

My favorite job was when I worked as an after-school summer camp counselor, where I was able to engage and teach students from ages 5-12 from low-income and predominantly Black and Hispanic communities. Despite attending Title 1 schools, all the students were bright and full of potential, but they did not see themselves the way I saw them. While teaching them, they were all engaged and curiously asking and answering questions. Then I wondered, why are they falling behind in school, but they clearly show that they are capable of learning and comprehending. After speaking with some of the students, I concluded the students adopted inaccurate labels from their educators or guardians and were systematically biased against in the classroom. They resigned to this identity and lacked the motivation to succeed academically.

The mentality of the students had bothered me, and I felt compelled to do something to shift their thinking. As a Black female, I was told by adults, teachers, and closest friends that my career aspirations were too high, and my chances of academic success were low. It was then I realized my passion for education in wanting to help mitigate systematic biases; since then I decided to graduate early from high school and pursue higher education to set a precedence for them. During my journey to graduate early, I lost my sense of belonging; I did not fit in with the upperclassmen and no longer shared courses with my friends. Although I struggled socially and mentally, I reminded myself of my purpose to be an inspiration to my students so that they can have the confidence to fulfill their aspirations in life despite what other people may think or say.

I graduated from high school with Summa Cum Laude and multiple endorsements, however, I was not fully prepared for the rigor of college. During the second year of my undergraduate career at Virginia Tech (VT), my GPA fell below average due to stress, overloading of classes, and battling with depression. My mother had lost her job and my father had been evicted from his home, so I began to work so I would not become another financial

burden to them. I began to feel underprepared, unequipped, inadequate to be an engineer; it seemed like my odds of graduating were slim. After I was able to seek counseling for mental health in my third year, using the skills I learned in my sessions both my time management and grades began to improve. Since then, I have been able to overcome this obstacle and persevere. Through overcoming this hurdle, I found that I could use my experiences in my mentorship to help other students. While at VT, I have a multitude of experiences that ignited my passion for STEM education including mentorship, pre-collegiate programs, and research. I am involved in many leadership positions, my most notable being the Pre-College Initiative Chair for NSBE. In this role, I have hosted outreach events for over 400 middle and high school students. This brings me joy because I get to interact with students and show them the wonders of STEM. All these experiences have shown me that graduate school is my next step in becoming an educator.

I would like to pursue graduate work to expand my knowledge and understanding of education. Within the Science Education program, my goal is to attain my teaching licensure in biology with an endorsement in chemistry. With a background in engineering, I believe I can develop integrative strategies for project and design-based learning by implementing engineering fundamentals into the classroom. I believe VT has an outstanding School of Education, and faculty like Dr. Brenda Brand, Dr. Bradley Bowen, and Dr. John Wells who I would like to work with. I trust that they would prepare me for my future as a STEM educator. I have a passion for diversity, motivation, engagement, and retention amongst my future students. I believe that my duty as an educator in STEM is to help increase the number of marginalized students, especially females and minorities, to pursue higher education. It is vital for all students to recognize their significance in the classroom and understand that their intelligence is not based on color nor gender, but their perseverance, practice, and determination to excel in their academic career.