

# BUILDING GLOBAL CITIZENS

MANRRS student chapter celebrates  
over two decades at MSU

BY LILY GRADO

**THE MISSISSIPPI STATE STUDENT CHAPTER** of Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences, or MANRRS, celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2021 and is poised to take on the next 20 years as a leader in the professional advancement of minority students.

The MANRRS organization was originally founded in 1982 at Michigan State University. Its main goal is to elevate minorities in the fields of agriculture, natural resources and other related sciences by providing them with academic and professional opportunities at local, regional, and national levels.

**Dr. Derris Devost-Burnett**, associate professor in MSU's Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences and the university's MANRRS faculty co-advisor, serves as part of the national executive committee team which consists of professional officers, student officers, and the MANRRS national office.

"MANRRS provides access to careers, training, and networking opportunities that students may not otherwise be exposed to," said Devost-Burnett. "The national level of MANRRS looks at international components of the organization and helps build global citizens that are ready to hit the ground running."

Burnett was originally a member of

the George Washington Carver Chapter of MANRRS at Tuskegee University in 2001. Currently, he serves as the co-advisor of the MSU Chapter, a position he has held since 2015. He has held several MANRRS positions including student member, co-advisor for both Kansas State University and Mississippi State University, national secretary, Region III vice president, and currently as national president.

Burnett was inducted as the president of MANRRS' national organization and took on presidential duties in early May of 2023. He hopes that his position, working alongside other governmental agencies and partners, will help set the policies for minorities in agriculture and promote national recognition and exposure for the MSU chapter.

"Despite a smaller number of participants in comparison to other chapters, MSU students are very engaged in the organization. In addition to competing in national competitions and achieving competitive accomplishments, we have also had national representation," Burnett said. "I like to call the MSU Chapter 'small but mighty.'"

Burnett reflected on how the organization has changed since he joined, revealing that in the past, people were

volunteered to fill leadership positions. Now, according to Burnett, students have become much more interested and involved in filling these administrative roles and taking on more responsibility for the organization and how it is run.

Burnett notes that one of the organization's goals is to help eliminate imposter syndrome, or the feeling of being incapable or not as competent as one might appear.

"We try to dispel imposter syndrome by putting students in the room with stakeholders and professionals. This allows them to build both their confidence and competence," Burnett said.

**Dr. Shecoya White**, an assistant professor in the Department of Food Science, Nutrition and Health Promotion and co-advisor of MSU's MANRRS chapter, helps students gain leadership opportunities to utilize in their workplace.

"I encourage all of the students to apply for scholarships," White said. "We want to make sure that the students are exposed to as much as possible prior to graduating from Mississippi State."

MANRRS aims to offer students different outreach opportunities as well as provide experiences involved with community engagement such as volunteering at various local events.

MSU MANRRS officers with co-advisor Dr. Shecoya White (left), Dean Scott Willard (center), and co-advisor Dr. Derris Devost-Burnett (right). (photo by David Ammon)



White discussed how MANRRS works to support local organizations including getting involved with volunteer opportunities in the community such as the Boys and Girls Club, an after-school program for children, along with events like the Harvest Festival, an annual community celebration catered to children involving festive fall-related activities. The organization also gives students a chance to gain more experience preparing for interviews for future job opportunities.

“MANRRS is particularly focused on helping the students to understand their strengths and weaknesses during the interview process,” White said. “By knowing internally what questions interviewers are going to ask and knowing how to answer them, it helps prepare students.”

By providing students with more access to these important opportunities like interview training, resume and CV revisions, the MANRRS program has allowed students in the MSU

Chapter the chance to participate in events such as panels and competitions as well as serve in national positions. Several MSU students were the recipients of research and business pitch awards at national competitions.

Mya Dixon, a senior undergraduate student at MSU double majoring in animal and dairy sciences and biological sciences, serves as the MSU Chapter’s president. She first gained her position of vice president in 2020 and became the chapter’s president in May of 2021. Working to promote minority students in the field of agriculture, Dixon encouraged students who felt as though they didn’t have a place elsewhere, to join the MANRRS student chapter.

“MANRRS helps open the door for students to have leadership development while also helping the community by performing service,” Dixon said.

Both graduate and undergraduate students serve as national representatives from one of six different geographical regions throughout the U.S.

Currently, Kenisha Gordon serves as the graduate vice president for region 4 of MANRRS. Gordon, an international doctoral student from Guyana, has been a member of MANRRS since 2017 during which she was working toward her master’s degree at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. Acting as a liaison between the national office and chapters, she assists in letting students know what opportunities are available for them.

“MANRRS helps to give students a sense of belonging outside of the major or concentration they are studying,” Gordon said.

She encourages students to join MANRRS so that they can both step outside of their comfort zone while also having opportunities for both jobs and networking.

“With MANRRS, you have the opportunity to attend a regional cluster and a national conference and network with not only your peers but also professionals within the areas you want to get involved in,” Gordon said. 🐾