## Peer Support Advocates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behmann, Sydney</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sberh@umich.edu">sberh@umich.edu</a></td>
<td>I majored in Environmental Systems and International Studies from UC San Diego in 2009, including one year abroad in France. I took a year off to travel, then spent six years as a graduate student in Agroecology and Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin, where I did research on transdisciplinary methods in complex environmental problem solving. Leaving behind an incredible community of friends, very different intellectual pursuits, and a highly active lifestyle with more free time, to begin medical school in a new state was tough. I had a hard time adjusting and failed the second FMM sequence, which ultimately forced me to make the decision that I wanted to stick with it. I passed the remediation exam. Small victories. After that I decided I needed to fill up my first year up with plenty of extracurricular activities to keep me active and social, which helped but also left me with less personal time. Second year presented with its own set of challenges, as clinical rotations can make it feel as though there isn't really time for anything else. Being constantly evaluated and feeling the need to &quot;perform&quot; feels very unnatural to me, as does any pretense of competition with peers/friends, so I have had to learn to balance playing the game with being true to myself. It's important to resist that feeling and stay active with at least 1-2 regular activities, but this is easier said than done. Not having much time for traveling, practicing foreign languages, playing music, hosting dinner parties, fermenting foods, etc.--things that made me feel whole before--takes constant adjustment. Patient care has truly been the redeeming factor for me, so I try to savor those moments with patients that remind us all of our humanity. I also feel fortunate that, now 31 years old, I have a pretty clear vision of what I want to do: psychiatry, with research/writing on related themes in ethics, philosophy, and consciousness. I spent my 20s struggling to figure this out, so I know that struggle and that struggle is real!</td>
<td>M4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buchanan, Jack</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jhbuchan@umich.edu">jhbuchan@umich.edu</a></td>
<td>I'm a 2nd year med student from Ann Arbor. I graduated from Earlham College with a degree in Biochemistry in 2015. I struggle with anxiety and depression, and have a drive to change the culture around mental health, especially in medical professionals. I took a year leave of absence after my first semester of med school, and started the Peer Support Advocacy Program as part of my own recovery to mental health and wellbeing. Reach out to me if you are interested in chatting about being a medical student who struggles with anxiety and depression, who is married, lives outside of Ann Arbor, has dogs, is passionate about medical student mental health, or just need someone to listen to you.</td>
<td>M3</td>
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<td>Collins, Claire</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cmwelsh@umich.edu">cmwelsh@umich.edu</a></td>
<td>I'm a non-traditional (first generation college student, rural/low socio-economic status background, liberal arts grad, with a 10-year span between undergrad and med school) student which certainly colors my perspective. In many ways, I'm more certain that this is the journey I'm meant to be on given that I've had so many rich experiences previously. However, conviction and a calling doesn't make the process naturally easier. I've sadly thought all-too-often that UMMS selected me just so they'd have someone to round out the bottom third of their class. I struggle significantly with the testing aspct of our training which is frustrating since it seems unrelated to my studying and effort. This is made even more of a gut-punch by the weight this component is given in our overall assessments. I am enjoying patient interactions immensely and take pride in my natural rapport during clinical rotations. I love the continual learning process and the opportunity to apply knowledge in tangible ways. Nonetheless, I know full well that medical school is a series of events that make you feel inadequate, guilty, and shameful. In the past several years, I've attempted to live a life with more vulnerability and openness though, and relish the opportunity to talk with other students about their difficulties.</td>
<td>M2</td>
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<td>Cooley, Charmayne</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cooley@umich.edu">cooley@umich.edu</a></td>
<td>Hi! My name is Dom DiGiovine and I am an M2. I was born and raised in Ann Arbor, MI and I graduated from the University of Michigan in 2017. I did not take any gap years, so if you have any questions about being a traditional student I can definitely try to help with that! My first year of medical school has been both challenging and rewarding. I really struggled adapting to the course load and definitely feel the pressure to perform at the same level as my incredibly impressive classmates. I also know how challenging it can be to deal with mental health concerns while going through medical school, so if you want I would be happy to talk about my experiences or just listen to you talk about yours. I love playing basketball, board games, and watching Netflix in my (limited) free time. I signed up to be a Peer Advocate because I have gotten invaluable encouragement and empathy from so many people and I want to be a similar resource for others. I want to help med students realize that their feelings are 100% normal and they are definitely not alone on this difficult journey.</td>
<td>M2</td>
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<tr>
<td>DiGiovine, Dom</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ddiagio@umich.edu">ddiagio@umich.edu</a></td>
<td>Duyhoang Dinh is an M2 from Rockville, MD. Having gone straight through to medical school from his undergraduate studies, he experienced great difficulty with adjusting to the intense work schedule that is demanded by the academic curriculum. He burned out halfway through the year, which climaxed in a car accident - fortunately, he came out unscathed and with a newfound support system in some of his peers. Since then, he's learned to better cope with his stress by making time for traveling, playing intramural sports, and attending music concerts/festivals. Medical school is tough and it's okay to not be okay. Reach out when you're feeling down or you have doubts; we will be here to listen with an open mind and an open heart.</td>
<td>M2</td>
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### Contact Information

- **Behmann, Sydney**: sberh@umich.edu
- **Buchanan, Jack**: jhbuchan@umich.edu
- **Collins, Claire**: cmwelsh@umich.edu
- **Cooley, Charmayne**: cooley@umich.edu
- **DiGiovine, Dom**: ddiagio@umich.edu
- **Dinh, Duyhoang**: dqdinh@umich.edu
I'm a second year medical student from Miami, FL. I did my undergrad at Florida International University, and I am a first generation college student. Before medical school I earned a MPH here at U of M, and I have a strong research interest in childhood obesity and other issues of childhood with modifiable risk factors. I also love reading, listening to podcasts, and playing with my dog.

Fernandez, Carmen cfern@umich.edu

I'm an M2 from Washington, DC. I graduated undergrad from Yale University in 2010 with a BS in Biomedical Engineering. I worked in health policy at the US Dept of Health & Human Services before returning to Yale for my MPH with a focus on Social & Behavioral Sciences. I have interests in health disparities and medical education. I love music and dancing so you can usually find me in Biohythms.

Gaston-Hawkins, Lauren lgastonh@umich.edu

I'm an M2 from Los Angeles, CA. Before coming to medical school, I was a High School teacher. Transitioning back to school was really difficult. I struggled academically and socially my M1 year. With academic set backs, I struggled with impostor syndrome, wondering how I could ever keep up with my peers, why I was even accepted, and if medicine was the right choice for me. I pushed passed this difficult time with the help of close friends and mentors who listened and supported me. I cope with the stress of medical school by taking time to relax with my fiance and cat, hike and exercise, and try new restaurants. Medical School is stressful, and almost everyone feels like they don't belong but no one should feel alone. I am always available to provide an open mind, listening ear, and should of support.

Iancu, Ariella iancuam@umich.edu

I'm a M3 from Tucson, Arizona. My clinical interest is in health disparities, and I am currently considering applying into Family Medicine or OB/GYN. I attended undergrad at the University of Chicago, and I graduated in 2015 with a BA in Biology. I am intimately familiar with the graces and challenges of moving long distances from away home for higher education. I also have a tendency towards anxiety, especially in high pressure settings like medical school.

Locher, lone ilocher@umich.edu

Hi, my name is Casey Patnode, I'm an M2. The biggest lesson I've learned and try to help others with is the importance of resilience. My journey up to this point has involved many failures; I actually did not get into UMMS on my first application and had to reapply. Once I got here, I failed one of my first quizzes. It's really easy to get down after these types of failures but the biggest favor you can do for yourself is to forgive yourself, learn your lessons and move on as a better and more motivated person. I would be thrilled to talk to anyone about strategies in developing resilience, especially meditation, as I have a daily meditation practice. I would love to share meditation resources and strategies. Also, I rap and am in PHLOMAX so if you want mentorship in rap form, I'm your guy!

Patnode, Casey caseypst@umich.edu

Hi! My name is Erika Steensma, and I am a M3. I am planning on pursuing a career in neurology- but when I'm not in the hospital or library, I love running, reading, and baking delicious desserts for my friends! I wanted to become a peer mentor because I know all too personally how difficult medical school can be. During my M2 clinical year, I really struggled with depression and anxiety. I ended up isolating myself from my friends, and convinced myself that I was the only one struggling. After finally gathering the courage and strength to reach out for help, I found a wide network of support, and realized that I wasn't at all alone. Thanks to therapy, medication, and the love and support of my friends and family, I am doing so much better now- but wish that I had reached out earlier for help. If you are struggling in any way, know that you are not alone, and know that myself (and so so many other people!) are here for you.

Steensma, Erika ecsteen@umich.edu

Hi, I'm Nick! I'm so excited to be starting my M3 year and hopefully figuring out what I want to do with the rest of my life. I grew up in Virginia, did my undergraduate degree at U of M, and have been so happy to stay here for medical school. When not studying, I spend my time with the med school a cappella group, student council, the smoker, and eating way too much Indian and Mexican food. Feel free to reach out about career indecision, test anxiety, impostor syndrome, LGBTQ issues, doing long distance in med school, or trading info about great places to run in Ann Arbor.

Raja, Nicolas nickraja@umich.edu

Hi, I'm Ruiqi! I'm an M1 from Chicago but have been working in San Francisco Bay Area for several years prior to medical school. I graduated from a small liberal arts college with a major in Gender and Women's Studies. I dabbled in teaching before pivoting into community mental health, working in various FQHCs in Oakland. My transition to medical school was difficult, partially due to feeling isolated and figuring out the "best" way to study. This was compounded by my struggle to balance coursework with family illness. I felt immense guilt for not being able to commit 100% to medical school and was ashamed of my downward academic performance. I decided to take a Leave of Absence to slow down, process everything, and lean on others for support. As I continue to reconnect with my interests and prioritize my own wellness, I have gained a renewed appreciation for the value of peer support during difficult times. I want to pay it forward and serve as a resource for anyone struggling with transitions, school-life balance, and feeling like you don't belong. For anyone curious about the LOA process, I am happy to share my experience with taking time off. As a final note, I love being outside and hanging out with my cat (Cashew), so reach out anytime if you want to join us on our walks/park adventures!