

Extraordinary Times, *Exceptional Students*

White Coat Ceremony Reflects Resilience and Promise of UMSOM Class of 2024

In a year like no other, 2020's White Coat Ceremony at the University of Maryland School of Medicine provided an opportunity for the School's faculty, staff, and fellow students to celebrate the new Class of 2024 in a unique way.

A tradition at the University of Maryland School of Medicine since 1997, the White Coat Ceremony is a key milestone occasion for first-year medical students, where they are presented with their traditional white coats, long the symbol of physicians and scientists. In past years, students have had their coats put on by School of Medicine faculty in welcoming their new colleagues to the profession of medicine. After being "coated," students recite a Code of Honor acknowledging their acceptance of the obligations of the medical profession. In contrast, this year's November 10 ceremony, sponsored by the Whiting-Turner Contracting Company and the Medical Alumni Association, was held virtually via Zoom for the Class of 2024 and a select group of faculty and staff, and also live-streamed on YouTube for the larger UMSOM community and student families. Through the efforts of the Ceremony's Planning Committee — **Donna L. Parker, MD, FACP**, Associate Professor of Medicine and Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Medical Education; **Joseph P. Martinez, MD, FACEP, FAAEM**, Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine and Medicine, and Associate Dean for Medical Education and Student Experience; **Kerri A. Thom, MD, MS**, Professor of Epidemiology & Public Health and Medicine, and Associate Dean for Student Affairs; **Kristen McCartin, CMP**, Events Specialist in the Office of Student Affairs; **Mary Pooton**, Assistant Dean for Development; and **Natalie Rathell**, Event Specialist, Office of Development — the event was hailed by all as a complete success.

The special tone for the day was set in the opening remarks by UMSOM's Dean **E. Albert Reece, MD, PhD, MBA**. *"I know this is not what you imagined today would be like,"* he noted. *"Although the COVID pandemic has prevented us from physically gathering, we are joined together in spirit by collectively recognizing what this occasion means to all of us. Today marks a major milestone in what will surely be a momentous and lifelong journey."*

Along with observations made by various speakers (including **Brad Lerner, MD, FACS '84**, President of the Medical Alumni Association, and UMSOM faculty members **George C. Willis, MD**, Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine; **John C. Allen, MD '14**, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Assistant Dean for Student Affairs; and **Dr. Thom**), a number of UMSOM faculty members surprised students with video messages of support. In addition, when they were asked to don their white coats for the first time, students discovered personal notes of congratulations tucked into their pockets from UMSOM alumni. And, to demonstrate their collective diversity, students recited sections of the Code of Honor in their native languages, including Turkish, Yoruba, Farsi, Portuguese, and Polish.

An additional highlight of the ceremony came in the remarks from two Class of 2024 students, **Adaobi Ahanotu '24**, and **Maria Vera Alvarez '24**. *"We are a special class that started medical school during a global pandemic, and a racial justice pandemic as well,"* said Ahanotu. *"Despite this, I am truly in awe of how our class has maintained unity and support for one another. We have truly persevered."*



Adaobi Ahanotu '24



Maria Vera Alvarez '24

In turn, Alvarez urged her classmates to realize their common focus. *"I think many of you will find similarities in your path whether it is linear or not,"* she said. *"I want to encourage you to look back and embrace your path because it's brought all of us here and should be celebrated."*

Darby Moore '24, Class of 2024 Student Government President, had nothing but praise for this virtual version of the White Coat Ceremony. *"The School did a beautiful job in putting the event together and making the best of the circumstances that we've been given,"* she said. *"I think they really upheld the tradition of the White Coat Ceremony, and maintained all of the true feeling in a virtual format."*

View the entire 2020 White Coat Ceremony [here](#).

Contributions to the **Medical Family Annual Fund** help our UMSOM students take advantage of educational events around the world. Please make a donation [here](#) or contact Irene Amoros, Director of Annual Giving and Special Projects, at 410-706-8550 or at iamoros@som.umaryland.edu.



UMSOM's Class of 2024 students don their white coats.