

FEARLESS IDEAS

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OFF TO A GREAT START

How Maryland's IAP Scholarship Prepared Ladeja Robinson for Career Success



AFTER BEING ACCEPTED into the University of Maryland, Ladeja Robinson '17 applied for UMD's Incentive Awards Program, but she didn't dwell much on it. She didn't think she had a great chance of being selected. In fact, she'd applied for the IAP in the first place only because the college access specialist at her high

school—Baltimore Polytechnic Institute—persuaded her in a hallway conversation to attend an information session, and kept reminding her to submit her application. She finally did: on the last possible day.

Ladeja's focus shifted when another applicant told her that IAP decision letters had been sent out. She asked her mother for the key to their mailbox, then went running down a flight of stairs to see if she'd received any IAP mail.

"My heart and stomach were sitting in my throat as I opened the mailbox," Ladeja recalls. "Then I saw the letter. Once I grabbed the envelope, I braced myself. I told myself whatever comes from this is meant to be. Then I read the first sentence and dropped to my knees and let out a squeal. I couldn't believe that I'd received the award. I ran back upstairs with tears in my eyes. My mom and stepdad were waiting for me; I immediately hugged my mom and handed my stepdad the letter. He read it out loud and it turned into a group hug."

Ladeja's IAP award sealed the deal for her. Offers from other institutions no longer mattered: there was no question she was going to Maryland. But after she arrived on campus, she was delighted to realize that being in IAP meant much more than receiving a scholarship. The program is designed to provide wrap-around support to its scholars through academic guidance, mentoring and a nurturing community.

In other words, the IAP prepares its scholars to succeed, not just as students while on campus, but in any career they choose to pursue after graduation.

That support structure made a huge difference when Ladeja, facing multiple and daunting personal challenges, considered dropping out of college in her sophomore year. The IAP staff

quickly came to her aid and got her to change her mind. "That moment was pivotal in my life," she recalls. "I had a very supportive group of people in my corner. The resources I was connected to, led to me switching my major from neurobiology and physiology to what I truly wanted: bioengineering. I'm so glad I held on. That's why I'm where I am today."

Ladeja now works in Los Angeles, CA as a manufacturing project engineer for defense corporation Northrop Grumman. Her first contact with the company happened at UMD, when she participated in a team that won a Northrop Grumman hackathon, gaining valuable experience working on a multidisciplinary team. After graduation, she landed a full time position with the company.

By any measure, Ladeja's career is off to a great start. Her hard work paid off, but she's also quick to note that her trajectory wouldn't be what it is today without the opportunities and rigorous preparation she received from Maryland and the IAP.

"Being an IAP Scholar was a transformative experience," she stated. "The program is responsible for the woman, colleague, and professional I am today. From the etiquette dinners, to volunteering on campus and in the local community, receiving leadership positions within IAP, the mentorship, the fellowship—they all helped me grow, learn basic principles regarding timeliness, preparedness, accountability, how to dress professionally, how to speak. It overall changed my life. IAP means everything and more to me."

As for the donors who support programs such as IAP, Ladeja noted: **"I'd say to them that their gifts change lives and unlock the potential in the young men and women they touch. Their generosity changed my life and inspires me to also give back."**