

## 2018-19 Student Officer Application

Ryan Truitt - Chairperson

Describe your past involvement with the Blackburn Institute.

Most students in Blackburn know me as the guy that talked about public libraries in his individual interview and somehow was selected to join the 2016 class. But, most don't know the reason behind my obsession with the public library. Since the 8th grade, I've spent countless hours surrounded by books, escaping from the small town reality that I knew growing up. Countless adventures and a sense of peace came from YA pages, showing me that there were more experiences out there than those I had in Lexington, AL. The Blackburn Institute has been my public library since coming to UA. I feel home in Ferg 2400, surrounded by a diverse group of students who are passionate about so many more things than I, and I find peace in our community. I quickly realized that Blackburn was where I could make a true impact on the university and our state, so I poured my time into it, taking on social media while still a new student and shortly after becoming Communications Director. Thousands of GroupMe messages and quibbles over fonts with Mac later, I'm excited to expand my role in Blackburn as your Student Chairperson. I deeply love this community and the impact it has on our state, but I love even more the impact it has on those who trust in our curriculum. Out of long bus rides and dinner panels rise lifelong friendship. Friendships foster our community, and a shared sense of purpose and passion culminate in Daniel Community Scholars projects. Beyond our curriculum, Blackburn students and Fellows across the country proudly live the values Dr. Blackburn outlined, and I would be honored to be the campus champion for all of the good our students do.

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Describe the impact you foresee having as a student officer.

I have loved serving as the Blackburn Institute Communications Director for the past year. I finally talked Mac into buying a new camera, and although we're still working on getting the current class photo on the website, I'm confident it will happen soon after we select a new class. I'm excited to expand my responsibilities, moving from Communications Director to Student Chairperson. During my tenure for the past year, I have seen the 2017 class come together and build trust with their class and the broader Blackburn community. It will be my goal to foster this same community with the newly selected class through expansion of Blackburn Lunch and Learn (Friday Forum) events to fit more student's schedules, and hosting more events that focus on sustaining dialogue between new student and returning students. As the connection to the

Advisory Board and our network of Fellows, I will work to keep students and Fellows apprised of the work done by both groups, so students are excited to transition into their Fellow role upon graduation. I want students to genuinely enjoy their time in the Blackburn Institute as a student, and it will be my goal as Chairperson to create an environment that is both a challenge and a delight.

## 2018-19 Student Officer Application

Hani Razavi - Vice Chairperson

Describe your past involvement with the Blackburn Institute.

I am a member of the present class of the Blackburn Institute. I have loved learning all about the work being done in the state of Alabama and gain knowledge from the members of my class. More so I gained the ability to better build my own my opinions on topics that are pressing in our state.

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Describe the impact you foresee having as a student officer.

I believe that the work that the Blackburn Institute is doing is very important. Having said that, I do believe that there is a flaw in our facilitation " of a diversity of an opinion." We often forget that other people have opinions that may differ from ours. We tend to push one opinion and hold others in contempt for having an opinion other than ours. There may be opinions out there that hurt us or contrast our point of view but we must have the ability to listen and see what value they have. It is unrealistic to think that we will live in a world where everyone shares the same thoughts as ours and think of solutions to problems the same way. We must take these opinions and work together to fix the problems in our nation, state, and university. I find that I am a centralist in most ways and bring an air of neutrality to the institute's leadership. With an open ear, the students of the institute will be able to voice their opinions in an environment without the fear of damnation from their fellow students and set a precedence of a true diversity of opinion.

## 2018-19 Student Officer Application

Christine Allen - Vice Chairperson

Describe your past involvement with the Blackburn Institute.

As a member of the 2017 Student Class, I have participated in all student curriculum events and activities. Beyond simply attending Blackburn events, I have made conscientious efforts to participate in active listening and engaging discussion with the overarching values of the Institute in mind. In addition to participation in student curriculum events, I also participate in the day to day workings of the Institute as a Student Office Assistant.

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Describe the impact you foresee having as a student officer.

Offering aid and guidance to student members while facilitating an environment for constructive dialogue is critical. As student vice chair, I will seek to ensure that this environment is maintained in collaboration with the student chair and the communications director. In drawing on our call as members to facilitate diversity of opinion, maintaining openness and personal dialogue is necessary. Additionally, I hope to assist in creating connections between our current student class, future student members, and recent graduates thus assisting in networking through the generations.

Finally, as student vice chair I also hope to impact relationships between new and returning student members, Advisory Board members, and Blackburn Staff. By acting as a liaison between students and other important members of the Institute, I hope to advocate for the student perspective and ensure that the opinions of student members are being heard and acknowledged.

## 2018-19 Student Officer Application

Norris Davis III - Vice Chairperson

Describe your past involvement with the Blackburn Institute.

Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to be a part of the 2017 New Student Class. From breaking the ice on the Spring retreat, to the Fall Travel Experience exploring Gadsden, Sylacauga, Talladega, and Anniston, to our recent Montgomery experience, I have had the opportunity to commune with my class and learn more about what our state has to offer and where there is so much potential to grow. Within our many discussions, and monthly small group dinners, I have seen the power of leadership and change being driven by having a breadth and diversity of opinion in the room, and how inspiring these small talks can be for major progress. I have been able to have impactful conversations and see the seeds of innovation sown by the members of our class, from the many project proposals to the selected group's insightful comic to promote mental health awareness and ending stigma within the Tuscaloosa community. This Blackburn class has led to so much positive growth in my life, and I hope to continue to be involved in the Institute as Vice Chairperson. Every component of this experience has been extremely valuable, and I would love to cultivate the values of the Blackburn Institute to make the experience for those who follow and our lifelong Fellows an even more valuable and enriching one.

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Describe the impact you foresee having as a student officer.

As a student officer, and specifically as Vice Chairperson, I hope to be a catalyst for students to feel able to express their own viewpoints within the Institute. One of our core values is to facilitate a diversity of opinion, and I believe it is one of the most important to foster. Our students are chosen because they reflect many different areas of this campus, state, political climate, and country, meaning that there is so much value added on a larger level by having all of us participate and contribute to the many conversations and dialogues that happen within our programming. I have experience in facilitating sustained dialogues, working with Crossroads, and ultimately establishing spaces where students feel their contributions are valued and necessary. I also would like to help push for Blackburn extending its reach beyond the usual areas that our student members come from. I believe that there needs to be a greater visibility or understanding of Blackburn on our campus, specifically with underrepresented groups, which

hurts the Institute in the long run. Diversity comes in so many shapes and forms, and by promoting our values to these sectors of campus we can push for an Institute that has students whose identities are beneficial to understanding and tackling the intersectional societal flaws we see so often within our trips and discussions. Finally, I see my impact in working to help assist the chairperson in gauging new students' opinions and improving fluidity in the shaping of our programming. I believe some of the best changes to come to the Institute this year came from our active collaboration with our student officers to create an environment that was empathetic to student needs and not too stubborn or crystalline in our practices. I want the students who come after us to not only have as positive an experience as I have had, but one that has improved and changed for the better over time. Overall, I would be honored to step into the position of Vice Chairperson of the Blackburn Institute, and continue to serve within this Institute in a capacity that fulfills my lifetime commitment and call to action that will improve our campus, state, and society for the better.

## 2018-19 Student Officer Application

Nivory Gordon III - Vice Chairperson

Describe your past involvement with the Blackburn Institute.

As a member of The Blackburn Institute, I have been afforded the opportunity to experience what Dr. John L. Blackburn envisioned. Since 2016, my exposure to the Institute has allowed me the opportunity to see our campus from all walks of life. Each individual person on their journey towards graduation has a story that entails twist and turns from decisions, both good and bad, mixed with a few defeats and sprinkled with a few memorable wins that outweighs them all. Through completing the first year student curriculum, I was able to develop my leadership skills, realizing there is beauty in different opinions and experiences, and that silence on an issue is never the right answer. I made a commitment to being a change agent for the state and as my time continues within the institute, I shall remain steadfast in an effort to do such, committing time, talent and treasure for a greater Alabama.

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Describe the impact you foresee having as a student officer.

Mary Anderson once stated, "Leaders are called to stand in that lonely place between the no longer and the not yet and intentionally make decisions that will bind, forge, move and create history." If afforded the chance to serve as a student leader, it is my hope to embrace the incoming class with the Blackburn Institute as both a cutting block and backyard garden. Analogous to a cutting block, It is my hope to encourage the incoming cohort to use Blackburn as an opportunity for refinement by releasing preconceived biases, never being afraid to be uncomfortable, while learning to embrace the differences we have individually.

As a backyard garden, It is my hope that the 2018 cohort will learn to start working early towards the common good with small steps, use the resources surrounding them in an effort to grow, and learn to harvest at the right time from the effort invested collectively.

Blackburn is a melting pot of overachievers, sports enthusiast and quiet thinkers who all enter with leadership experience, but it is my hope to further expand their insights and unlock their unlimited potential in preparation to change the State.