

2010 PROGRAM COUNSELORS

ORLANDO ELLERBY

Orlando Ellerby, is a M.S. student in forestry at Mississippi State University. His thesis research is entitled “Factors Affecting the Economic Viability of Logging Contractors in the Eastern United States.” He is currently an adjunct forestry instructor at East Mississippi Community College teaching Dendrology, Forest Surveying, and Measurements I & II. He is an active member of the MSU Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources & Related Sciences (MANRRS) Chapter where he serves as student advisor and previously served as MANRRS National Graduate Parliamentarian. Orlando also served on the Dean’s Council for the College of Forest Resources (CFR), was a CFR Student Ambassador, and is a member of the Society of American Forestry (SAF). He has also earned Registered Forester status in Mississippi. Orlando has received several scholarships including the Kelvin Nolan Summer Camp Scholarship, Mead/Westvaco Minority Scholarship, and the International Paper Minority Scholarship. Additionally, he has received numerous awards including the Outstanding Forester Award from the MS SAP, CFR Student Leadership Award, MSU Spirit of State Award and MSU Ambassador Service Award. Orlando’s goal is to recruit and educate minority youth in the field of Natural Resources.

MICHELLE LEWIS

Michele is a candidate for the Master of Environmental Science degree, and the Master of Divinity degree from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, in conjunction with the Yale Divinity School. After receiving her B.A. from Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina, Michelle spent twelve years working with the National Park Service (NPS) educating communities and promoting stewardship of America’s National Parks. During her time with the National Park Service, Michelle worked at the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, Fort Sumter National Monument, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, and Cape Hatteras National Seashore. She also worked brief assignments at the Arch in St. Louis, and the Grand Canyon. Michelle is an award winning filmmaker, and her research at Yale University is focused on connecting under-served populations to the environmental movement through the channels of popular culture, and engaging these individuals in the environmental discussion. Michelle also holds a Master of Arts degree in Communication from Regent University in Virginia Beach, VA.

VANESSA OQUENDO

Vanessa is originally from Fort Walton Beach, FL. She is a final year Master’s student in the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture at Mississippi State University majoring in Wildlife and Fisheries Science with emphasis in human dimensions of natural resources management. Her thesis investigates

male and female hunter motivations in Mississippi and other outdoor activities that can substitute for hunting. She is currently the department's graduate student representative and serves as the treasurer for the Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences. Vanessa also serves on the College of Forest Resources Diversity Council and Dean's Council and is an active member of the MSU Chapter of The Wildlife Society. She has also been Treasurer for the MSU Chapter of Minorities in Agricultural, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS) for the past two years. Vanessa has been involved with the university community by assisting with other summer camps and by volunteering for various campus events related to natural resources. Upon completion of her degree, Vanessa hopes to work in natural resources management where she intends to help marginalized groups get connected to nature through conservation programs that introduce them to hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-associated recreation.

TYRA M. PENDERGRASS

Tyra grew up in Charlotte, N.C. She is a recent graduate of Howard University (Class of 2008). Tyra graduated Magna Cum Laude with a degree in Biology. Tyra is currently seeking her Master's degree in Environmental Management in the School of Forestry and Environmental Sciences at Yale University. In her free time Tyra loves to travel, dance, work-out, participate in engaging community service projects, learn about different cultures, and eat. Tyra's life dream is to improve the lives of the less fortunate, globally. Tyra believes that "to lead, one must serve, because the greatest leaders amongst us have the hearts of servants".

AARON RUFFIN

Mr. Ruffin is a native of Tuscaloosa, Alabama and currently resides in Stockbridge, Georgia. He currently works as an Urban Designer for The Collaborative Firm, LLC in East Point, GA, where he works on several long range planning projects for county and city governments ranging from small area Land Planning Studies to Comprehensive Plans. A graduate of Mississippi State University, Mr. Ruffin obtained his Bachelors of Landscape Architecture degree in 2005 and a Masters of Public Policy and Administration in 2007. While at MSU he served as President of the Student Chapter of Minorities in Agriculture Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS), MPPA Graduate Student Liaison to the Faculty, Alliance for Graduate Education in Mississippi Scholar (AGEM), Department of Landscape Architecture Minority Student Recruiter, and a Resident Director for Housing and Resident Life. Currently, he is an active member of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the American Planning Association, MSU Alumni Association and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

CHARLES WOODARD (C.J.)

Charles was born in Greenville, MS. He is one of two children and a proud uncle of one. He graduated from Tuskegee University in 2009 with a B.S. in Forestry with an emphasis in Wildlife. He spent his senior year at the University of Florida as part of a 3+2 program with Tuskegee University and the UF Department of Wildlife Conservation. Charles is a USDA 1890 Scholar and is currently on leave from the US Forest Service to pursue his Masters of Science degree in Wildlife & Fisheries Sciences. He is currently a graduate research assistant in the Human Dimensions and Conservation Law Enforcement Laboratory at Mississippi State University. Charles has spent the past two years with the USFS in South Dakota working on protecting the endangered Black-footed Ferret. C.J. is a 1st degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do, kick boxer, and an avid golfer.