

Aryanna Harris Receives MLK Student Leadership Award At Blackburn College

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CARLINVILLE - Aryanna Harris, a senior sports management major from Springfield, Illinois, is the recipient of Blackburn College's 2024 Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Student Leadership Award. Presented annually, this award honors students who have demonstrated outstanding commitment and service to the ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the College. Harris was announced as the award recipient during Blackburn's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Convocation in January.

Harris was surprised but honored to be recognized for her leadership on campus. “I am blessed and grateful to have been chosen to receive this award. If it weren’t for those who believed in me and saw me for the person I truly was, I wouldn’t be here today” “ she said. “I believe in everyone, even when they don’t believe in themselves, and as long as I am here, I will continue to make sure that people are as successful as possible. Dreams are never unreachable, and here at Blackburn, I have the opportunity to help others find ways to make it their reality. As always, this is not about me but what we can do together and for each other. Stronger together, and together, we will make it through any and every obstacle this temporary world has. Always trust God, have faith, and believe in yourself.”

Blackburn’s MLK Student Leadership Award was first presented in 2014 to celebrate the exceptional community-based work Blackburn students undertake. To be eligible, a student must meet one or more criteria, including exhibiting leadership that has significantly impacted the Blackburn community, extraordinary commitment and dedication to service, volunteerism, and social justice, or perseverance to overcome challenges. The award process is coordinated by Dr. Michael Cummings, Blackburn’s Chief Diversity Officer and Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging.

“Aryanna is a leader and role model for the entire campus,” Dr. Cummings said. “With an incredible personal drive as well as a deep commitment to the well-being and success of our community, she is well deserving of this award and recognition.”

On campus, Harris serves as a manager for the Administrative Services student work department in Blackburn’s unique Work Program. In her role, she oversees and coaches, holds goal meetings, and oversees competency evaluation for students - working in everything from Admissions, Accounts Payable, Institutional Research, and Marketing & Public Relations - ensuring they succeed in both the classroom and their work settings. She is also responsible for critical tasks such as processing time cards and discipline.

"I honestly think the Work Program is an amazing addition to the college experience," Harris said. "It helps you develop time management skills and build essential abilities needed when considering your future careers - everything from communication and team collaboration to project management and professionalism. It’s a great resume builder. Being an athlete helps you bring those skills to the floor or field, especially in leadership positions.”

In addition to her academic and Work Program pursuits, Harris is a point guard for the Women’s Basketball team, President of Blackburn’s chapter of the Black Student Union

(BSU), and serves on various campus committees and the College's Student Success Academy team. In November 2023, she was recognized by the State of Illinois as a Lincoln Academy Student Laureate for demonstrating strong leadership aptitude, exhibiting a desire to make a difference in the world through civic engagement, and displaying the characteristics of Abraham Lincoln that made him someone who inspired and transformed the world for generations.

"Aryanna is a perfect example of the kind of student Blackburn attracts and the kind of leaders this institution builds," said Director of Career Services Haley Bray. "She has overcome a number of challenges in order to work her way to where she is today as an athlete, as a student, and as a leader. I am so honored to watch her rise."

As the 2024 award recipient, Harris received a certificate stating her achievement, a \$100 prize, and will have her photo displayed on the MLK Legacy Wall with past recipients. The entire Blackburn College community congratulates Aryanna Harris on this significant achievement.

About Blackburn College

Founded in 1837, Blackburn College is a four-year, Presbyterian-related, co-educational liberal arts college located in Carlinville, IL. One of only ten federally-recognized Work Colleges, Blackburn has the only program in the nation fully managed by students. Balancing academic rigor and experiential learning, each student at Blackburn gains tangible experience and develops critical skills by contributing to their community, all while building a resume and earning their degree. U.S. News & World Report has recognized Blackburn College as one of the best colleges in the Midwest region for 2024. Blackburn also earned a top-ten ranking for social mobility. Blackburn has been listed as a top performer for social mobility each year the list has been published. The Washington Monthly ranked Blackburn first in Illinois for performance by students receiving Pell Grants in 2022 and 2023. The publication has twice ranked Blackburn as the best baccalaureate college in Illinois.