

fall 2015

SAMFORD

reflections

samford university diversity newsletter



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features

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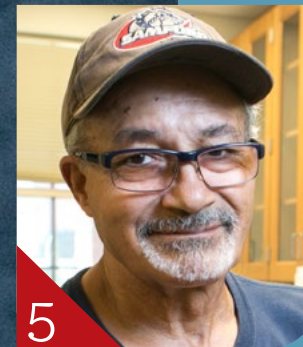
Samford Reflections is a biannual electronic newsletter spotlighting the university's commitment to cultural differences and diverse perspectives. It features Samford stories of minority students, employees, alumni and friends to celebrate and communicate their achievements. To subscribe or unsubscribe, email reflections@samford.edu.



Nigerian Graduate
Student Oluwabunmi
Dada Adjusts to New
Country, Degree
Program



Demondrae Thurman
Brings Best and
Brightest to Samford



Herman Harris Keeps
Campus Mended,
Maintained for 40
Years





From the Director

We are excited to bring you the latest edition of *Reflections*. We have put a lot of time into this issue and think you will enjoy reading of the wonderful things happening at Samford. This issue is filled with great articles on students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends that are doing excellent things on our campus. We've worked very hard to bring you these stories and hope that you will enjoy and tell others about the publication.

I look forward to your feedback (reflections@samford.edu) as we continue together to make Samford a reflection of all.

Denise J. Gregory, Ph.D.
Director of Diversity and Intercultural Initiatives



Minority Bridge Fund

Established in 2012 to provide financial assistance for tuition, room, board and books, the Minority Bridge Fund is used to bridge the gap between what students have and what they need financially to complete their Samford education. Unlike a traditional scholarship, all donations are used to provide financial assistance for

current minority students who need a “little extra” to make ends meet—and make possible finishing what they started at Samford. Please consider donating to the fund by visiting www.samford.edu/giving to secure the future of our students today.

Giving Spotlight

Carlos E. Alemán, Cristina Almanza, Orlando Rosa, Vanessa Vargas, Teresa Zúñiga Odom and Board President Matt Ennis



Fiesta Birmingham Celebrates Hispanic Culture

Fiesta is an integral part of the Birmingham community that celebrates Hispanic culture through its annual fall festival. This year, Fiesta celebrated its 13th year and presents the best of Hispanic art, music, dance and food. The board of directors that produces the yearly event is made up of Hispanic and non-Hispanic professionals from across the metro Birmingham area.

Education is a critical piece of Fiesta's mission. "Fiesta was created to raise scholarship money for deserving Hispanic youth to attend colleges in our state, and educate the general public about the diverse Hispanic cultures in Alabama," said Fiesta founding board member Teresa Zúñiga Odom.

In 2014–15, Fiesta donated \$10,000 to Samford University to provide scholarships for Hispanic students.

Vanessa Vargas, Fiesta board director and scholarship committee member, says that the scholarships "lend a little help and allow young Latino students to become first-generation college graduates."

Cristina Almanza, fellow board member, reiterated this sentiment. "The scholarships allow our kids to have a bright future," she said.

Some of the recipients of the scholarship include Samford Fellow Fernanda Herrera Vera and Samford baseball player Frankie Navarrete.

For more information, go to fiestabirmingham.com @FiestaBham on Twitter or [Facebook.com/FiestaBham](https://www.facebook.com/FiestaBham).

Student Spotlight



Miles Away from Home

Nigerian Student Oluwabunmi Dada Adjusts to New Country, Degree Program

The growing pains of going to college can take a toll on anyone, but for Oluwabunmi Dada, the experience was particularly challenging. She didn't just leave her hometown to attend Samford University; she left behind her home country.

Dada is a graduate student from Nigeria. She is pursuing a master's degree in environmental management from Howard College of Arts and Sciences. She was drawn to Samford because of its unique degree program.

"There is an energy concentration that the program offers, so you have more variety. It is not really available at other schools," Dada said.

Dada was nearly 10 thousand miles from the campus as she filled out her application to Samford. She attributes efficient communication with the university's Global Engagement Office for the ease of the process.

Though Dada had not been on campus prior to applying, she says that the intimacy and sincerity of students' beliefs struck a chord with her.

"I like the Christian beliefs and small population," she said. "I like everything about it. It is different from where I come from, and there was a lot of adjusting to culture."

Not everything about Dada's transition was easy; she says that the two greatest hardships of fully transitioning to life at Samford were adjusting to Alabama's climate and American food.

"The United States is very cold compared to what I was used to at home," Dada said. "And the first two weeks, I was basically living on fruit. The people at the caf really helped me with that."

Dada is trying to start an African Student Association to support and connect with other international students.



A Tremendous Place to Study Music

Demondrae Thurman Brings Best and Brightest to Samford

Dr. Demondrae Thurman has been an integral part of the music department at Samford University since 2013. In addition to teaching the trombone, euphonium and tuba, he also conducts the Wind Ensemble and serves as director of graduate studies in music.

Thurman began playing music in seventh grade. After trying every brass instrument available, he and his band director finally settled on the euphonium. He fell instantly in love with the warm tone that is inherent within the instrument.

Through music, Thurman has been able to travel the world extensively, including China, Japan, and much of Europe and the United Kingdom. He even met his wife at a music festival.

“Music brought me to the academy where I feel I’ve done my finest work,” Thurman said. “I have taught students who have gone on to successful careers as band directors, college professors and professional musicians.”

Thurman believes talent isn’t enough in the arts. As in sports, hours of practice on fundamentals and studying the greats are necessary for excellence in music. In his experience, students have to devote time to music through practicing, listening and attending live concerts to be successful.

Since becoming a faculty member, Thurman has been continually humbled that he has been embraced by students, faculty and supporters of the School of the Arts. He feels that his being hired at Samford was a strong suggestion that something different was needed to complement the great things that were already happening in the instrumental music area. He is extremely proud of the diversity within his studio and the commitment that his direct administration has made to further the cause.

“I believe Samford is a tremendous place to study music,” he said, “and I’m committed to bringing in the best and brightest students to our campus.”

40 Years of Service

Herman Harris Keeps Campus Mended and Maintained



Staff Spotlight

Forty years is quite some time to dedicate your talents to one place. Since March 1, 1976, Herman Harris has mended and maintained buildings on Samford University's campus. Although he was hired as a mechanic for Samford vehicles, he eventually moved to building maintenance. Harris shared that he came to Samford one Thursday afternoon to help out a friend, and by the following Monday, he was a Samford employee.

Throughout his tenure, Harris has witnessed the growth and changes on campus firsthand. When he began his work, there was no Beeson Woods or West Campus, and Leslie S. Wright Center for Fine Arts had just been completed.

Each day, Harris moves throughout the dormitories and academic buildings,

performing much-needed duties such as replacing lightbulbs, maintaining plumbing and repairing locks. He enjoys when his work allows him to share a few words with the students.

Some times of the year are busier than others, and the work is nonstop. During dorm prep, which takes place from May to August, Harris and his colleagues work tirelessly to prepare each and every room for the students' arrival.

Harris declares that he has no plans to retire any time soon. "[The] main thing about any place you work: you have to enjoy it. Then you won't want to leave!" he said.

Samford is a better place because of the overwhelming pride and dedication of Harris.



Cultural Event Spotlight

Jasmine Guy Performs at Samford

Wright Center Presents *Raisin' Cane*

Jasmine Guy and the Avery Sharpe Trio raised eyebrows with their unique performance of “Raisin’ Cane: A Harlem Renaissance Odyssey” Sept. 18 in Samford University’s Wright Center.

“The first act is all about setting up the first 10 years [of the Harlem Renaissance], and that’s a lot to do in 45 minutes,” Guy said. “The second act is all about Jean Toomer’s book, *Cane*. It has a different tone and is a little more specific.”

“The music is set, the text is set, the story is set, but there is room for that aliveness,” Guy said. “My musical theatre background is very strict. You are doing the show eight times a week, it is all timed, and there is very little room for change within the moment. This show isn’t structured that way.”

“Sometimes I haven’t been ready [for my speaking part]. I’ve been jamming [with the band] and then realized it was time to go back to the podium to bring the piece back,” Guy said.

Despite being set in a different period of time, Guy feels that audiences are able to find value and appreciate the relevance of the work.

“The work that we are resurrecting from the 1920s I have found to be so valid,” she said. “I think it is a disservice to go from Harriet Tubman to Martin Luther King Jr. and leave out everything else — to leave out construction, the Harlem Renaissance, Nat Turner and not make these people in our history visceral in our lives. History should never be boring.”



Alumni Spotlight

Pass the Chalk Party
**CELEBRATING THE IMPACT OF
EDUCATION IN BIRMINGHAM**
PRESENTED BY THE SAMFORD BLACK ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



alumni.samford.edu/sbaa

An Electric Atmosphere

SBAA Sponsors Pass the Chalk Party

The inaugural Pass the Chalk Party sponsored by the Samford Black Alumni Association (SBAA) took place Oct. 2 at WorkPlay in downtown Birmingham. The goal was to celebrate the impact of education in Birmingham. Guests enjoyed heavy hors d'oeuvres and live music from Just a Few Cats. All proceeds from this event directly benefited education in Birmingham through the Minority Bridge Fund at Samford University, Growing Kings, Birmingham Education Foundation and Together Assisting People (TAP) Inc.

In order to alleviate some financial burden and provide an avenue of financial resources for minority students, Samford has established the Minority Bridge Fund to provide assistance for tuition, room, board and books.

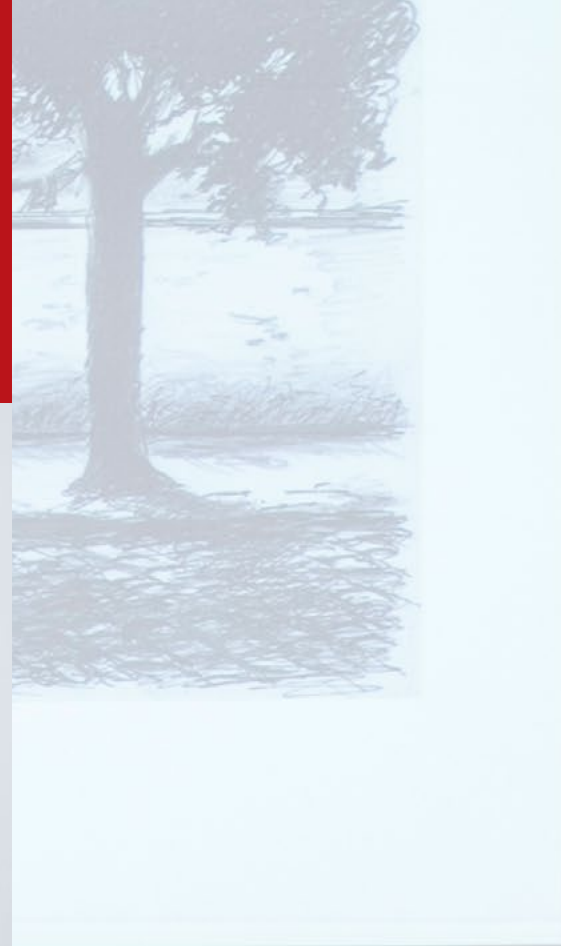
Growing Kings mentors at-risk males in Birmingham City Schools. The Birmingham Education Foundation bring the voice of the community to Birmingham City Schools' leadership. TAP is a nonprofit foundation whose mission is to prepare athletes to be successful in life outside athletics.

Each of these organizations works to incite change that will affect the Birmingham community.

Isaac Cooper, president of the SBAA, was very pleased with the success of the event. "The atmosphere during the Pass the Chalk Party was electric!" he said. "The room was filled with smiles, great food, outstanding entertainment and an environment that welcomed building new relationships. The turnout was great."

Author Explores Connections between Immigration, Race

Lila Quintero Weaver Speaks at Samford



Cultural Event Spotlight

Lila Quintero Weaver, author of *Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White*, spoke at Samford's lunch and learn Sept. 28. The event was sponsored by the Latino Student Organization in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month.

In 1961, at the age of 5, Weaver emigrated from Argentina to Marion, Alabama. Her novel *Darkroom* recounts her experiences growing up as a Latina during the desegregation period. Being neither black nor white during the Jim Crow area, she found herself in a "gray area" between the two.

"*Darkroom* started as an academic project at the University of Alabama, so it was pretty small scale at the time," Weaver said. "University of

Alabama Press got interested in it, so we expanded it to a book."

When the University of Alabama Press approached Weaver about expanding it into a book, she realized it fit into a niche that had not really been explored at the time. "There were a lot of books about the Civil Rights movement, but not from the point of view of a Latina," she said.

In her speech at Samford, Weaver shared excerpts from her novel, and talked about navigating a confusing and dangerous time in America's history as someone who was not from America. Weaver hopes that more visibility and representation will help Hispanic and Latino youth to be proud of their heritage.



Organization Spotlight

A Sense of Familia

Students Establish Latino Student Organization



LSO officers, left to right, back row: Nathan Yoguez, Juliana Guzman Salazar, Dulce Rivera, Frankie Navarrete. Front row: Fernanda Herrera-Vera and Ana Piñon.



Students Melody Martinez and Fernanda Herrera felt a need for a student organization that would provide the growing number of Hispanic students on campus a community. In the spring of 2015 and in partnership with their faculty adviser, Dr. Carlos Alemán, they began the process of establishing the Latino Student Organization (LSO), an organization where Latino and non-Latino students can come together and have a sense of familia on campus.

“It has helped me grow as an active student. I have found a little piece of home on Samford’s campus,” said current LSO president Dulce Rivera.

As the LSO enters its second year, it continues to grow a diverse student membership. The LSO serves as both a space for Latino students to share their experiences and where the Samford community at large can learn about Hispanic culture.

Importantly, the LSO bridges Samford to the Hispanic community in Birmingham. The LSO has volunteered with local Hispanic nonprofit organizations such as the Adelante Alabama Worker Center, the Alabama Coalition Immigrant Justice and the Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama. Members have also participated in cultural events such as the Latino Culture Festival Fiesta and the annual Dia de los Muertos celebration. This semester they have started Lunes Latinos, a monthly on-campus gathering celebrating Latin American culture through games, music and art.

For more information about the LSO, go to twitter.com/samfordlso