a willingness to take on challenges that create lasting impact. Whether launching new business ventures, building partnerships, or supporting my teams, I believe in leaving every organization stronger than I found it. I strive to represent the University of Miami by leading with integrity, embracing innovation, and giving back through mentorship and community engagement.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

The University of Miami taught me the importance of embracing change, taking initiative, and surrounding myself with people who challenge me to grow. Being part of a community built around innovation, diversity, and ambition showed me that there is rarely a single path to success—you have to create your own opportunities. That perspective has stayed with me throughout my career and continues to influence how I approach leadership, problem-solving, and growth.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Most recently, I lead Fuku by David Chang's non-traditional growth and operations from 5 to 20 sports venues, including its first university location at the University of Miami and its first airport location at JFK Terminal 6. I also supported launches at major events like the Super Bowl, Formula One, and the U.S. Open, while helping build the operational framework for expansion into new channels.



Destiny James, B.S.P.H. '19

Community Health Senior Project Manager, Atrium Health

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I embody the spirit of a Cane by approaching life with resilience, optimism, and compassion. I strive to remain grounded during difficult moments, adapt when faced with change, and encourage others to do the same. I value meaningful relationships, believe in the power of community, and look for opportunities to support and uplift those around me. Whether facing challenges or celebrating successes, I aim to lead with integrity, care, and a belief that together we can make a difference. As someone who bleeds orange and green, I carry immense pride in being a University of Miami alumna and in representing the values that makes being a Cane so special.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

One lesson I gained is captured in the message of my TEDxUMiami talk: Storm Preparedness 101. The University of Miami taught me that success is not about avoiding storms, it's about learning how to weather them. During my college journey, I faced challenges that tested my resilience and determination. There were moments of uncertainty, financial hardships, and obstacles that could have easily derailed my goals. Yet, through the support of the Cane community, life-changing scholarships, and opportunities such as being awarded funding through the amazing God's Plan moment, I learned that even the most difficult storms can carry unexpected blessings.

Standing on the TEDxUMiami stage gave me the opportunity to reflect on those experiences and the lessons they taught me: to persevere when the path forward isn't clear, to trust the process, to lean on community, and to remain open to opportunities that may arrive in unexpected ways. The University of Miami didn't

just prepare me academically. It taught me how to navigate adversity with courage, faith, and purpose. As a Hurricane, I learned that storms do not define us; how we respond to them does. That perspective has shaped the person I am today and continues to guide me in every aspect of my life. It is a lesson rooted in my experiences at the U and an experience that I truly couldn't have gained anywhere else.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Since graduating from the University of Miami, one of my most noteworthy accomplishments has been serving as a senior project manager leading a regional collaborative in central North Carolina through its first official Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) cycle as the Central Carolina Community Collaborative. In this role, I lead the alignment and collaboration efforts across 27 hospitals, 10 health departments, 4 United Way agencies, and several community organizations, technical vendors, and academic partners, bringing together diverse organizations around a shared vision for improving community health.

I am especially proud that this work has extended beyond our region and contributed to national conversations around community health improvement. I have had the opportunity to present at multiple national conferences, sharing best practices, lessons learned, and innovative approaches to cross-sector collaboration, regional planning, and CHNA implementation. Being recognized as a thought leader in this space and helping other communities strengthen their own efforts has been an incredibly rewarding part of my postgraduate career.



Douglas Corsi, B.S. '19

Internal Medicine Resident, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

"Canes care for Canes" is a phrase that has always resonated with me. Throughout my life, I have tried to live it out, both for my fellow Hurricanes and for the loved ones, families, and patients I care for who never set foot in Coral Gables. Miami taught me the value of building community and looking after the people who surround and support you. I have dedicated my life to caring for others in every direction: my lifelong Miami friends, my patients, and my family, including my brother and fellow Cane Brad Corsi (Class of 2025).

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

My time at Miami taught me to give myself fully to whatever is in front of me, whether it is a demanding professional pursuit or simply a moment worth enjoying. This came directly from our culture at the U, where ambition and joy are not competing forces but complementary ones. The same wholehearted commitment I brought to campus life now shapes how I approach medicine, research, and the relationships that matter most to me, and I have come to see it as the foundation of a life that is both successful and genuinely fulfilling.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Getting engaged to the love of my life and fellow Hurricane, Vanessa Veltre (Class of 2020), and building the life we always dreamed of together: planning our wedding, parenting our cat Louie, and both graduating from medical school.



Irene Mulloy Harmody, B.S. '18

Staff Engineer, TLDP

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

When you're a Cane, you're a Cane for life! I love showing my Canes pride year-round, but especially during football season. Additionally, my Canes family are some of the most important people in my life. I love you all!

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

I love to tell the story that my dear friends, roommates, and teammates who were marine science majors inspired me to go into polymer chemistry. Their passion for ocean life and keeping plastics out of water left an impact. Only the U could have brought us together, and only at the U do you run along Biscayne Bay and call it Saturday morning. My 4 years at the University of Miami absolutely shaped my life, and I could not be more grateful.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

In addition to earning a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I serve on the advisory board for Sorbenta LLC. I have also earned the ACS Women Chemists' Committee Merck Research Award, have had one patent issued, with two more patent applications submitted.



Janeth Campbell, B.S. '19

Dermatology Resident Physician, Howard University Hospital

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I embody the spirit of a Cane by recognizing that excellence is rooted in service, inclusion, and community. Some of my favorite memories at the University of Miami were volunteering through UM Days of Service, participating in Hurricanes Help the Hometown, helping plan and raise funds for Relay for Life, and teaching children poetry through Written in My Soul. Those experiences showed me the impact of serving alongside others and strengthened my lifelong commitment to giving back.

That commitment has guided my journey as a dermatology resident. Through my research, I have worked to improve the representation of skin of color in medical education, expand access to accurate dermatologic information through innovative platforms like TikTok, and advance more equitable care for underserved communities. Through advocacy on Capitol Hill, I have also championed policies that expand access to high-quality dermatologic care.

I intentionally chose to complete my dermatology residency at Howard University Hospital because I wanted to train in an environment where serving underserved communities is central to the mission. In the clinic, I strive to embrace diversity by listening to my patients' experiences and working to ensure that every patient feels seen, heard, and represented. Outside of the clinic, through my service organization, I work directly with the community to provide skin health education and distribute free skincare products to under-resourced communities in the D.C. area.

Being a Cane means carrying forward the values that the University of Miami instilled in me: compassion, service, collaboration, and a responsibility to use my education to improve the lives of others. Whether through research, advocacy,

education, or patient care, I hope to leave every community I join stronger than I found it. And, of course, I continue to carry my Cane pride with me—during football season, you can often find me wearing a UM sweatshirt or other Hurricanes gear to clinic each week, cheering on the Miami Hurricanes while representing the community that helped shape who I am.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

Looking back on my time at the University of Miami, the one perspective I gained that I do not think I could have gained anywhere else is the importance of an institution that truly invests in its students. At the U, I felt that the university was not just a place where I attended classes, but a community that actively supported my growth, aspirations, and success.

From free campus events and traditions like Pancakes with Pat, Canes Night Live, and SportsFest, to UM's willingness to support student organizations, ideas, and initiatives, UM created an environment where students felt valued and empowered to get involved. Some of my favorite memories came from these traditions and the sense of community they fostered, including competing in SportsFest with my dorm communities at Mahoney-Pearson and later at University Village, where we won both times. These experiences showed me that the U was not just about academic achievement, but also about building lifelong connections and creating opportunities for students to come together.

I was also fortunate to have access to mentors, deans, and administrators who were approachable, responsive, and genuinely invested in helping students succeed. That commitment extended beyond campus life and into my professional journey. As a student interested in medicine, I benefited from programs such as the Miller School of Medicine MCAT Preparation Program and the Motivations Program, which helped support students from underrepresented backgrounds pursuing careers in medicine. I was also able to engage in undergraduate research because of the incredible opportunities available at UM. Through my connections at UM, I was blessed to meet my esteemed mentor, Dr. Heather Woolery-Lloyd, a UM physician herself, whose mentorship, guidance, and support became one of the most influential factors in my journey toward dermatology.

The lesson I carry with me is that when an institution believes in its students and provides them with resources, mentorship, and opportunities, it can change the trajectory of their lives. UM taught me the value of creating communities where people feel supported, seen, and encouraged to pursue their biggest goals—and that is a lesson I continue to carry with me today.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

My most noteworthy accomplishment after graduation has been co-founding Community Skinterventions in 2022, a nonprofit dedicated to improving access to dermatologic care and education for historically marginalized communities in Washington, D.C. Throughout my medical training, I recognized that many communities face barriers to receiving timely, culturally relevant dermatologic care, and I wanted to create an organization that brings education and resources directly to where people are.

Through Community Skinterventions, we have organized 25 educational events reaching more than 1,500 community members. We have provided free skincare products and culturally tailored educational materials on topics including sun safety, melanoma detection in darker skin, atopic dermatitis, acne, and how to navigate access to dermatologists who accept Medicaid and Medicare. Most recently, we expanded this mission internationally by helping coordinate a Community Skinterventions educational event in Nigeria.

Beyond providing resources, I have personally engaged with community members in shelters, parks, sports courts, health fairs, and through street medicine programs—meeting people where they are, answering their questions, and empowering attendees to advocate for their own dermatologic health. We published this work in the Journal of Drugs in Dermatology to encourage other healthcare professionals to develop similar community-based initiatives. I have also advocated for systemic change by meeting with state representatives on Capitol Hill to address policies affecting access to dermatologic care. This work has reinforced my belief that improving health equity requires not only treating patients in the clinic, but also educating communities, addressing barriers to care, and advocating for policies that ensure all individuals have access to high-quality dermatologic healthcare.



Jasmin Dakkak, B.B.A. '20, M.B.A. '20

Managing Partner, AutoLife Insurance Group

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

Being a Cane means leading with purpose, showing up for your community, and never being afraid to put yourself out there. Whether I'm helping protect families and businesses through our insurance agency, mentoring young professionals, or volunteering through my church and local organizations, I try to lead with integrity, kindness, and a service first mindset. The U taught me that success isn't just about personal achievement, it's about lifting others up along the way.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

The U gave me the confidence to dream bigger than I thought was possible. Pursuing my bachelor's degree and an accelerated M.B.A. challenged me to think strategically, collaborate with people from all different backgrounds, and embrace opportunities outside my comfort zone. The relationships I built and the culture of innovation taught me that growth happens when you say "yes" to new experiences and to take every open door as a new opportunity.

What is/are your most note-worthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

After graduating in 2020, I joined my family's independent insurance agency, where I've had the privilege of helping grow the business while serving families and businesses throughout our community. Along the way, I've been recognized as a Sarasota 35 Under 35 honoree and our agency was voted Best Insurance Agency in Sarasota. Beyond my career, I'm especially proud of my involvement in the community through the Realtors Association of Sarasota and Manatee county, University of Miami Alumni Board, local industry organizations, and my Greek Orthodox church, where I mentor young adults and teach Greek dance.



Jayden DeGrace, B.A. '23

**Manager of Art Direction, Washington Commanders
Graphic Designer, 14th and Market**

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

Embodying the spirit of a Cane means embracing adaptability, resilience, and community. My journey at the U was anything but linear as I navigated seven different majors, transitioning through fields like business management, public health, and more before finding my true passion. A true Cane isn't afraid to step into the unknown and reinvent themselves. That same spirit of exploration now drives my entire creative methodology as a designer and art director.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

Life begins at the end of your comfort zone. The unparalleled freedom to explore, combined with the deep cultural immersion I experienced in Miami, is something I couldn't have replicated anywhere else. The university's flexible open-door transfer policy between schools and the unique cognates program allowed me to try new things without being penalized for my curiosity. I learned that exploration isn't a detour, it's a necessary part of the process. Additionally, utilizing the work-study programs gave me tangible, hands-on experiences to try different disciplines of graphic design, which was vital for building a diverse portfolio and giving me the multidisciplinary perspective I rely on today.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Following a foundational post-graduate internship with the Seattle Seahawks, I joined the Washington Commanders, where I advanced from Graphic Designer to Art Director within two years with the organization. In this role, I am proud to lead high-level art direction including spearheading a 2026 brand refresh and uniform closet campaign, which introduced a comprehensive visual brand system for the

team that felt like it was missing an identity.

Simultaneously, my freelance career has allowed me to collaborate with incredible partners. A few major highlights include:

- Executing a real-time apparel rollout of custom University of Miami sweatshirts for each round of our College Football Playoff run to the National Championship
- Partnering with 14th and Market to design custom Jordan Brand apparel for top March Madness NIL athletes and a reactive tee collection for top Nike women athletes for their "So Win" Campaign
- Designing the a few apparel capsule collections for the WNBA's Atlanta Dream
- Collaborating with the NWSL's NJ/NY Gotham FC by delivering comprehensive marketing campaigns for Gotham FC's 2024 NWSL Playoffs and STM renewals



Jordan Wiesinger, M.P.S. '23, J.D. '23

Attorney, Dean Omar Branham Shirley, LLP

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

To me, the Spirit of a Cane is about carrying the University of Miami's values with you long after graduation. It means remaining connected to the University community, supporting future generations of Hurricanes, and using the opportunities I've been given to serve others. I do my best to remain connected to professors and fellow students who have provided great mentorship and friendship to me throughout law school and stepping into my career. I also enjoy sharing my experience with prospective students who are considering the University of Miami.

Additionally, I strive to give back by mentoring younger students through the college application process, offering guidance on essays, resumes, interviews, and choosing the right academic path. I know firsthand how impactful encouragement and mentorship can be, and I am grateful for the people who invested in my success at the University and beyond.

For me, embodying the Spirit of a Cane means staying connected, lifting others up, and representing the University through service, mentorship, and a lifelong commitment to the community that helped shape who I am.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

The University of Miami gave me an experience I truly could not have had anywhere else. It was the only university that allowed me to combine my passion for marine science and the law by pursuing a joint degree, earning my juris doctor and master of professional science in marine conservation simultaneously.

That interdisciplinary education was further enriched by incredible experiential

learning opportunities. While at UM, I had the privilege of attending the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Egypt, where I learned about the role of the law in addressing climate change. I studied Caribbean ecosystem ecology at the Bimini Shark Lab and traveled to Isabela Island in the Galápagos, where I saw firsthand how science, policy, and sustainable tourism can work together to protect fragile ecosystems. These experiences shaped the way I think as an attorney today, reinforcing that the best solutions come from a combination of perspectives.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Spending most of my time fighting to hold large corporations accountable for disregarding human health and safety by prioritizing profits over humanity. I am proud to have tapped into a niche area of the law that allows me to combine my passion for environmental science and the law to advocate for individuals harmed by toxic exposures. It is especially meaningful because it reflects the interdisciplinary education I received at the University of Miami and demonstrates that I have been able to translate that education into tangible impact for my clients and community.



Kelly Malloy, J.D. '22

Intellectual Property and Franchise Associate, Registered Patent Attorney, Malloy & Malloy, P.L.

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

In my view, embodying the spirit of a Cane as a young alumna means continuing to give back to the University after graduation. Whether it's planning fundraisers for law student scholarships, hosting community engagement events, or returning to campus for Homecoming each year, I prioritize ongoing, active involvement at the U in an effort to make a positive impact, however big or small.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

Miami Law showed me the enduring power of a tight-knit support system, as well as the importance of investing in my community. Many of the relationships I built with faculty, staff, and alumni during my time as a student leader have blossomed into meaningful mentorships that continue to provide invaluable guidance. These experiences have driven my commitment to mentoring others.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

It is an honor to serve as chair of the law school's Young Alumni Committee (YAC) during Miami Law's centennial year after sitting on its executive team and the board of the Law Alumni Association since graduation. Our YAC team has developed mentorship programs, fundraised for law student scholarships, and fostered connections among young alumni through our social and professional events. Additionally, I received the Young Alumni Award from the law school in 2024, served as co-chair of the Miami-Dade Bar's Intellectual Property Committee as a first-year attorney, was twice honored as a "Rising Star" in Intellectual Property Law by Super Lawyers, and joined the University of Miami Law Review's Young Alumni Council. I also remain involved in Iron Arrow.



Kevin Togami, B.S.Ed. '17

Legal Engineer (GTM), Harvey Ex-O'Melveny & Myers LLP

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

When I hear “spirit of a Cane,” I think of Miami icons who didn't allow anyone to define them other than themselves (e.g., Michael Irvin, The Rock, Sylvester Stallone). They took ownership of who they were and I try to emulate that same “man in the arena” mentality. Every day is an opportunity to see who we are and what we're made of, and it's a huge privilege to be able to control that answer. It all starts with being present and making the effort to show up as the best version of myself in all facets - the best fiancé/son/brother/cousin/uncle/friend/lawyer/colleague I can be.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

One of our mottos is, “It's all about the U.” And first of all...it's true (Go Canes, baby!). But beyond the school pride, that motto can also help frame an overall approach to life, not in a conceited way, but in a hyper-focused, block-out-the-noise type of way. When you're clear on your priorities, everything else fades into the background.

That lesson came to life my senior year when I travelled with our Miami boxing team to a national tournament in Virginia. My first fight was against a boxer from FSU. With “The U” across my chest, I knew I was representing something much bigger than myself, and long story short... I dropped him and won! It's still one of my favorite college memories, not just because it was a rivalry fight, but because that win memorialized the collective effort my coaches and teammates put in to prepare me for that moment. I owed them my best because they gave me theirs. They helped me focus on the right things, navigating through the chaos of self-

doubt, fear, and fatigue. I still take those hard-earned lessons with me into law, business, and beyond.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

After graduation, I worked at a top sports agency in Miami (Shoutout Grutman Sports and Entertainment!). While working there, I applied to law school and landed an entertainment law fellowship at Loyola Law in Los Angeles. During my time at Loyola, I secured highly coveted legal internships with Nike and Converse and was also selected as a Google Legal Scholar. After passing the California bar exam, I practiced at one of the top law firms in the world, O'Melveny & Myers, where I focused on mergers and acquisitions, sports, and entertainment and helped close over \$10 billion in deals.

Now, I'm a legal engineer at Harvey, the fastest growing Legal AI company in the world (currently valued at over \$11 billion), where I help law firms and companies navigate the rapidly developing intersection between AI and law.

The entire journey feels like a collective accomplishment because many things wouldn't have happened without the steps prior, and I attribute a lot of my success to the mentors and supporters that were there each step of the way. It takes a village!



Kimberly Ogun, B.S.H.S. '24

Graduate Student Researcher, University of Pennsylvania

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

To me, the spirit of a Cane comes down to one thing: Canes care for Canes. I took that literally during my time at the U, pouring myself into creating spaces where students of color felt seen and at home, from conceptualizing Hairology's inaugural hair show to coordinating A Taste of Africa for the African Students Union. And I still take it literally today. Wherever I go, I look for ways to lift up fellow Canes and create opportunities for the people coming behind me, because I know firsthand what this community can do when we show up for each other.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

The U taught me that belonging isn't something you wait for, it's something you build. My first years weren't easy. As a first-generation American, it took time to find my footing and my place. But instead of waiting for a seat at the table, I started setting tables of my own. Through Hairology, the African Students Union, Yellow Rose Society, NCNW, and Munch of Fun, I helped create the community I had been searching for, and in the process I found my people. The friends I made at Miami are my sisters to this day. That lesson, that community is created and not found, has shaped everything I've done since.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

After graduation, I joined the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, where I supported national health policy work and co-led community service initiatives. I'm now pursuing my master of public health at the University of Pennsylvania. During my first year, I served as a Lipman Family Prize Fellow at Wharton, helping evaluate social impact organizations from around the world for a \$550,000 award. This summer I am working as a Summer Associate in

health consulting at Mercer. Every step has been in service of my larger mission: building more equitable health systems for underserved communities, both in the U.S. and globally.



Kimiya Shirinbar, M.S. '24

Faculty Member and Researcher, University of Nevada Las Vegas

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

To me, embodying the spirit of a Cane means never backing down from a challenge and always believing in yourself, even when the odds are against you. Throughout my journey, I have embraced being the underdog, using every obstacle as motivation to work harder and prove that perseverance and resilience matter more than where you start. The University of Miami taught me to lead with confidence, serve my community, and represent the U with pride wherever I go. Whether I'm teaching as an instructor at UNLV, conducting research, representing the United States internationally, or giving back through service, I strive to carry the values of determination, leadership, and excellence that define what it means to be a Cane. Once a Cane, always a Cane.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

When I first stepped onto the University of Miami campus, I arrived with one simple goal: earn my degree and graduate. I never imagined how much bigger my journey would become. During my time at the U, I found myself pursuing opportunities I never thought possible. I was nominated for the Jack Kelsey Leadership Award, taught pilates classes to first-generation college students, performed at the NPHC Greek Show and won a grand prize, became a program manager at the University of Miami, created content through Miami Elite Marketing, and filmed a movie in Dubai with a GAFAC scholarship. Looking back, I realized I accomplished everything I never planned to do, and those experiences became far more meaningful than the original plan I had envisioned.

The greatest lesson the University of Miami taught me was to never doubt myself or

sell myself short. Before coming to the U, I was often afraid of rejection and failure. I would hesitate to pursue opportunities because I worried about the outcome. However, my time at Miami completely changed my perspective. I learned that rejection is not something to fear, regret is. I became more afraid of not taking a chance than of hearing "no."

Most importantly, Miami taught me that life doesn't always follow the plan you create and that's often a good thing. Sometimes the best opportunities come from taking a different path than the one you originally imagined. The U taught me that rerouting isn't failure; it's redirection. That mindset has stayed with me long after graduation and continues to guide me as I pursue new opportunities, embrace challenges, and strive to make a meaningful impact wherever I go.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

After graduation, I have been fortunate to achieve several meaningful milestones across leadership, education, research, and global engagement. I was awarded the Al Minbar Scholarship in Morocco, recognizing my commitment to leadership and community impact. I performed as a featured dancer during the HBCU Classic at Allegiant Stadium, one of the NFL's premier venues.

Professionally, I became an instructor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), where I teach in the kinesiology department as one of the youngest instructors there. I was also selected as a United States delegate for the Global Youth Climate Summit, representing the U.S. in international discussions on sustainability and climate action. I was also selected as a Pilot Project Fellow for the Miami Dade Innovation Authority. Currently, I am working in the UNLV Department of Physical Therapy Research Team, contributing to research focused on advancing rehabilitation and human performance while I am in pursuit of my doctoral degree.



Laura Francois, B.S.P.H. '22

Student Physician, Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine Florida

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I embody the spirit of a Cane by leading with service, resilience, and a commitment to uplifting others. At the University of Miami, I learned that being a Cane means using your education and talents to create meaningful change in your community.

Since graduating, I have continued to live those values as a medical student, community leader, and advocate for health equity. I founded the Student National Medical Association chapter at my medical school, serve in national leadership, conduct research focused on reducing health disparities, and organize outreach initiatives that expand access to health education and preventive care for underserved communities.

Whether mentoring future physicians, collaborating with community organizations, or building programs that create opportunities for students and underserved communities, I strive to lead with compassion, humility, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

To me, the spirit of a Cane is measured not by personal accomplishments, but by the lives you impact, the communities you strengthen, and the legacy of service you leave behind. It is about leading with purpose, paving a new way for others as you climb, and using every opportunity to create lasting, meaningful change.

As I continue my journey toward becoming a family physician, I am proud to carry the values instilled in me at the University of Miami forward by providing equitable care, mentoring future generations of physicians, and advocating for healthier, more empowered communities.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

My experiences at the U, from studying public health and French to engaging with communities beyond the classroom, shaped my understanding that health is influenced by culture, access, and social circumstances. More importantly, my time at Miami taught me that meaningful change requires vision, perseverance, and the willingness to create new innovative pathways.

The U showed me that a lasting legacy is not built by simply being present, but by leaving a community stronger than you found it. I learned the importance of stepping forward to build new opportunities while laying a foundation for those who will follow. Whether through leadership, service, or advocacy, I continue to strive to create initiatives that extend beyond my own involvement and continue making an impact long after my time in a role has ended.

The perspective I gained at Miami continues to guide me today: true leadership is about the resilience to overcome challenges and the commitment to create meaningful change that extends beyond yourself. During my time at the U, I learned how to navigate uncertainty while balancing the demands of managing multiple student organizations, maintaining my academic progress, preparing for the medical school application process, and serving my community during a time of unprecedented disruption. As the world faced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, I witnessed how structural barriers affected communities, including the Haitian diaspora abroad, and I learned the importance of leading with adaptability, empathy, and purpose. Years later, I carry these lessons with me as I lead within my medical school community to connect education and service.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

I was awarded the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Scholarship, a highly competitive scholarship for medical students committed to serving underserved communities. I was also Global Scholar of the Year at the Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine Florida, which I was awarded for exceptional leadership and impact in global health, recognizing sustained commitment to improving healthcare access, education, and outcomes for underserved international populations through a holistic, osteopathic approach.

In addition, I founded and chartered the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) chapter at Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine Florida, and served as its inaugural President; I am currently serving as the Regional Academic Center Student Director. I serve as the International Affairs National Committee co-chair on the SNMA National Board of Directors, contributing to national programming and advancing global health initiatives, and the Florida Osteopathic Medical Association (FOMA) Public Health Task Force, contributing to initiatives focused on community health and physician advocacy.

I was vice president of the campus Family Medicine Student Organization, which was recognized with the 2026 American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) Program of Excellence Award for a First Time Applicant, and I presented at the 2025 Sleep and Health Conference in Sweden on research addressing sleep health equity among marginalized populations under the mentorship of Dr. Judite Blanc, Associate Professor at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine Center for Translational Sleep and Circadian Sciences.

I am the National SNMA Student Access to Research Incubator (SARI) project lead for family medicine, and I established a collaborative partnership with the Uplift Drug Free Coalition to develop and lead multidisciplinary community health fairs. I created a longitudinal youth medical education workshop program in partnership with the Dorcas Outreach Center, providing sustained mentorship and introducing middle and high school students to careers in medicine.

I curated and directed the Doctor for a Day program, providing aspiring minority students with immersive exposure to the medical profession, and I advanced initiatives promoting health equity, preventive medicine, and access to care for underserved communities through leadership, research, community engagement, and physician advocacy.



Megan Elizabeth Johnson, Ed.D. '24

Manager, BH Brain & Spine Care Business Operations, Baptist Health

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

The University of Miami taught me that being a Cane means to lead fully in purpose, to embrace innovation, and to use your talents to create opportunities for others. I strive to embody that spirit every day by improving access to healthcare, developing future leaders through higher education, and serving my community through volunteer leadership and philanthropy.

Whether leading strategic initiatives at Baptist Health Brain & Spine Care, mentoring undergraduate students as an adjunct professor, or investing in scholarship and community programs, I believe leadership is measured by the impact we have on people. The values I developed at the University of Miami continue to shape how I lead with integrity, resilience, and a commitment to service.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

My doctoral experience at the University of Miami transformed how I think about leadership and building systems with lasting impact. The program challenged me to move beyond managing people and instead focus on building systems, developing others, and creating meaningful change through purposeful collaboration.

Equally important, learning alongside accomplished professionals from diverse industries broadened my perspective and strengthened my ability to solve complex challenges through research, innovation, and evidence-based decision-making. Most importantly, the University of Miami taught me that leadership is not defined

by a title, but by the ability to translate knowledge into action that improves lives. That lesson continues to guide every decision I make.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

After earning my doctor of education degree from the University of Miami, I have had the privilege of serving as manager of business operations for Baptist Health Brain & Spine Care, where I lead strategic initiatives that strengthen operational performance, expand patient access, and support the continued growth of one of the nation's leading neuroscience programs.

Beyond healthcare, I remain committed to developing future leaders as an adjunct professor and to serving my community through volunteer leadership at Bethune-Cookman University. Also, I was honored to receive a Community Service Award recognizing my contributions to the Volusia County community, where I helped expand scholarship opportunities, establish permanent educational endowments, build community partnerships, and mentor students pursuing careers in healthcare and leadership.



Melanie McGrath, B.M. '21

Songwriter, Producer and Freelance Senior Project Manager

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I embody the spirit of a Cane by refusing to fit into just one box. I'm a songwriter, producer, yoga/pilates teacher, project manager, and creative who lets all of those things strengthen one another. In my first year, I knew I wanted to study both music and Spanish, and the Foote Fellows program at UM made that possible. UM constantly encouraged me to explore every interest I had, and gave me the confidence to build a career as multidimensional as my interests. Being a Cane taught me that pursuing multiple passions builds a perspective that's entirely my own, which no one else can replicate.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

Looking back on my time at the U, one lesson I couldn't have learned anywhere else is this: if it doesn't exist yet, create it. I learned this again and again at UM, like when I wanted to teach for Shalala MusicReach before that opportunity existed for undergrads, or when I wanted to make an entire album of original music for my final media project, even though that wasn't the initial assignment. That's the spirit of the U. It didn't hand me a lane, it handed me the confidence to think bigger than the lanes that already exist.

I've carried that with me ever since. My career today is a collage of what I'm passionate about: writing, producing, creating, project managing, teaching. None of that was handed to me as a clear path. I built it, the same way I learned to at Miami: if it doesn't exist, create it.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Since graduating, some of my most meaningful accomplishments have been in songwriting and my creative career. I received the ASCAP Harold Adamson Lyric Award and have landed sync placements on Netflix, Amazon Prime, and MTV. Seeing my music placed in projects that reach that scale of audience has been incredibly rewarding. I was also selected for the She Is The Music mentorship, Alicia Keys' initiative supporting women in the music industry, and the Johnny Mercer Songwriters Project in Nashville. These experiences have all greatly shaped my career as a writer.



Niara Williams, M.P.H. '22, J.D. '25

Corporate Counsel, eMed

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I am proud to be a double Cane, and my time at the University of Miami remains one of the most meaningful chapters of my life. The experiences, relationships, and values I gained continue to shape both my career and my commitment to serving others. As an alumna, I strive to carry the spirit of The U by staying engaged with the University, mentoring future professionals, and giving back to my community through volunteer service with the Junior League of Miami. Being a Cane is more than earning degrees—it's a lifelong commitment to leadership, service, and making a positive impact.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

The experiences I couldn't have gained anywhere else were the experiential and practical opportunities the University of Miami provided outside the classroom. While pursuing my M.P.H., I supported COVID-19 response efforts during a pivotal moment in our nation's history, applying public health principles in real time. As a law student, I served as a student advocate in the Health Rights Clinic, helping clients navigate health-related legal challenges. I also worked with the Center of Ethics and Public Service to research the intersection between health and gentrification-caused displacement. These experiences taught me that advocacy requires understanding the people and communities policies are meant to serve.

What is/are your most note-worthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

One of my most noteworthy accomplishments after graduation is landing my dream job at eMed, a company at the forefront of digital health innovation and population health. This is especially meaningful because it allows me to combine my interests in health care, public health, and the law.



Peri Ella Green, B.B.A.'18

Independent EdTech Consultant, Make it Make Sense, LLC

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I believe Canes care for Canes. So no matter where I go in the world, if I run into a fellow Cane I'm gonna look out for them or at the very least throw up the U and yell #GoCanes!

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

You are not the work you do, you are the person you are.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Getting internationally-recognized for my research with Most Outstanding Design Paper at 2025 International Conference of the Learning Sciences in Helsinki, Finland. Another was receiving the Presidential Fellowship, a highly competitive and the most prestigious fellowship awarded to doctoral students by Northwestern University.



**Randall Fitzgerald, B.A. '21, J.D. '24,
M.A. '25, LL.M.T. '25**

Attorney Advisor, Office of General Counsel, USDA

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

Miami Hurricanes are persistent and resilient; if we get knocked down, we get back up, because we're finishers. The academic journey for my undergraduate class was sandwiched between the chaos of extended campus closures resulting from extreme emergencies; the campus was closed after the damage of Hurricane Irma during our first semester, and fifteen months before our graduation, we experienced a global pandemic.

I'm the only person in my family to obtain a doctoral degree; I didn't enter law school with a built-in roadmap to success, but that didn't stop me. I earned my bachelor's degree with four majors in the span of four years, and then three graduate degrees in the span of the next four years, including two law degrees (a J.D., and an LL.M. in taxation) and successfully defended a graduate thesis for my M.A. in Latin American Studies.

While completing these degrees — learning how to be a law student, growing from the humbling academic and personal environment of my first year of law school, into attaining 4.0 semesters in my second and third years— I challenged myself to achieve more, stayed open-minded to constructive feedback, and put in the work. I may have gotten knocked down, but I got back up, and was determined to finish. Outside the classroom, my peers twice elected me President of our Federalist Society chapter, and trusted me in a sixteen-way race for Student Bar Association. Miami Hurricanes finish strong, whatever gets thrown at us.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

I had coffee for the first time as a college student at the University of Miami during the fall of my first year. While studying with classmates before an exam, a member of our group purchased and shared with us a colada of Cuban coffee. Cafecito is an important partner of the tired student, and an even better companion for building

lasting friendships. In my eight years as a Miami Hurricane, I've shared quite a few coladas under the palm trees with my classmates and friends.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

I'm proud to be a quadruple Cane! As a law student, I worked for a state appellate judge and a federal district court judge, and completed civil rights fellowships with two nonprofit law firms. I passed the Florida bar exam on my first attempt in September 2024, successfully defended my graduate thesis on South American judicial independence in August 2025, and was appointed as an Attorney at the United States Department of Agriculture in the Office of General Counsel in September 2025. I was a Spring 2026 fellow with the American Conservation Coalition, and I was also appointed in 2026 to the Young Alumni Leadership Council (YALC) and as vice president of the Washington D.C. Canes Community.



Sebastian Vegas, B.S.C. '21

Attorney, Technology, Operations, IP & Privacy Legal at Citi

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

I believe being a Cane means lifting up other Canes. Whether it's attending New York Canes events, connecting with alumni on LinkedIn, or mentoring and networking with fellow graduates, I try to stay engaged with the community that helped shape me. And of course, I share a name with Sebastian the Ibis, so my Cane spirit was destined from the start.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

Network, network, network! The University of Miami taught me that genuine relationships can open doors in ways you never expect. As a first-generation American and first-generation college student, I often felt like I was figuring things out as I went. I made a point to introduce myself to people, attend every networking event I could, and stay curious. That habit has been one of the greatest gifts the U gave me, and I think it developed because our campus community felt so close-knit. Many of the opportunities I've had since graduation can be traced back to the confidence I built by simply putting myself out there.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

I'm proud to have built experiences at organizations I once only dreamed about, including NBCUniversal, Sony Music, and Citi. Passing the Uniform Bar Exam and being sworn in as a licensed attorney are milestones I'm very proud of, as they represent years of hard work and perseverance.



**Serena Shah, B.S. '19, M.B.A. '25,
M.D. '25**

Ophthalmology Resident Physician, Illinois Eye and Ear Infirmary at the University of Illinois Chicago

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

If you had to choose a word to describe the spirit of a Cane, it would be passionate, without a doubt. Canes pour their time, love, and energy into the things in life that matter the most to themselves and those around them. I embody the spirit of a Cane by doing just that in both my professional and personal life in situations that span from caring for patients and writing impactful research manuscripts to caring for my friends and family.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

One lesson that I couldn't have gained from anywhere else that University of Miami taught me is the following: learn from those around you. The University of Miami attracts brilliant minds, individuals with innovative ideas, and people who desire to change things for the better. These people will teach you more about yourself, about what you are capable of, and about the world than you can ever imagine!

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

Some of my most noteworthy accomplishments after graduation include completing the 4-year M.D./M.B.A. program at University of Miami, matching into ophthalmology residency at University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) Illinois Eye and Ear Infirmary, publishing over a dozen peer-reviewed articles on various topics within the fields of dermatology and ophthalmology, and traveling with friends and family both nationally and internationally to experience new activities that ranged from hiking in Zion National Park in Utah to jeep-riding on safari in Maasai Mara in Kenya!



Sofia Eileen Hamilton, B.A. '21

Senior Health Policy Analyst, Americans for Prosperity

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

Working in policy and politics demands resilience. I hear “no” almost daily, from legislators, editors, and other powerful people. If I took “no” for an answer, I’d never make progress or drive change. So, like the ibis, who is the last to leave and the first to return home after a hurricane, I hold onto my purpose and keep pressing forward.

Resiliency for its own sake is wasted energy — it’s only when applied toward the greater good that it drives real, meaningful change. During our first year, “Canes Care for Canes” was drilled into our heads, and I took it to heart. My purpose in policy work is to build a better country for my broader community, and I pursue that by advocating for patients to have access to higher-quality, more affordable health care. I carry the spirit of a Cane into every fight: resilience with purpose, in service of the people I represent.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

During my final semester at the U, I interned with the member of Congress in whose House district the University sits. I went in wanting to give back to and learn more about the community outside our campus bubble, but the experience showed me how much that community had shaped my time in Miami without ever realizing it.

Constituents in our district brought the same concerns to their member of Congress that I now spend my career working on. That’s not something you learn in a classroom; you only see it by stepping outside the campus gates and into the district that makes the University possible in the first place.

While it's usually the first thing overlooked, the community surrounding a university is just as much a part of its identity as the students inside it. That internship is where I first understood that advocacy starts with the community right in front of you.

What is/are your most noteworthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

My job often has me testifying before legislatures and appearing in the media advocating for patients nationwide — and I've helped bring about many meaningful changes — but my favorite accomplishment happened on my own time, in my own city.

A security guard confiscating my pepper spray at a concert turned into the first piece of legislation I ever influenced. Frustrated after losing it at the door, I went home to reorder one online, only to find that Amazon and every major retailer refused to ship to my D.C. address, even though possessing pepper spray for self-defense is completely legal in the district. I dug into the code myself and found the real story: D.C. had repealed its registration requirement years earlier, but retailers never got the memo, leaving residents in a city with rising crime rates unable to protect themselves with something as basic as pepper spray.

I funneled my frustration into an op-ed, published in the Washington Examiner. The piece caught the attention of a D.C. City Council member, and the issue was eventually addressed in legislation, with the council member publicly acknowledging my role in bringing it to light. Since then, I've heard from women thanking me for helping them feel a little safer in a scary world. I was 23, and it was the first time I saw firsthand that one person paying attention to a small, overlooked problem can actually change the law and make a difference.



Trinity Conn, B.S.M.A.S. '19

Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Shedd Aquarium

How do you embody the spirit of a Cane?

To me, being a Cane means leading with curiosity, resilience, and a commitment to making a difference. At the University of Miami, I learned and saw in real time how science and conservation not only overlap but how imperative it is that that work connects to the community, both campus- and Miami-wide. That mindset has shaped my career, from working alongside researchers and restoration practitioners to mentoring students interested in conservation. Whether I'm working with researchers across institutions, partnering with coral restoration practitioners, or mentoring the next generation of conservation scientists, I try to build the same kind of supportive community that helped shape me as a student. I hope to leave every project and every person a little better than I found them.

Looking back on your time at the U, what is one lesson, experience, or perspective that you couldn't have gained anywhere else?

The biggest lesson I learned at Miami was that you don't have to wait to make meaningful contributions to science. As an undergraduate working at the Rosenstiel School, I wasn't just observing research, I was trusted to be part of it. That experience gave me the confidence to ask ambitious questions, and see myself as a scientist. There's nowhere else I could have combined world-class marine science, direct access to cutting-edge coral reef research, and mentors who believed in me from such an early stage. Those experiences set the foundation for everything I've accomplished since.

What is/are your most note-worthy accomplishment(s) after graduation?

After graduating from the University of Miami, I earned my Ph.D. in Biology at Penn State University, where I studied how genetic diversity can help endangered coral populations adapt to a changing climate.

Today, as a postdoctoral fellow at Shedd Aquarium, I use whole-genome sequencing to identify corals that are naturally more resilient to heat stress, helping restoration practitioners make more informed decisions about which corals to propagate and outplant. My research has contributed to publications in journals including Science Advances, PNAS, and Evolution, and in 2025 I was honored to receive the Biota Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Walder Foundation to expand this work and to generate recommendations that coral restoration practitioners can actually employ from genomic data I generate. What I'm most proud of, though, is seeing our research move beyond the lab and become a tool that supports the long-term conservation of coral reefs.