

# PAYNE FELLOWSHIP 2020 NEWSLETTER



**PAYNE**



INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
FELLOWSHIP



# Message From the Director

Dear Fellows, Alumni and Friends of the Payne Fellowship Program:

I am delighted to present to you the 2020 Payne Fellowship newsletter. Many productive efforts have taken place this year despite extraordinary challenges. In this issue, we will be highlighting the accomplishments of the 2018 and 2019 fellows and introducing our 2020 fellows. Sadly, the 2020 fellows had to postpone their congressional internships but were still able to participate in a virtual orientation this summer. While the pandemic was spreading over the world, USAID promptly arranged an alternative internship experience for the 2019 fellows who were scheduled to go overseas but ended up, like most of us, working from home. Similarly, our graduating 2018 fellows onboarded as Career Candidate Officers and started working at their designated backstops, virtually.

No matter how disorienting, painful or uncertain our lives are right now, we are still moving forward. We have gathered as a community to discuss the horrific events of racial violence and injustice that have ignited social unrest. As the nation grapples with how we fall short in meeting the ideals of equality and inclusion, the Foreign Service has come under the spotlight. More than ever, the Payne Fellowship proves its value to USAID as related in the [Foreign Service Journal article](#) by Youshea Berry, chair of our newly created advisory group.

We are very thankful to all our supporters, but especially to the members of the Payne advisory group. This group of dedicated senior USAID officials came together and supported us during a critical time. As a result, we have been able to improve the Payne fellows' transition into the Agency and strengthened our mentoring program.

This year, we welcomed five new affiliates into our university network. The following graduate schools have committed to provide significant financial support to complement the Payne fellowship award:

**School of Education, American University**  
**Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan**  
**School of Diplomacy and International Relations, Seton Hall University**  
**Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey**  
**Master of Global Affairs, Rice University**

More good news: congratulations to Emma Din, Anthony Medeiros III, Krina Patel and Sofia Quesada who were granted Foreign Service tenure earlier this year. We look forward to seeing more tenured Payne alumni!

With just a few days away until our application deadline of November 1, we are excited to expand our program by 50 percent in 2021. We are now able to offer life-changing opportunities to 15 talented and deserving individuals. Seeing the interest our program is garnering among young leaders who are brimming with knowledge, cultural competencies and passion, makes us optimistic about the future. Not only of our program, but of our nation.

Here's to the future!

Maria Elena Vivas-House

# 2020 Fellows Introductions & First Impressions



## JAZMIN DIAZ

University of Pennsylvania - Master of City Planning, Housing, Community, and Economic Development

I am a first year grad student studying urban planning at the University of Pennsylvania-specifically housing, community, and economic development. I am most passionate about cooperatives, micro-financing, and creating a path to wealth building in urban communities. I am greatly inspired by the innovation and creativity of marginalized communities and hope to use my urban planning degree to contribute to these efforts on a global scale. I am thankful for the support provided by the Payne Fellowship program to pursue my academic passions and apply them as USAID Foreign Service Officer. I am looking forward to creating new memories with the 2020 Payne Cohort and making lasting relationships with inspiring people creating change abroad.



## MARIAM KHORENYAN

New York University - MS in Global Affairs, Transnational Security

I am a proud Armenian immigrant and a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer who served in Georgia. My experiences in both local and federal government, my undergraduate work in Justice, Law and Criminology from American University and my passion for international peace and security inspired me to apply for the Payne Fellowship. In addition to English, I also speak Armenian and Russian. I'm incredibly excited to continue developing both personally and professionally with the Payne Fellowship and cannot wait to pursue my dreams by focusing on how the international community can work together to address conflict through international development.



## ANGELL KIM

University of Arizona - MPA and GIS Certificate

I will be a graduate student at the University of Arizona for public administration and a certificate in GIS. I have a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and a minor in Latin American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. I enjoy gastronomy, collaborating with people to reach goals, and learning from different cultures and communities. My previous experiences include volunteering for Rotary International, working in project management, serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia, and advocating for reproductive health in the Latin American and Caribbean region. I aspire to be a Program and Project Development Officer for USAID. As a Payne Fellow, I am most excited to meet, work, and learn from new colleagues and peers throughout the Fellowship.



## JOSE LEANDRO

Johns Hopkins University - Master of Science in Public Health, Health Systems

This summer, I am excited to start my MSPH. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has brought us unprecedented challenges, I am looking forward to connecting with my mentors, my Payne cohort, and the experiences that will come my way. I am particularly looking forward to learning more about the agency's work, picking the classes that will meet my interests and the skills needed to succeed as Foreign Service Officer, and seeing where my overseas internship takes me.



## KATRYNA MAHONEY

Georgetown University - MA in Global Human Development

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic that's plaguing our world, I feel very fortunate to begin my Payne Fellowship journey. This fall, I joined Georgetown's School of Foreign Service as an MA candidate in the Global Human Development Program - an applied approach to navigating the complexities of international development. My areas of interest include conflict, migration, and humanitarian emergencies in the Africa and LAC regions. In looking ahead, I am most excited to meet new challenges and expand my worldview. I also can't wait to meet my ever-inspiring cohort members in person!



## DEVE MEHTA

George Washington University - MPH in Community-Oriented Primary Care

I'll be attending The George Washington University- Milken Institute School of Public Health, where I will be pursuing a Master's in Public Health with a certificate in community-oriented primary care. I attained a Bachelor of Arts from Pitzer College, a member of the Claremont Colleges, where I pursued a self-designed major in public health: sexual and reproductive health and minored in anthropology. My areas of interest include infectious disease, migration, LGBTQ+ human rights, intersectionality, and epistemology of science & medicine. What I most look forward to as a Payne Fellow is to cultivate community and create social change. I am thrilled to work alongside other USAID scholars and collaborate with international colleagues to learn about health disparities and societal issues.



## LEYLA MERLO

George Washington University - MA in International Development Studies, Global Health

I am a first generation Peruvian-American and recent graduate from the University of Maryland, College Park. It is truly a blessing and privilege to be a 2020 Donald M. Payne International Development Fellow. The Payne Fellowship has given me a second family; a network of fellows, mentors, and supporters. I am so excited to continue this journey alongside my 2020 cohort and ultimately realize a career as a Foreign Service Officer. Overall, I am most excited about traveling overseas, learning about different cultures, and creating an impact on the lives of others. I will always be infinitely grateful to the people behind the Payne Fellowship for providing me with a world of opportunities.



## TAINA PEREZ

Yale University - MA in Environmental Management

I will be attending Yale School of the Environment pursuing a Master's of Environmental Management. My 2020 summer as a Payne Fellow kept me on the edge of my seat, literally. I sat on the edge of the chair in my kitchen as I opened my laptop and logged onto the summer's virtual orientation. Despite the circumstances, I would not change a thing about my summer experience. Within the fellowship, I am most excited about sustaining my relationship with my current mentor in order to best prepare myself for becoming an Environment Officer. Finally, I would like to share that I was inspired by the stories and experiences of my cohort fellows and look forward to upholding the mission of USAID and being part of the Payne family!



## NAILA SEGULE

Harvard University - MS in Environmental Health

I'm pursuing a Master of Science in Environmental Health at Harvard University. This summer, I interned at the North Carolina Division of Public Health's Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch. I was able to work on re-opening Jury trials, environmental health surveillance, and analyzing occupational health indicators. I loved the opportunity to gain some practical experience before I learn the theory in the classroom!



## ZACH WERHLI

Harvard University - Master in Public Policy

I'm thrilled to have been selected as a 2020 Payne Fellow. I'm originally from Salem, Oregon, but I've spent the last two years working on foreign policy and international development issues at an NGO in Washington, DC. I'll be pursuing an MPP at the Harvard Kennedy School this fall, although I'm planning to take classes remotely in Oregon for the foreseeable future. During the fellowship, I'm excited to get to know my cohort and the broader Payne community even better. I'm also keeping my fingers crossed that we'll be able to head overseas next summer for our internship.



# 2019 Fellows Virtual Internship: Lessons Learned



**NATALIE FISZLER**  
USAID/INDONESIA

This summer I had the incredible opportunity to intern virtually with the health office at USAID/ Indonesia. The highlight for me was being able to support the COVID-19 emergency response and learn about the variety of activities implemented by partners, from risk communication strategies and distribution of WASH supplies to strengthening national laboratories. As my main project, I built interactive web maps to tell the story of health office-funded COVID-19 activities implemented across all 34 provinces in Indonesia. As I continue as a second-year MPH student with an interest in global health security, I look forward to bringing these experiences into the classroom and continuing to learn about the COVID-19 response worldwide.



**NIESHA FORD**  
USAID/UGANDA

This summer, although I was not able to see people physically, I was able to speak to many people about their experiences and any advice they could give- from Payne Fellows ahead of me, to current FSOs. I found that to be extremely valuable and helpful. It was also great to put my coursework in action. In my impact evaluation course, I had to create a program, including the indicators, theory of change, etc. How I was evaluated in that class was almost identical to how USAID evaluates its implementing partners monitoring and evaluation plans, so I felt grateful for understanding the work that goes into these documents on the implementing partners side of things, but also gaining an understanding of how these plans are evaluated from the USAID side during the internship.



**MEKLIT GEBRU**  
BUREAU OF ECONOMIC GROWTH, EDUCATION, AND ENVIRONMENT

For my summer internship, I worked in the Bureau of Economic Growth, Education, and Environment at USAID's Washington Office virtually. I specifically worked with the Higher Education Division Team. My research skills that I used in my graduate program came in handy when I was working on evidence mapping for USAID's Higher ED Learning Agenda and working on Higher Education and COVID-19 responses across the globe. The highlight of my internship was getting to know the people that worked in the Office of Education. I am especially thankful for the Higher Education Division Team, and my supervisor Dr. Samantha Alvis who was very encouraging and supportive throughout my virtual internship. I am also thankful and grateful for the 2019 Payne fellow cohort & former Payne fellows because they have been a great support system during my internship and beyond.



**JESSICA HERNANDEZ**  
BUREAU FOR RESILIENCE AND FOOD SECURITY

During graduate school, I've learned to interface with senior leadership and global public figures, which came in handy during my virtual internship as I interacted with and penned messages for the Senior Leadership Group. The highlight of my internships was working with an amazing team and getting to meet and learn from many wise women across the Agency.



**AVANI MOOLJEE**  
USAID/LIBERIA

The highlight of working with the Mission to Liberia was the people. I had the opportunity to have several in-depth conversations with FSOs, civil servants, locally-hired staff, third-country nationals, and all of their unique experiences only heighten my anticipation of becoming an FSO. Their passion for the work they do was clearly visible, and working remotely, navigating several time zones and calendar overlaps didn't negatively affect their commitment to their work in the slightest. That was inspiring to see, and I hope to mirror their work ethic in the Missions I serve in the future. It was heartwarming to see the strong work relationships team members had, and their friendships that extended beyond office hours and into personal life. Working with this Mission was a truly wonderful experience and I hope to keep in touch with many of the staff members in the future.



**MICHELLE NGIRBABUL**  
USAID/TANZANIA

Graduate school provides countless opportunities to improve my writing proficiency and data literacy, two skills that will continue to support me beyond my internship. It's just as important to know how to conduct data analyses and interpret results as it is to effectively communicate results to targeted audiences, and I'm grateful I got to use both on a variety of assignments during my internship. Overall, the highlight of my virtual internship has been connecting with and learning from the incredible staff at USAID Tanzania every week. Asante sana!



**SUSAN OJUKWU**  
BUREAU FOR GLOBAL HEALTH

One highlight of my virtual internship was participating in a gender co-creation workshop in collaboration with USAID implementing partners. This workshop brought technical experts to the table to solicit feedback on a theory of change model that aims to explore gender considerations in the context of maternal health and family planning programs for improved measurable outcomes. We broke into groups and each group focused on a different part of the model: making suggestions about any missing pieces, and addressing questions that may have been omitted about topics like provider bias, for example. This was a highlight because not only did I develop significant knowledge, but I also saw in practice many of the methods that I have explored in my graduate coursework. It was great to see how workshoping and incorporating different perspectives can still be done successfully in a virtual setting.



**ROSE QUISPE**  
BUREAU FOR RESILIENCE AND FOOD SECURITY

The highlight of my virtual internship has definitely been the weekly calls with different women FSOs. I have been able to connect at a deeper level with women who have gone through similar experiences as I have. Each call allowed me to picture myself in their shoes and create scenarios of how I will handle challenging situations in the field. The topics ranged from networking to work-life balance. Aside from making new mentors, my communication skills also strengthened. The 20+ calls with these diplomats gave me the confidence and reassurance that I will excel in my career as a Foreign Service Officer. I am tremendously grateful for the opportunity to gain so many mentors in such a short time; I only hope to continue this mentorship with the next Payne Fellows.



**MARIANNA SMITH**  
BUREAU FOR POLICY, PLANNING AND LEARNING

One of my projects this summer was to gain a better understanding of the role and effectiveness of USAID's non-projectized assistance like policy dialogue, convening, and donor coordination. A Mission Director and I conducted interviews with USAID staff, from foreign service nationals to mission directors, with varying years of experience. The interviews not only provided us insight into how we can better leverage our skills to contribute to locally-led development, but also allowed me to learn about the work of multiple missions and connect with incredible staff that I look forward to calling my colleagues. The data we gathered is now being used to create a new staff training and is informing the Over the Horizon initiative, the agency's research and learning about the lasting challenges to the development and humanitarian landscape as a result of COVID-19.



**BEMNET TESFAYE**  
BUREAU FOR POLICY, PLANNING AND LEARNING

I prepared for the summer virtual fellowship through a series of courses at SAIS. Both Principles of Evaluation for Development Projects and Practical Research Methods refined my skills in applying strategies for the evaluation of international development projects. Statistical Methods for Economics and GIS taught me the statistical analysis techniques used in quantitative analyses for the Evaluation Team. A highlight of my virtual internship were the different teams: The Evaluation Team; BS-02 Team; and the Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research. The different teams empowered me to take on challenges, and they helped me accomplish a very exciting project for the Evaluation team. They not only taught me the techniques I could not learn in class, but they also brought a fun and inspiring energy to our virtual meetings. I am excited to work with the Bureau of PPL in the near-future.



# 2018 Fellows Reflecting on the Journey



## **DEBBIE ALFRED**

As I begin my dream career as an Education Foreign Service Officer, I am looking forward to learning from my mentors while strengthening my leadership and technical skills to contribute to the advancement of global education. I am excited to capitalize on the countless professional development opportunities available at USAID, whether it is through direct online training or by collaborating with a team through a rotation. My career at USAID also presents a unique opportunity for me to showcase our country's diversity abroad while working towards important development goals. I could not be more grateful to have the opportunity to take on this role alongside my network of Payne fellows as I embark in my career in the foreign service.



## **CAROLINE CARRASCO**

I am most excited about the opportunity to learn from the diverse experiences that the Foreign Service will surely enable. Whether that's learning from other officers, implementing partners, or directly from the communities with which we work, I am thrilled about the chance to absorb it all. While the past two years of graduate school have served to expand my understanding of health around the world, I know that the experience I'll gain through being with USAID will be illuminating. I am honored to be among a group of people motivated to change the world for the better, and am excited to get started!



## **ISABELLA GENTA**

Being a Payne Fellow has introduced me to an incredible group of young people with so much passion, integrity, and ingenuity. Being a part of this cohort has brought me an immense amount of pride and gratitude and I will without doubt carry these friendships into the next phase of my career as a Foreign Service Officer. The opportunities that the Payne Fellowship has afforded me personally only scratch the surface of what values it embodies as a program; the Payne Fellowship and USAID's commitment to its success gives audiences in the US and around the world a chance to see what diversity in our country not only looks like, but also represents. This is what I, as a Payne Fellow, am most proud to be a small part of.



## **ANNA GHOULY**

As an Environment Officer, I am looking forward to advancing the U.S. Global Water Strategy through water and sanitation projects in USAID's water priority countries. I am eager to help in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) activities, as well as work with implementing partners and government ministries. I am particularly excited to work on activities that seek to fill WASH financing gaps, eliminate open defecation, increase consumer demand for improved sanitation, and improve the efficiency and sustainability of WASH service providers.



## **ASHLEY HAMILTON**

As I start my career with USAID, I'm looking forward to all of the awesome places I'll go! And I love meeting new people, so I'm excited about all of the friends I will make along the way.



## **PRA TIHBHA JUTURU**

I would have never imagined starting my career during a global pandemic, but I am very lucky to be going into this career with a family of Payne fellows who have been offering never-ending support and encouragement. The collaborative environment and opportunities to constantly learn drew me to start my career with USAID. I am looking forward to learning from my colleagues and tackling some of the most pressing global environmental issues with them. Most importantly, I am looking forward to getting to post, wherever that may be. I cannot wait to immerse myself in another culture and work alongside our brilliant local staff.



## **VIVIAN OLABAMIJI**

I attended Duke University's campus in Kunshan, China. I saw U.S.-China relations play out at the community scale and learned how our countries' development approaches differ. I made lifelong friends with people from all over the world in Asia. I also got to understand that global health challenges require global partnerships. The Payne Fellowship allowed me to study and intern in Asia, while also preparing me for my career in the USAID Foreign Service through these experiences. For that, I will be forever grateful.



## MICHELLE OLAKKENGIL

I am excited to start this next chapter in my life and my commitment to health equity. Being in the Foreign Service of USAID means being able to collaborate with those from different countries in the pursuit of health and dignity, especially for those who need it the most. I would not be in the position I am today without the Payne Fellowship. Through its support, I have been able to advance my education and pursue internship opportunities that have improved my understanding of the role of a health officer. Additionally, the fellowship has provided me with a cohort of individuals who will share in this collective experience and offer support along the way, which gives me comfort and hope in this journey.



## AARON SCHERF

The Payne Fellowship, in my opinion, is more of a community than a program. We fellows are just one part of this network; our program staff at Howard, our mentors at USAID, and our supporters within the government are all essential members of the community. Together, we are united by a commitment to advance the values of inclusion, representation, and collaboration within development. Being a part of this community is an honor, of course, but it is also an obligation to stand up for all of the people we represent. Our experiences so far will help us in advocating for more inclusive and more accountable development programs, but our capacity to coordinate with other fellows, mentors, and supporters will be far more important. Being a Payne Fellow is not an award that we've already won--it's a challenge to act for others, as part of a global community.



## MAI YER XIONG

I am proud to be able to build on my family's legacy through a career in public service as a Foreign Service Officer for USAID. Three decades ago, my family were refugees from Laos who relied on services of organizations like USAID. Within one generation of my family's US immigration story, I now hold a position with the responsibility of serving communities in need across the world. I vow to approach this responsibility with empathy and to remain critical of my work and the development field to hold us accountable for making progress towards a world that upholds the dignity of every human being. As Michelle Obama said, "We've got a responsibility to live up to the legacy of those who came before us by doing all that we can to help those who come after us." As such, I also vow to use my voice to speak out against injustice and take action to correct such injustice whether abroad or within our own borders.  
#blacklivesmatter