



## **Kiana McClintick, Fisk University- c/o 2018, English Literature**



**Name :** Kiana McClintick

**Your HBCU :** Fisk University

**Graduation Year :** 2018

**Major :** English Literature

**Minor :** Liberal Arts

### **1. Where are you from? Who introduced you to HBCUs?\***

I'm originally from the Bay Area, California, near San Francisco. I was introduced to HBCUs in my Senior year of high school. I was in a dual enrollment program where I was taking college classes while finishing up high school. The director of the dual enrollment program told me she thought I would love being at Fisk University because it would be a chance for me to get an education surrounded by people who looked like me and had similar experiences. I grew up in a predominantly white and Asian community and was frequently one of the few African American students present in all of my classes, so the director of the dual enrollment program thought I would benefit greatly from being in an environment where my 'blackness' wasn't being tokenized or judged. It wasn't until I visited Fisk a little while later that I realized how supportive and different the community was from anything I'd ever experienced before. It felt freeing, like a weight was being lifted.



Me in Denmark last May in front of Eskegov castle before I presented my research

### **2. Why did you choose an HBCU over a pwi?\***

I chose an HBCU for many reasons, one being the familial culture surrounding the university, the bridge programs and the financial support. When I first visited Fisk, my host was a student who had come from the same dual enrollment program I was in and seeing how supported she was at Fisk by other students and faculty really made an impact. It was comforting to see how engaged Professors were in their students' success, some even going so far as to text students about their whereabouts when they missed class. It was also exciting to learn about how dedicated the University is to cultivating new opportunities and bridge programs for Its students. Their connection with Meharry Medical College supports students who are pursuing careers in dentistry and medicine while the bridge with Vanderbilt's Psychology Program helps students interested in a counseling career. The faculty and Administration at Fisk is always on the look out to secure new opportunities for students and works with you to make your experience what you want it to be. Financially, Fisk has had a deep understanding of the economic realities surrounding African Americans and higher education. They've sought to alleviate some of the stress that comes with higher education through generous aid.

### **3. What is the story of your "experience" at Your HBCU given its heralded status as a stellar and prestigious institution?\***

My experience has been nothing short of incredible. I've heard people question the quality of an HBCU education before, but my life at Fisk proves otherwise. In the Summer before my second year, I traveled out of the country for the first time to London, England to take a law class called "Introduction to International Human Rights: Theory, Law and Practice" at the London School of Economics and Political Science. While there, I studied with law students from all over the world and realized that not only could I hold my own in Academic debates, but I could excel in global conversations. It was my Fisk education and support from Fisk Administration that prepared me for that life changing experience. Furthermore, my HBCU's partnership with the UNCF/Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) gave me the opportunity to apply to the program. MMUF is a National Fellowship that seeks to propel underrepresented minorities into Academia by aiding each fellow throughout their Academic careers. Students develop a 2 year self-guided research project on a topic of their choosing with the goal being to have a substantial writing sample to present to PhD Admissions Committees. They also offer travel stipends to present research, which I took advantage of last Summer when I traveled to Denmark to present my research as the only American Undergraduate and the only African American present among PhDs from all over the world. Had it not been for Fisk's partnership with this prestigious fellowship, I would not have had the opportunity to do any of this. It was my education at Fisk and the guidance of the dedicated Professors that enabled me to get into the fellowship in the first place and for that, I am extremely grateful. As I move forward, I know that the rigor and intensity of my studies at Fisk University has prepared me for the academic challenges associated with attending one of the top law schools in the nation, Georgetown Law School.

### **4. "First time" experiences at your HBCU?\***

My first time being in a student led protest was at my HBCU. Fisk, like many other HBCUs, had extensive involvement in the Civil Rights movement and the culture of the university still strongly encourages that kind of civic engagement. Professors looked to us to lead demonstrations and rallies, even if it meant missing classes. It was when Michael Brown died that Fisk students organized protests and "lay-ins" in the streets of Nashville and trips to St. Louis to ensure that protesters' rights weren't being violated by police. Seeing fellow students with so much dedication moved me to help organize future demonstrations, such as a sexual assault awareness night where we attempted to counteract victim blaming behavior.

### **5. Who are the professors that have impacted your life in and out of the classroom? How did they do that?\***

There are three Professors who have been vital to my personal and academic success, and they are all part of the English Department at Fisk University. Dr. Lean'tin Bracks was the first black Professor I ever had and it was her Introduction to Gender Studies class that made me want to pursue my minor in Women and Gender Studies. Her passion for teaching is clear, but her passion surrounding gender studies and equal treatment is admirable. Even outside of gender studies classes, she always makes sure to include readings and discussions that challenge students to look

closer at the intricacies of identity politics. Dr. Katharine Burnett has also been instrumental in my growth as a person while at Fisk. Her open door policy often meant that I'd spend hours in her office discussing things topics like the transgender bathroom bill, great horror novels, or the complexities of the latest Orange is the New Black episode. She has been a pillar of light and encouragement for me through difficult applications and stress induced break downs. It was seeing her teach that inspired me to look into pursuing a PhD program in the first place. Although I no longer want to be in Academia, taking her classes has still been fulfilling on both a personal and academic level. I have had the opportunity to get to know Dr. Patrick Fleming as a Professor for the British Literature classes and a mentor for my UNCF/Mellon Mays 2 year project. He has been there to support me and put things in perspective through my anxiety ridden emails and phone calls. He has listened to all of my questions and has challenged me in class and in my own research to push beyond what I ever thought I was capable of doing. His patience and unwavering support, even When his plate was full made me feel grateful to have such an amazing mentor.



My sisters and I representing the Alpha Upsilon chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc at Fisk University