

## **EKU SENIOR ONE OF ONLY 30 IN WORLD ACCEPTED INTO HUMANITY IN ACTION PROGRAM IN ATLANTA**

RICHMOND, Ky. – As she navigated her own academic struggles, Symone Purcell came to realize “how closely tied the growth of others is to my own progress.”

The Eastern Kentucky University senior calls it a “mentality of mentorship,” and it drives her passion for service and her dreams of someday serving as a rural Kentucky physician, wherever the need is greatest.

Others are taking notice. The biology (pre-med) major from London, Kentucky, with a sterling 3.81 GPA and equally impressive record of campus involvement is one of just 30 American and European college students and graduates headed to Atlanta this summer for the 2016 Humanity in Action Program, thanks to a prestigious John Lewis Fellowship. Lewis, who represents Georgia’s 5<sup>th</sup> District in the U.S. Congress, is an icon of the Civil Rights Movement. The month-long program offers participants the opportunity to “think anew with others about complex issues of diversity in historical and contemporary terms,” according to the program’s [website](#), focusing, through educational seminars and site visits, on “vulnerable populations and the unfulfilled goals of just democratic societies.”

Purcell’s parents, both health care professionals themselves, grew up in the Caribbean country of Grenada.

“Learning about the challenges they’ve overcome has certainly influenced my perspective by impressing the necessity of compassion, dedication, creativity into my psyche,” Purcell said. “Their actions have always been louder than their words. They’ve always pushed me to keep my sight open to new frontiers, and they’ve never let me forget that we always have a duty to serve the future and to respect our past.”

Purcell, who is on track to graduate in 2017, confessed she has always been a “day-dreamer,” adding that ECU “shifted that tendency onto a more realistic track so that I am well-equipped to act rather than just to imagine. It has not, however, stifled my creativity. In fact, it has most certainly enriched it.”

The 2013 Corbin High School graduate called her participation in ECU Honors “a transformative experience (and) filled with people and courses that mold students into more efficient, aware and flexible scholars. I am no exception. I am extraordinarily grateful to everyone in the Honors Program for grasping me by my shoulders and telling me that I could be more.”

So much for what Eastern has done for Purcell. She has certainly reciprocated, serving as:

- peer mentor for the Freshman Academy for Diverse Students, guiding all students, especially minority students, as they navigate their first year in college.
- cultural arts and education co-chair for the Student Activities Council, through which she forged new connections between the Student Government Association and the Latino Success Center, the Cultural Center, the Office of International Student and Scholar Services, the Asian studies program and ECU Honors.
- Honors ambassador, collaborating with program faculty to host and staff information and recruitment programs.

Off campus, she has served as a peer mentor for the Southern Kentucky Area Health Education Center, advising high school students with an interest in medical careers.

Little wonder ECU faculty and staff describe her in glowing terms. Dr. David Coleman, director of ECU Honors, called Purcell “a remarkable young woman who through hard work, intellectual talent and an especially kind-hearted personality, is destined to make a positive difference in our world.”

Certainly, Purcell wants nothing less as she pursues her passions for serving others, health care and global human rights.

“I want to become a physician out of respect for what my family and community have taught me about generosity, love, acceptance and leadership, which are a few components of what I call the ‘mentality of mentorship,’” Purcell said. “For me, that mentality encompasses a lot of facets of the human experience but, most importantly, it is a set of thought patterns rooted in giving back to the world.”

She wants to “pay it forward” in rural Kentucky because she has witnessed firsthand the disparities in health care, particularly the low ratio of primary caregivers to patients, but also the leadership role that small-town doctors often play.

“Physicians do not merely treat the symptoms of the individual,” she said. “They are also community pillars who are uniquely suited toward leadership and mentorship roles. I can help lessen the suffering of the ill while becoming a role model, fostering a sense of support for others who also wish to explore medicine.”

Purcell also comes by her interest in global human rights naturally. “(It) stems from the fact that I have never been able to ignore the wider world because my family’s international background brought the issue closer to home for me. Being a global citizen, to me, is all about acceptance. We must learn to accept the diversity of the human experience, but we must also respect the commonality of it. At the same time, I think the universality of human rights makes it both broad and precise. Human rights affect

the physician serving rural America as much as it influences one in England, and I appreciate that relevance.”

Purcell’s dream of becoming a doctor dates to her childhood, but her Eastern Experience would never have happened without the personal touch that has long distinguished the University as a school of opportunity. It was her acceptance letter into ECU Honors that cemented her decision.

“All my other acceptance letters were bland and impersonal; happily received, yes, but in no way distinctive. In contrast, my letter from ECU was adorned with a personal comment on the content of my essay. I was fascinated and charmed. I still receive that kind of personal touch at ECU even now, and it is definitely one of the qualities I most cherish about Eastern.”

She even received it from a fellow student, Dylan Bogard, a Lewis Fellowship finalist last year when he was an ECU Honors senior, who helped prepare Purcell for her interview with Humanity in Action. (Bogard received the University’s Community Service Award at its annual Martin Luther King Jr. Banquet in February.)

It’s that personal touch Purcell hopes to pass on to others in what promises to be a successful career in health care and community service.

The Office of National and International Scholarships and Fellowships at ECU, housed in ECU Honors, assists students with the deliberation and application process. The Office offers individual advising assistance to all ECU students in determining appropriate fellowships or scholarships to pursue, coordinating application materials, selecting recommenders, preparing compelling personal statements, developing project proposals or proposed programs of study, and interviewing. For more information, contact Coordinator Dr. Minh Nguyen at 622-8667 or [minh.nguyen@ecu.edu](mailto:minh.nguyen@ecu.edu).