

**Philosophy of the Civil Person**  
**Alfie Scholars Junior Conference**  
**Seattle University**



**August 30, 2024**

# **Philosophy of the Civil Person**

## **Presenters**

Didier Randrianandrasana  
Joyce Diakubama  
Stephanie Nehema  
Zopora Jones  
Amy Nguyen

Sandra Hernandez  
Ahmed Abdullah  
Marvin Espino  
Morgan McKibbin  
Ayleah Bowser

## **Alfie Team**

Professor Natalie Cisneros  
Director Carol Cochran  
Professor Nathan Colaner  
Professor Paula Lustbader

Director Scott Petit  
Professor Jeff Philpott  
Professor Jason Wirth  
Prof. Jennifer Bodley

# Conference Schedule

- 10:00–10:20    **Welcome**  
Professor Paula Lustbader
- 10:20–10:40    **The Impact of Political Corruption in Madagascar: Understanding and Addressing Systemic Challenges**  
Presenter: Didier Randrianandrasana  
Moderator: Nico Seni
- 10:40–11:00    **Education Equity and Access in the Democratic Republic of Congo**  
Presenter: Joyce Diakubama  
Moderator: Shayna Guevara
- 11:00–11:20    **Balancing Survival and Sustainability: Addressing Environmental Justice in the Democratic Republic of Congo**  
Presenter: Stephanie Nehema  
Moderator: Czarina Runatay
- 11:20–11:40    **Break**
- 11:40–12:00    **From Exclusion to Empowerment: Why Inclusive Curriculum Is Necessary in Modern Education**  
Presenter: Zoporah Jones  
Moderator: Heremela Gebrehiwot
- 12:00–12:20    **Addressing Inequities: The Struggle for Quality Education and Life for Disabled and Marginalized Youth**  
Presenter: Amy Nguyen  
Moderator: Anna Au

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| 12:20–1:00 | <b>Lunch</b>  |
| 1:00–1:20  | <b>The Negative Media Portrayal of Black Men in America: The Impact of Negative Narratives and Stereotyping on Society</b><br>Presenter: Ahmed Abdullah<br>Moderator: Nico Seni |
| 1:20–1:40  | <b>Navigating the Pathway: Challenges and Solutions for DACA Recipients Seeking Citizenship</b><br>Presenter: Sandra Hernandez<br>Moderator: Aster Gebregergis                  |
| 1:40–2:00  | <b>Breaking Barriers: Seeing the Importance of Eye Care and Addressing Eye Health Challenges</b><br>Presenter: Marvin Espino<br>Moderator: Hanan Aman                           |
| 2:00–2:15  | <b>Break</b>  |
| 2:15–2:35  | <b>Black Maternal Health Crisis: Elevating Black Voices and Reframing Patient-Clinician Relationships</b><br>Presenter: Morgan McKibbin<br>Moderator: Shayna Guevara            |
| 2:35–3:00  | <b>Racial Disparities in Maternal Health: Learning More About the Complex Crisis of Black Maternal Mortality</b><br>Presenter: Ayleah Bowser<br>Moderator: Heremela Gebrehiwot  |
| 3:00–3:30  | <b>Closing</b><br>Professor Paula Lustbader   |

# **Presentation Descriptions**

## **The Impact of Political Corruption in Madagascar: Understanding and Addressing Systemic Challenges**

Presenter: Didier Randrianandrasana

This presentation explores the deep-rooted issue of political corruption in Madagascar, a country with a population of approximately 30.3 million, where over 80% live below the poverty line (World Bank, 2023). Despite its rich natural resources and unique biodiversity, Madagascar's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) has declined from 32 in 2012 to 26 in 2023 (Transparency International, 2023). This decline underscores the persistent challenges in governance and economic development. The presentation is structured into three parts: defining corruption and its origins in Madagascar, examining the actors involved and their impact on development, and proposing potential solutions to combat these systemic issues. The goal is to provide a nuanced understanding of how corruption operates and suggest actionable strategies to address these challenges.

## **Education Equity and Access in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

Presenter: Joyce Diakubama

Educational equity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) faces critical challenges rooted in limited resources, political instability, and entrenched socioeconomic disparities. This presentation examines the structural barriers that hinder access to quality education and offers targeted, sustainable solutions to bridge these gaps and promote inclusive educational opportunities for all students. By exploring the role of technological advancements, policy reforms, and community engagement, the discussion highlights strategies to transform the educational landscape and foster long-term development in the region.

## **Balancing Survival and Sustainability: Addressing Environmental Justice in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

Presenter: Stephanie Nehema

This presentation argues that addressing environmental justice in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) requires dual focus on combating systemic corruption and global economic exploitation while promoting culturally sensitive and community-based solutions that balance immediate humanitarian needs with long-term sustainability. The presentation will explore the intricate relationship between environmental degradation and socio-economic challenges in the DRC,

a nation rich in resources yet struggling with poverty and political instability. It will provide a historical overview of environmental injustice, tracing its roots to colonial exploitation and its perpetuation by contemporary global economic practices. The presentation will examine the detrimental effects of environmental degradation on health and livelihoods, particularly among marginalized communities, and propose a multifaceted approach to environmental justice. This includes advocating for community-based natural resource management, raising awareness, and fostering international cooperation. By highlighting the need to balance immediate humanitarian aid with sustainable environmental practices, the presentation aims to inspire collaborative efforts to create a more just and sustainable future for the DRC.

### **From Exclusion to Empowerment: Why Inclusive Curriculum Is Necessary in Modern Education**

Presenter: Zopora Jones

Inclusivity Curriculum is a need-based curriculum in the classroom, as it fosters ideas of equity and sense of belonging. Inclusive curriculum can combat the systemic foundation of hate and discrimination that has played a role in the public-school system for generations. This paper will not only open the door to why there cannot be steps taken back from the multiculturalism we have implemented in our student's core learnings but also enhance the ideas that a just education is the right education. Without an educational system that focuses on the power of inclusive experiences, we will give way to a system that instead reinforces bias in learning, limits empathy and empathetic approaches to learning, and, as well, affects students' self-esteem, resulting in feelings of not belonging and being undervalued

### **Addressing Inequities: The Struggle for Quality Education and Life for Disabled and Marginalized Youth**

Presenter: Amy Nguyen

Education is one of the most vital aspects to a child's development. School is not only important for academic learning, but it will also build social and emotional regulation skills, prepare a student for a successful and enriching future, and overall serve to develop a student's life wholly. However, disabled and marginalized youth are finding themselves in an educational system that fails to provide a quality educational experience, which negatively affects these students as they continue to navigate their futures. In this presentation, I examine the impact of inadequate education, factors that contribute to this issue, and possible solutions to improve the educational system for our disabled and marginalized youth. It is imperative that we advocate for quality education, as it is our

responsibility as a civil society to ensure the successes of every individual student, no matter their background.

## **The Negative Media Portrayal of Black Men in America: The Impact of Negative Narratives and Stereotyping on Society**

Presenter: Ahmed Abdirashid Abdullah

This presentation will explore the persistent issue of negative media portrayal of Black men in America, focusing on how these harmful narratives contribute to widespread societal biases and reinforce systemic inequalities. Looking at historical examples and contemporary research, the discussion will highlight patterns of misrepresentation in television news and their detrimental effects on public perception. I will also propose potential solutions, including diversifying newsrooms and implementing ethical reporting practices, to address and counteract these negative portrayals. The goal is to show why fair and accurate media representation is important for creating a more just society.

## **Navigating the Pathway: Challenges and Solutions for DACA Recipients Seeking Citizenship**

Presenter: Sandra Hernandez

For over 12 years the Deferred Act for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has served hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants that were brought to the United States as children. These individuals, who entered the program as children, are now adults building careers and families. While DACA has provided work authorization and protection against deportation, the program itself does not provide U.S. citizenship nor a pathway to citizenship. As a result, its recipients are at risk of losing their benefits and everything they have built if the program is removed. The legal uncertainty surrounding DACA highlights the need for a pathway to citizenship that will protect undocumented immigrants while simultaneously addressing broader immigration reform. This presentation will explore social issues, such as biases and misconceptions about undocumented immigrants, that hinder possibilities for legislative progress. We will also look at the history of DACA and investigate possible solutions that target these issues.

## **Breaking Barriers: Seeing the Importance of Eye Care and Addressing Eye Health Challenges**

Presenter: Marvin Espino

Did you know that over 90% of blindness and visual impairment can be prevented or treated with timely eye care? Despite this, many people in

underserved communities suffer from vision problems due to a lack of access or affordability. Good vision is crucial for daily tasks like reading, driving, and socializing, and it impacts overall well-being and safety. Poor eyesight can lead to accidents, health issues, and emotional challenges, such as isolation and dependency. Regular eye care prevents and manages vision problems early, enhancing quality of life. Everyone deserves clear vision, but barriers like cost, awareness, and access often prevent marginalized communities from receiving proper eye care. Addressing these barriers is essential for ensuring equitable vision care for all.

## **Black Maternal Health Crisis: Elevating Black Voices and Reframing Patient-Clinician Relationships**

Presenter: Morgan McKibbin

*Of course innocent mistakes occur, but the accumulated insults and indignations caused by racial presumptions are destructive in ways that are hard to measure. Constantly being suspected, accused, watched, doubted, distrusted, presumed guilty, and even feared is a burden borne by people of color that can't be understood or confronted without a deeper conversation about our history of racial injustice.* **Bryan Stevenson**

From new vaccines to revolutionary drugs for hard-to-treat disorders, the field of medicine continues to rapidly advance, offering a promise of better patient outcomes and quality of life. Minority groups continue to experience outcomes that contradict these breakthroughs—an increase in death rates and a decrease in life expectancy. Compared to White women, Black women in the US are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy and childbirth-related problems. This disproportionality persists even when controlling for socioeconomic factors, signifying that systemic and structural issues are at play beyond actions of individuals or even healthcare access. Understanding the complex intersectionality of navigating U.S. healthcare systems as an African American woman is inextricable from developing effective interventions and policies aimed at reducing Black maternal mortality rates. In addressing the urgent issue of Black maternal mortality rates in the United States, this presentation explores the systemic factors contributing to these disparities, examines the intersectionality of race and gender in healthcare outcomes, and advocates for comprehensive policy reforms and community-based interventions to achieve equitable maternal health care for Black women.



## **Racial Disparities in Maternal Health: Learning More About the Complex Crisis of Black Maternal Mortality**

Presenter: Ayleah Bowser

There has been a long ongoing racial disparity in healthcare – the huge disparity between maternal mortality rates in the Black community compared to other races. My project aimed to analyze the historical background and possible causative factors influencing maternal mortality rates among Black women. I also expanded on solutions based on the data I used in my research. I used a multi-method approach. I was using qualitative data based on public health records including demographics and quantitative historical accounts. My findings showed that many systemic factors were behind this issue, including a lack of diversity in labor and delivery, a disproportionate rate of social determinants of health in the black community, and a lack of prenatal care. My suggested solutions are providing free prenatal care through public health departments, expanding Medicaid coverage, and increasing hospital DEI policies. Overall, Black maternity mortality is rooted in history but is carried on by current healthcare policies. Some of these policies include a lack of diversity in labor and delivery and OB-GYN care. As well as the lack of access to prenatal care in the black community. Some solutions to my issue are access to prenatal care and resources as well as greater DEI policies in hospitals and learning environments.

# **Presenter Biographies**

## **Didier Randrianandrasana**

### **Major: Economics**

Born in Antananarivo, Madagascar, Didier grew up in a culturally diverse community influenced by French, Malagasy, and Chinese traditions. His upbringing was shaped by a politically turbulent environment, which sparked his interest in understanding and addressing systemic corruption. Despite economic hardships, Didier's parents prioritized education, fostering his passion for learning and social justice. His cherished memories of summers with his grandparents in southern Madagascar, especially the lessons of love and kindness from his grandfather, have profoundly influenced his worldview. Now, as an Economics major at Seattle University, Didier is committed to advocating for ethical governance and societal reform in Madagascar.

## **Joyce Diakubama**

### **Major: Computer Science**

As an international student from Kinshasa, DRC, currently studying Computer Science at Seattle University, Joyce has a unique perspective on the critical disparities in education that limit the opportunities of students in her home country, Congo. Her background in computer science provides the technical foundation to propose innovative, technology-driven solutions that can transform the educational landscape in the DRC. Drawing on her lived experience, research, and analysis, she aims to bring insights into overcoming the systemic barriers in Congo's education system.

## **Stephanie Nehama**

### **Major: Environmental Science**

Stephanie Nehema Amis takes great satisfaction in being called a "great woman" because it represents the fortitude and tenacity she has developed over all aspects of her life. As the eldest child in her family, she constantly had a lot of responsibilities, and the challenges she encountered along the way helped shape the person she is today. Growing up in the Democratic Republic of Congo, she witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of war and corruption, where survival often meant sacrificing dreams and aspirations. Despite these hardships, she remained determined to rise above her circumstances. In 2021, she moved to the United States, the country where "all dreams come true." "This transition brought new challenges as she navigated a different culture and language. The early days

were far from easy, but she embraced the discomfort and pushed herself to adapt. Bellevue College became a crucial stepping stone in her journey, offering her the opportunity to overcome language barriers and engage in impactful activities. She participated in events organized by the Sustainability Environmental Students Funds (SESF) committee, where she was the chair, deepening her commitment to environmental sustainability. As an officer in the student government, she advocated for student issues in Olympia, gaining valuable experience in leadership and advocacy. Her involvement in Model United Nations (MUN) further expanded her perspective on global issues, particularly environmental justice, and inspired her to contribute meaningfully to the movement for change. These experiences have been pivotal in shaping her passion for advocacy and environmental stewardship. Upon arriving in the U.S., she developed a strong passion for ensuring that everyone is allowed to follow their goals. Introduced to the concept of environmental justice, she became aware of the connection between global issues and the importance of fighting for equitable access to a healthy environment. This new awareness sparked a deep passion within her for addressing injustices, particularly those related to environmental degradation and its disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities. Her commitment to ensuring that everyone could pursue their goals was strengthened by the challenges she witnessed growing up in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In an environment where corruption was a daily reality, she saw many talented friends forced to give up on their dreams due to systemic barriers. These experiences have fueled her determination to advocate for change, with a particular focus on environmental justice. She believes that fighting for a just and sustainable world is not just about protecting the planet, but also about ensuring that all people, regardless of their background, have the chance to live in a safe, healthy environment and achieve their full potential.

## **Zoporah Jones**

### **Major: Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies, Elementary Education**

As a future educator I am passionate about making my students feel valued and able to achieve anything they set their minds to. Growing up in a predominantly white town as a bi-racial girl, I encountered many instances of ignorance and hateful speech towards myself and others who looked like me. I was only ever introduced to curriculum that included stories from famous work like “The 1619 Project,” “Between the World and Me,” “The House on Mango Street,” and “On Earth we’re Briefly Gorgeous” towards the end of my high school career. Combined with the little time to really know works like this and be educated on what they truly meant, there was much adversity from my school’s population on multicultural stories and if they were worth the time and attention. I want to use my future as an educator to continue to mold our curriculum around the ever-changing globe we are a part of, celebrating the differences between myself

and the people here, and even bigger, everyone who enters a classroom. I wish to do this at the heart of any community, the public education system

**Amy Nguyen**  
**Major: Psychology**

Amy is currently a junior at Seattle University, pursuing a major in Psychology with the aspiration of becoming a pediatric occupational therapist. Her goal is to make a meaningful difference in the lives of youth by addressing their unique needs and supporting their development. As a first-generation American, she has personally experienced the challenges of accessing quality education through the lens of her immigrant family. This background, coupled with her own experiences with mental disabilities, has deeply influenced her perspective. She understands firsthand the lack of support and resources that can impact one's educational journey and is determined to ensure that future generations do not face the same obstacles.

Over the past three years, she has dedicated herself to working with children in various capacities, including after-school clubs, ABA therapy with children on the autism spectrum, and currently at a daycare. These experiences have only strengthened her passion for providing quality support and education. Through her work, she has seen the profound effects that thorough and compassionate support can have on young lives. Her hope is that, by the end of her presentation, the audience can collectively reassess the state of education for youth and recognize the urgent need for improvement, particularly for disabled and marginalized students.

**Ahmed Abdirashid Abdullah**  
**Major: Strategic Communications**

Ahmed Abdirashid Abdullah is an international student from Sweden, currently pursuing a degree in Communication and Media at Seattle University. Born and raised in Stockholm to Somali immigrant parents, Ahmed's experiences as a second-generation immigrant and a Black man in Sweden shaped his passion for advocating for fair and accurate media representation of marginalized communities. His academic focus centers on challenging negative stereotypes perpetuated by biased media narratives and exploring solutions to promote a more inclusive and equitable media field.

## **Sandra Hernandez**

### **Major: Nursing**

As a first-generation college student, I embody my parents' persistence, strength, and hard work. I view education as a powerful opportunity to shape my own journey and motivate others. As an incoming junior nursing student at Seattle University, I aim to develop mindful caregiving skills that respect diverse cultures and backgrounds in striving for cultural competence. Beyond my academic pursuits, I am deeply connected to the DACA community through my two siblings who are DACA recipients. Witnessing their experiences and the significant impact of political decisions on their futures has fueled my passion for raising awareness about contributions of DACA recipients and the urgent need for a pathway to citizenship.

## **Marvin Espino**

### **Major: Pre-Science (Biology)**

Marvin's professional goal is to become an optometrist, as he finds the function, study, and anatomy of the eyes both fascinating and vital. Marvin was personally impacted by an optometrist at a young age. For as long as he could remember, Marvin saw the world as a blur. At around the age of 5, Marvin went to the eye doctor for the first time, and it was transformative. After Marvin received his first pair of corrective lenses, his life took a positive turn. He saw things he wasn't able to see before, like having the ability to read the board at school, which accelerated his learning and improved his grades. The event of Marvin acquiring his first pair of glasses was life-changing. Becoming an optometrist will allow Marvin to positively impact other people in the same way his optometrist did for him, providing the gift of sight.

## **Morgan McKibbin**

### **Major: Nursing**

Morgan is a Junior nursing student who is devoted to cultivating an attitude of curiosity and critical self-reflection through her educational and professional journey. As a future Nurse Midwife, she is interested in elevating maternal health outcomes for patients from diverse backgrounds. Growing up as a White woman in America, the narratives she heard from family members painted childbirth as a wholly good experience. She seeks to use her voice to highlight the reality of childbirth in America and advocate for a new approach to patient-clinician relationships.

## **Ayleah Bowser**

### **Major: Nursing**

Ayleah is part of the 2026 BSN transfer cohort at Seattle University and a graduate of Green River College, with her DTA-Pre-Nursing degree. Her time working as a nursing assistant in a state-run skilled nursing facility has given her firsthand experience seeing the disparities in healthcare care caused by systemic issues and how this affects the health outcomes of patients. Ayleah has been personally interested in the Black maternal mortality rate for many years, as well as the history of mistreatment in healthcare towards Black people and the effectiveness of public health programs. Ayleah dreams of becoming a staff float nurse to have constant opportunities to interact with different patient populations and deepen her nursing knowledge.













