Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award
Duke University 2021 Student Recipient

TATAYANA RICHARDSON

Tatayana Richardson will graduate this May with a double major in Religious Studies and African & African American Studies and a minor in Cultural Anthropology. Her nomination by Jennifer Wright Knust, on behalf of the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, speaks to Tatayana’s selflessness, generosity, integrity, and spiritual depth. Dr. Knust writes the following of Tatayana: “Remarkably reflective, her passion for justice, brilliant mind, and steadfast commitment to an expansive vision of the beloved community have made her a prominent leader at Duke.” She truly embodies the qualities of service, character and spirituality recognized by the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award.

In her time at Duke, Tatayana has shown a sustained commitment to supporting community on and off campus. Since 2019, she has been a mentor for Building Opportunities and Overtures in Science and Technology (BOOST), which serves Durham Public Schools students from underrepresented communities in a program designed to excite young people about science. She has also served as the director of programming for The Future is Now, a student-run mentoring program for female-identifying middle school scholars. Most recently, she has joined the North Carolina Literacy Corps, working with Durham Children’s Initiative to design and execute lesson plans, create virtual programming, and lead a bi-monthly book club highlighting Black and Latinx writers. In each of these roles Tatayana has displayed her drive toward supporting and advising young scholars for a more equitable future.

Tatayana has also shown thoughtful leadership on campus. She has served as a Peer Advisor since 2018, working closely with academic deans, college advisors and directors of academic engagement to support her fellow students in navigating all that Duke offers. She has also been appointed as Spiritual Formation Coordinator with the Duke University Wesley Fellowship, where she develops curriculum and programming to further spiritual growth for campus ministry participants. In addition to these roles, she writes a biweekly “Student Voices” column for The Chronicle, “Searching for Canaan”, in which she asks the tough questions and grapples with the most pressing challenges facing modern Christianity.

Tatayana’s deep spirituality grounds her community engagement, her campus leadership, and her academic pursuits. She has participated in a number of educational and experiential faith-based programs and is completing an honor’s thesis on community formations and the fortitude of Black congregations, drawing from Black and other theological writings. Following graduation, Tatayana will begin graduate work in theology, where she will further develop her skills as a spiritual leader.

To close with Tatayana’s own words in her Student Voices column in The Chronicle: “being called into community doesn’t require us to agree with one another one hundred percent of the time, but does call us to recognize humanity in one another and to treat that humanity with respect and compassion. This, if done with true and honest intentions, has the capability to pull this nation away from its misplaced self-righteousness, and toward a beloved community.”

Duke University is proud to name Tatayana Richardson as the student recipient of the 2021 Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award, in recognition of her thoughtful engagement and many contributions to the community.