

Q&A

WITH NEWLY ELECTED UNITED STATES
CONGRESSMAN

Jamaal Bowman, M.S. '06

Bowman's November 2020 historic election to Congress is a full-circle moment. He unseated a 16-term incumbent congressman to now represent a district encompassing parts of Southern Westchester County and the Northern Bronx, including Mercy's Bronx Campus. Bowman is an alumnus of Mercy's school counseling graduate program, a degree that laid the groundwork for his career as an educator, then co-founder and principal of a public middle school in Eastchester, Bronx. He will be the 2021 Commencement Speaker and Honorary Degree Recipient for the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences on May 19.

As Bowman enters Congress during an unprecedented time, he brings with him knowledge gained from his degree program, ideals in alignment with Mercy's mission and characteristics representative of the College's student population. Bowman is grateful to Mercy College and his professors for "Giving him the opportunity to lead and pursue his dreams." See the below Q&A to learn more about the impact Mercy College had on Bowman's life and career.

When you were applying to graduate schools, what attracted you to Mercy College? I applied to a series of school counseling programs throughout New York City. At the time, I was living in Brooklyn and commuting to the Bronx for work. I was trying to find a school located between those two places. Mercy had a new school counseling program, and I was lucky to be accepted.

What did you like most about the school counseling program? I thought the professors were brilliant. I loved the readings. The school counseling program did a real deep dive into psychological theory, which I really liked and appreciated. My favorite classes were the human development classes and reading about Freud's theories. I still have a

book from one of the classes – it is one of my favorites – "Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis." That's when I learned about the subconscious mind, and neurosis, and all of those things, which stuck with me. As I talk about unconscious racism and unconscious bias, I plug right back into Freud's work.

Did what you learn at Mercy inform your career and your ideals as you moved forward and ran for office? Yes. When I got into Mercy, I was an elementary school teacher. As I went through the school counselor program, I got certified in school counseling and transitioned to work as a school counselor in public schools. That helped me experience my work from a different point of view – I started working with large groups of children

and understanding not just the importance of mental health and psychological supports, but social and emotional learning. So that Mercy learning really informed my career as an educator and even helped in writing my proposal when I became the founder of the Cornerstone Academy Middle School in the Northeast Bronx. My philosophy on education is one where we educate the whole child – we take a holistic approach – and we understand that education is not schools working in isolation. It's schools working with health care, housing, food security and jobs, and opportunity leads to the overall health and development of children. That perspective informed me as an educator and informed me as a candidate, and it will now inform me as I enter Congress.

How does it feel to go full circle – attending Mercy College – and now representing Mercy’s Bronx Campus? It’s pretty cool. It provides a great opportunity to plug back in as an alumnus but then also build bridges to the community that Mercy sits within. There are so many children who come out of high school and don’t know what path to take. Having Mercy as an option is important. They need to know they have this amazing school right in their backyard.

So that’s critical. And, doing everything I can to help Mercy have the resources that it needs to serve children and the community within the district. It’s a pretty powerful thing – and pretty exciting.

I’m working with President Hall to figure out what Mercy’s needs are and to look for collaborative opportunities.

What advice would you give to students who are pursuing career paths similar to yours? When I was a student at Mercy, I had no idea that I was going to run for office one day. You never know how life is going to play itself out. I would advise students to work hard to be the best student you can be. It sounds cliché, but it’s important, because you unlock aspects of your intelligence that you didn’t even know were there. As I came into Mercy with a below average GPA, I left with a 3.5 GPA. I took the learning seriously and it afforded me higher level professional opportunities.

Also, be outspoken because the world needs your perspective. It needs your voice. It needs your ideas. So please, whatever you can give, give it to us. The world needs you, so use your voice to change the world.

Part of Mercy’s mission is to provide motivated students the opportunity to transform their lives. What does this mission mean to you? You know, that means everything. Mercy said they would give me a shot and because of that I didn’t want to let Mercy down. I wanted to prove to any doubters.

I fell in love with learning at Mercy College. My professor Esther Wermuth was always encouraging and uplifting and gave us an opportunity to lead. That really shaped and molded me into the confident student, educator and leader that I ultimately became. I’m a perfect example of Mercy fulfilling its mission.



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