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# High school students MAP the future of forests at Michigan State University



Sustainable Forestry Initiative  
September 10, 2019



© SFI - Pictured left to right: Kyesha Brunson and Faridevianey "Fari" Silva

Sustainable forest management is an important tool to ensure a healthy planet and shared global prosperity. However, despite a great need for future leaders in sustainable forestry, there are difficult barriers for many youths interested in pursuing related degrees. The **Multicultural Apprenticeship Program (MAP)** at Michigan State University (MSU) seeks to change that. The program gives underserved high school students hands-on exposure to careers in sustainable forestry. In partnership with the **Sustainable Forestry Initiative**, MSU wants to share their success and grow the program.

## MAP Builds the Bridge

Through MAP, high school students from Michigan and other parts of the United States have the opportunity to explore careers in forestry, natural resource management, animal sciences, and other related fields. Sponsored by MSU's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, MAP pairs each student with a faculty member on a project that provides both fieldwork and laboratory experience.

According to MSU forestry assistant professor Asia Dowtin, "MAP was born out of the acknowledgment that within the various disciplines of agriculture and natural resources, there was a pretty shocking under-representation of people from diverse socioeconomic, racial, and cultural groups. MAP bridges the gap between these communities and the communities of scholars here on campus."



© SFI - Pictured left to right: Jeffrey Hwang, Desirea Cooper, Asia Dowtin, Justin Kunkle, Kyesha Brunson, David Rothstein, Indya Hunt, Genevieve Benson, and Tina Guo

## Student Perspectives

Faridevianey "Fari" Silva, a rising senior at Hartford High School in western Michigan, participated in the forestry MAP program during both her sophomore and junior years. She discovered the program by researching ways to prepare for college and learning about potential career options.

For Silva, a highlight of the program was meeting both students and faculty from across the United States and exchanging ideas.

"I didn't really know much about forestry when I came to the program, but I kept an open mind, and MAP gave me a whole new outlook," Silva said.

Silva also spoke to how the forestry MAP program centers students and teaches them to appreciate the peacefulness of being in the field. "Being the kind of student I am, having gone through everything I've been through," Silva said, "I really value peace and patience. And when you are in a forest and taking a walk, it's literally you, yourself, and the air and trees."

Indya Hunt is a senior at MSU who works as a MAP program assistant. Although she plans to complete her undergraduate degree in criminal justice, the MAP program has inspired her to pursue a master's degree in forestry.

"The MAP program has helped me grow as an individual and a leader," Hunt said. "It's taught me how to have patience and to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. When I first started at MSU, we would go out into the field every single week. And, I mean, it was hot. And then it was snowing. You know, we live in Michigan, so the weather always changes...But I started to miss it. I missed identifying the trees, avoiding poison ivy, getting bit by mosquitos. I missed the struggle and the success."

Hunt also credits the program with giving her perspective and peace. "I grew to love nature," she said, "and learned that forestry is something you have to look beyond your years to understand how important it is."



© SFI - Pictured left to right: MAP program assistant Indya Hunt and MAP student Kyesha Brunson

## Bringing the Lessons Home

MAP is designed to not only help students decide how to move forward in their education and career path, but also to share what they've learned with their communities. MAP student Jeffrey Hwang plans to use what he learned from his experience to initiate a tree canopy research project in Cerritos, CA and surrounding Los Angeles suburbs.

"This research project will be used to try to push for better urban land management in the student's hometown," Dowtin said. "It's amazing to have an opportunity to inspire that type of thought and action in a student's life. I really enjoy the tremendous growth that they display in a really short amount of time."

Faculty are proud of the many scholastic and interpersonal skills students learn while participating in the MAP program, and Dowtin has consistently been impressed by the strides she sees students make after just a few weeks.

According to Dowtin, "There is a tremendous amount of personal growth that we witness in terms of students initially arriving here and having interest in other disciplines that are not in any way related to forestry. But by the time it's over, that initial attitude of, 'I don't think I really want to be here. I don't really want to deal with the mosquitos or the heat' turns into, 'When are we going back into the field? You're going to go to the field without us? That's not fair.'"

## The Power of Partnership

In addition to MSU, the MAP program is supported by both public and private agencies, as well as corporations. The independent, non-profit Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) contributes through a Community Grant and believes that the project helps it achieve its vision of a world that values and benefits from sustainably managed forests.

Rocco Saracina, Manager of Conservation Partnerships at SFI said, "the future of our forests is only as bright as the leaders who will ensure sustainability into the future. The MAP program amplifies underrepresented voices, empowers new and diverse talent, and gives us hope that the brightest days are yet to come."

"Through support from organizations such as SFI," Dowtin said, "we've been in a position to host multiple students and give them a very broad introductory experience into what forestry really is." To learn more about sustainability, forest-focused solutions, opportunities for youth, and SFI's Community Grant Program, visit [sfiprogram.org](https://sfiprogram.org).



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