

Yeakula makes a point during a discussion at a Wayne State University class.



Learning Success

Liberian student wins U.S. accolades */// By Karen Newman*

A public diplomacy program conducted by the U.S. Mission to the United Nations has blossomed since its 2006 launch and changed at least one life, that of Moriah Yeakula.

In 2006, USUN engaged foreign missions accredited to the United Nations in a discussion at U.N. headquarters on the education of girls in the developing world. The panel was part of a three-day program that also took the participants to U.S. universities.

The program featured participants from Afghanistan, El Salvador, India, Indonesia,

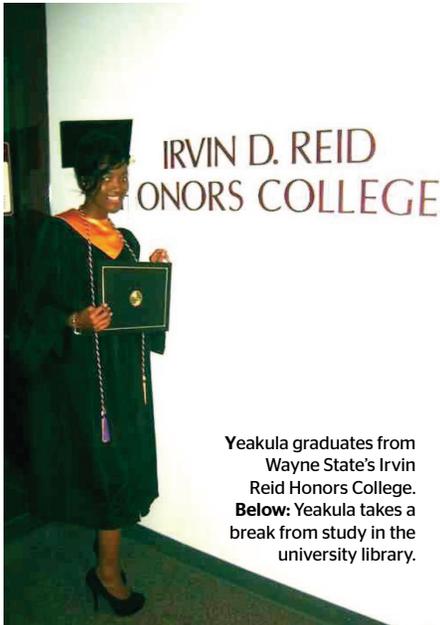
Liberia, Palestine and Uganda; a panel that included former Executive Director of UNICEF Ann Veneman; and U.S. Cultural Ambassador Mary Wilson, formerly of the Supremes. The program also featured educators from several regions discussing the responsibility of governments for the education of girls in the developing world.

Yeakula attended the program accompanied by a Liberian teacher who was in the delegation of educators, recalled Millie Meyers, USUN press advisor.

“When they first arrived,” Meyers said. “I took them to do a piece for National Public Radio’s Story Corps at Grand Central Station. They were petrified of the escalators.”

Meyers said Yeakula, then 17, had come “from a very difficult educational situation” in her homeland.

Yeakula was selected from a pool of five Liberian female students to visit three U.S.



IRVIN D. REID HONORS COLLEGE

Yeakula graduates from Wayne State's Irvin Reid Honors College. Below: Yeakula takes a break from study in the university library.

universities, including Wayne State in Detroit. Former U.S. public delegate to the U.N. Yousif Boutrous Ghafari had developed a connection with the school. Yeakula, then a freshman at a Liberian university, was subsequently invited to study at both Rhodes College, in Memphis, Tenn., and Wayne State. Wayne State's former President Irvin Reid had heard her speak at the U.N. program and had encouraged her to attend the school as a Liberian International Student Scholar. Yeakula enrolled in 2007 with help from the university and a United Methodist Women Scholarship.

Yeakula was also involved with the Liberian Literacy Foundation and helped host a book drive in support of the foundation's "A Million Books for a Million Lives" campaign for Liberian schoolchildren. Impressed by her effort, Wayne State became the first American university to partner with the Liberian Literacy Foundation.

Yeakula ultimately gained two bachelor's degrees, in economics and sociology, and

graduated with honors in December. She was involved with several student organizations, eventually serving as president of the Wayne African Student Society and a member of the Wayne State Board of Governors' Academic Affairs Committee.

In Detroit, she volunteered with the Red Cross and Salvation Army, and eventually was honored with the Michigan Campus Outstanding Student Award. She also hosted a radio talk show called "Giving Back" on the first U.S.-based online Liberian radio station.

"I am convinced that one day Moriah will be the President of Liberia," Reid later said, citing her energy and ability.

Now in Liberia, Yeakula aims to enroll in law school. She said she'll use what she learned from the exchange program to ensure the welfare of other young Liberians and focus on expanding the discussion on women and youth issues. ■

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