


By Joe Surkiewicz

The **Fannie Angelos Program** aims to transform lives and the legal profession

BUILDING DIVERSITY



From left: Fannie Angelos, LL.B. '51, University of Baltimore President Kurt Schmoke and John C.M. Angelos, J.D. '90, at a 2014 party for the Fannie Angelos Program.

A photograph of three people sitting at a yellow table outdoors. On the left is a man in a dark suit and light green tie. In the center is a man with a beard wearing a white patterned shirt and a blue bow tie. On the right is a woman with dark hair wearing a dark blue blazer over a white top. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera.

From left: Fannie Angelos Scholars 2L Herman Brown, Adam Shareef, J.D. '17, and Zenia Wilson, J.D. '12.



T

he reality of law school hit **ADAM SHAREEF** hard at the end of his first semester.

The magna cum laude graduate of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore had earned a grade point average of just 2.3. His disappointing academic performance prompted an “existential crisis,” he said recently.

Shareef went into law school knowing he had to live up to a lot of expectations.

“Everyone in my family was telling me how smart I am and that I won’t have a problem,” he said.

If only. Midway through his 1L year, Shareef was desolate.

“I was considering not going back for the second semester,” he recalled. “I almost quit.”

But Shareef persevered. More than that, he excelled, graduating in May 2017 with a juris doctor degree and a 3.5 GPA. He is now a clerk for Maryland Court of Appeals Judge **Michelle Hotten**.

What happened?

Shareef credits the rock-solid support system of the University of Baltimore School of Law's Fannie Angelos Program for Academic Excellence. Accepted to the program as an undergraduate, Shareef began law school with access to a network of legal scholars, practitioners and fellow students who were always ready to offer advice and mentoring.

An alliance between the UB School of Law and Maryland's four historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs — Bowie State University, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Coppin State University and Morgan State University — the program was founded in 1995 as the Baltimore Scholars.

In 2014, thanks to a \$1 million donation to reinvigorate the program from **PETER ANGELOS, LL.B. '61**, it was renamed in honor of his older sister.

The program aims to level the field to ensure that talented, enthusiastic students are able not just to get accepted to law school, but to be successful in school and in the legal profession.

Today, more than 90 Fannie Angelos scholars have been accepted to law school, at UB and at universities across the country.

The program's ongoing success was recognized this year by the American Bar Association's Section of Litigation, which awarded the Fannie Angelos Program its 2017 Diversity Leadership Award.

Accepting the award were DLA Piper Professor of Law **MICHAEL MEYERSON** and Dean Joseph Curtis Professor of Law **F. MICHAEL HIGGINBOTHAM**, the co-founders of the Fannie Angelos Program (Meyerson is the program director).

"They selected us as a model for the country," Higginbotham said. "This is a model that can be duplicated."

Peter Angelos had high praise for Meyerson and Higginbotham, calling them "the driving force" behind the program's success.

Fannie Angelos, LL.B. '51



“She was a family person who strived to educate and teach her children. She was a strong believer that **education and school** were very important. —John C.M. Angelos, J.D. '90

When **FANNIE ANGELOS, LL.B. '51**, began practicing law in the early 1950s, she was one of only about a dozen women lawyers in Baltimore, her brother said.

Peter Angelos said his older sister, who came to the U.S. from Greece as a small child, always related to people outside the mainstream of the legal profession. As an immigrant and a woman, she was a double rarity in the profession in the mid-20th century.

She had been inspired by tales of her maternal grandfather, a lawyer and a person of eminence in Greece's Dodecanese islands, Peter Angelos said.

But Fannie Angelos's father didn't think law was a proper pursuit for a woman, said her son **JOHN C.M. ANGELOS, J.D. '90**.

Fannie Angelos, of course, thought otherwise.

In the late 1940s, after earning an undergraduate degree from the Maryland State Teachers College at Towson

(now Towson University), Fannie Angelos worked full time during the day, then made her way to night classes at the University of Baltimore School of Law.

"She took the bus and the streetcar," her son said.

Though a pioneer among women lawyers in Baltimore — she practiced here for 64 years — Fannie Angelos was nevertheless a traditional Greek woman, John Angelos said: "She was a family person who strived to educate and teach her children. She was a strong believer that education and school were very important."

And while she might have been diminutive, she was a force to be reckoned with, he said: "She was very much into respectability and manners, the decorum you needed to exhibit in the way you carried yourself, the way you dressed and acted in your personal and professional life."

Peter Angelos said his sister was a "born teacher" and took great pleasure

in meeting and advising the Fannie Angelos scholars.

“It was something to watch,” he said of her interactions with the students. “They were all drawn to her. She’d make appointments for them to come see her. It was a great experience for her.”

Peter Angelos said it was fitting that the program bears his sister’s name: When she began practicing law, the legal profession “didn’t take advantage” of women’s talents.

Now, he noted, “it’s the same with minority students.”

Fannie Angelos died on Thursday, April 9, 2015, at age 88. She had worked until the previous Friday.

The legal profession sorely lacks — and needs — African-Americans.

“The benefit of diversity in the legal profession is that we end up with better lawyers — really smart lawyers,” Meyerson said.

“Law schools benefit because a diversity of backgrounds among students helps both students and faculty,” he continued. “The more varied people you meet, the smarter you are.”

Said Higginbotham: “Supreme Court decisions speak about the value of diversity. What’s often overlooked is the perception of the justice system. With a wide diversity of lawyers and judges, the legal profession looks more fair and just. It helps the perception of justice.”

Much progress remains to be made nationwide. While African-Americans comprise 12 percent of the population, African-American men make up less than 2 percent of law school partners and African-American women make up just over half a percent, according to the National Association for Law Placement, or NALP.

Likewise, NALP data show that fewer than 4 percent of law firm associates are African-American, while the figure

for African-American women is slightly more than 2 percent.

The situation is not much better in law schools. African-Americans account for under 9 percent of all law students in the United States, according to NALP. And African-American law students graduate with significantly more debt than their white classmates.

The Fannie Angelos Program succeeds on several levels, Meyerson said: “We help people to get into law school who wouldn’t otherwise get in. We also help students who would have been average lawyers become really good ones.”

And, Meyerson emphasized, the program is committed to going the distance for the scholars, many of whom face multiple obstacles to making it through law school.

“Often the journey isn’t linear,” he said. “It might take three years or it might take four or five. It can be a winding road.”



Professors Michael Meyerson (left) and F. Michael Higginbotham



Michael Meyerson and Annice Brown

“There’s a **world of challenges** to get students from HBCUs into law school. Students from these schools often don’t know how to prepare for law school or how to apply. Plus, they don’t have the money for LSAT prep courses. They don’t know how to play the game. But they all have God-given talent. —Michael Meyerson



Scholars line up behind (from left) F. Michael Higginbotham, Lenora Giles and Michael Meyerson at the Nov. 17, 2016, fund-raising gala for the Fannie Angelos Program at the Belvedere Hotel.

The Fannie Angelos Program has two parts. In the first, eight HBCU applicants are selected each year as Fannie Angelos scholars, qualifying them to receive a full scholarship to the University of Baltimore School of Law if they do well on the LSAT exam.

The second part of the program admits up to 72 additional HBCU students, allowing them to attend a rigorous LSAT review course at no charge.

The Fannie Angelos Program helps the undergraduates explore the law as a potential career path while also boosting their analytical and writing skills.

Said Meyerson: “There’s a world of challenges to get students from HBCUs into law school. Students from these schools often don’t know how to prepare for law school or how to apply. Plus, they don’t have the money for LSAT prep courses. They don’t know how to play

the game. But they all have God-given talent. A lot will figure it out on their own, but they’re going up against people who know how to play the game.”

Which described **ADAM SHAREEF**.

“It’s the support I received that made the difference,” Shareef said of his academic turnaround. “I started to apply the things I learned in the program. My grades got better and I rebounded. I made the moot court team.”

Continued Shareef: “The progress I made was attributable to the Fannie Angelos Program. Everyone associated with it wants to make sure the next generation does better.”

And, Shareef said, Meyerson, Higginbotham and Fannie Angelos Program coordinator **LENORA GILES** made sure the scholars pay it forward.

“I’ve adopted many of the younger Fannie Angelos scholars,” Shareef said.

Fannie Angelos Scholar **ZENIA WILSON, J.D. ’12**, said an announcement on the Morgan State campus about the Fannie Angelos Program caught her eye — and changed her life.

“I wanted to go to law school, but there weren’t many resources available,” Wilson recounted. “One day I saw a flyer about the program and I went to a presentation by Professor Meyerson. He was so dynamic.”

Meyerson urged her to apply to the program. She did and was accepted.

In addition to paying for Wilson’s LSAT prep course, the Fannie Angelos Program gave her a head start on law school, she said, describing a two-week “boot camp” that exposes undergraduates to law school and to the legal profession.

“We visited law firms, went to a constitutional law class and got a

really good introduction into what law school was like,” Wilson said.

But the experience was daunting.

“There were so many times during the process that I wasn’t sure if law school was really for me,” she said. “But ultimately the program reinforced my commitment that this is what I want to do.”

Today Wilson is a staff attorney at Maryland Legal Aid in Baltimore. Her supervisor, **Amy Petkovsek**, said the Fannie Angelos program produces lawyers perfectly suited for legal work in underserved communities.

“I have two Fannie Angelos scholars on my staff,” Petkovsek says, Wilson and **ASHLEY PHILLIPS, J.D. ’14**. “They know how to apply the support they received in law school to their clients. As an employer, those are the skills I look for.”

At UB, second-year law student **HERMAN BROWN** achieved a notable first for a Fannie Angelos scholar: Last year, out of 155 students, he was No. 1 in his class.

This past summer Brown interned at Whiteford Taylor & Preston — and also found out that he’d made *Law Review* and been hired for a federal District Court internship in the fall, said **TODD BROOKS, J.D. ’06**, the partner who hired him.

“Herman not only exemplifies the need for the Fannie Angelos Program but also its success,” Brooks said. “He spent eight weeks with us and was very motivated and interested in everything we threw at him.”

Brown said the program has given him and other scholars the tools they need to succeed: “It showed us how to write outlines and how to study. I was able to excel because of it.”

He also picked up crucial soft skills: “I learned a lot I didn’t know — simple stuff like how to talk with and network with people, and which are the best law firms to consider when applying for a job.”

And he is proud to pass the torch to new scholars.

“Once you’re in the program, it’s

like a family,” Brown said. “Now I meet new scholars coming in. My job is to help them. It creates an environment where you succeed.”

Baltimore City Circuit Court Judge **Videtta Brown** points with pride to two Fannie Angelos scholars whom she hired as clerks: **ANNICE BROWN, J.D. ’16** (no relation), who clerked from 2014 to 2016, and **VERONICA COLSON, J.D. ’14**, who completed her clerkship last summer.

“They were awesome law clerks,” Judge Brown said. “Because of the Fannie Angelos Program, they got support all the way through law school, both academically and from the camaraderie of their peers. The program goes beyond classwork. It instills a responsibility to the world outside of law school.”

Added Brown: “I wish I had had something like it.”

Hope Keller contributed reporting to this article.

CHARLES HAMILTON HOUSTON SCHOLARS PROGRAM

The Charles Hamilton Houston Scholars Program is another UB School of Law diversity initiative for undergraduates.

Houston (1895–1950) was the litigation director of the NAACP and a mentor to U.S. Supreme Court Justice (and Baltimore native) **Thurgood Marshall**.

The program, which began in 2010, involves an intensive, two-week workshop held at UB in the spring. Up to 20 freshmen and sophomores are introduced to the law as a career, says Professor **CASSANDRA JONES HAVARD**, the program director.

“It’s eye-opening,” Havard says of the experience.

Students take a contract law class, as well as writing and professionalism workshops and an empowerment workshop devoted to overcoming psychological barriers to success. They also sit for a sample LSAT and are advised on how to study for the exam.

At lunchtime seminars, students meet lawyers and visit courts and law firms.

Havard said that while many scholars’ preconceptions about



Professor Cassandra Jones Havard

law school are “dashed” by the end of the two weeks, all the undergrads leave with a solid grasp of the legal profession.

It’s a measure of the program’s success that at least 16 Charles Hamilton Houston scholars have been accepted to law school, at UB and at universities across the country, including Harvard and Yale.

Others succeed in different fields, including one scholar who earned a Ph.D. and went to work for a hedge fund.

The program introduces the law to young people who, Havard says, might otherwise never meet a lawyer: “It’s important to see someone like you who is successful.”

Moreover, she says, the Charles Hamilton Houston Scholars Program enriches the profession itself: “Diversity is important not only because it brings different points of views, but because it reaches a bigger pool of talent.”

—*Joe Surkiewicz*