



From left to right: Ja'Bette Lozupone. Nghi Nguyen.

Reflecting on MCRPA: A Special Interview with Ja'Bette Lozupone

MCRPA Secretary Nghi Nguyen sits down with one of our founding members Ja'Bette Lozupone, Director of Student Affairs, to talk about her presentation in Hood College's upcoming Technology, Entertainment, and Design (TEDx) event and also reflect on her career and MCRPA journey as the Association sets to celebrate its 10th anniversary.

N: Thank you so much for joining me today. Congratulations on being selected as one of the speakers for the TEDx Talks. To begin, what is TEDx?

J: TEDx is all about, I mean, in the most simplistic response I can give, it's all about sharing ideas worth spreading. That's pretty much it in a nutshell.

N: Can you give us like some details on what you are going to talk about in your presentation?

J: So, I'm definitely planning on sharing a little bit of my background. The topic is basically, and I don't know what the title will be necessarily—if it'll change—but I'm going to be talking about transcending wishful thinking to wishful doing. And so, I definitely plan to talk a little bit about how I used wishful thinking, right to start wishful doing, and just kind of how I arrived at that idea and framework. So, sharing my background and some of the struggles I've been through, and the obstacles that I've had to overcome. And, um, kind of taking people on a journey of how I got to where I am now, but then also really trying to give folks something tangible so that moving forward, they can leave having a sense of how they can engage in utilizing their wishful thinking to then start actually acting on what it is that they want to accomplish in their lives.

N: Nice! Is this an online or in-person conference?

J: It is going to be in person. The audience is limited to 100 people, which is a very strict guideline for TEDx talks, and TED will then distribute the recording through their website. They'll push it out and it'll be out in the universe.

N: This one is in Frederick, right?

J: This is taking place in Frederick. It's actually taking place at Hood College, which is really special for me because this is like a full circle moment. I mean the fact that, one, I think it's an honor and a really amazing accomplishment not just because I'm doing it, but I just think that's really cool. Not a lot of people get to do a TEDx talk, so the fact that I have this opportunity and the fact that I'm going to go back to Hood College where, really, that was the beginning of my crucible moment as a teen mom. Um, it's really kind of like this full circle moment for me. I mean, I'm going back to where it all began.

N: So, you say this is the first time that TEDx is being hosted in the Frederick area?

J: I understand this is the first time that TEDx is coming to Frederick, Maryland. And it's going to be hosted at Hood College, which is my alma mater. It's where I did my undergrad, my MBA, and my doctorate. So, it's a really special, full-circle moment, for me.

N: I wish it was in person. I would have attended. It would've been fun.

J: Yeah, the audience is limited to 100. I don't know how they're selling or distributing tickets, but I'm sure if you go to the Hood College website, you can probably find out.

N: Actually, I did see the website. I have to go back and look to see. I'll go back and see if they have more information. So, are you excited?

J: I am excited! I'm excited and at the same time I am absolutely terrified. I'm really nervous. I think what people don't realize is that TEDx talks are 18 minutes long, and they're recorded typically in one take, and you don't have note cards. So, you really have to memorize what it is that you're going to talk about, and that is really scary, right? Because there's no do-over, so, you know. It's a wonderful



opportunity. It's a wonderful platform to share ideas worth spreading. But of course, there's a lot of preparation involved and making sure that the content is strong and engaging and that I'm telling a good story—because I do think of myself as a storyteller. And, you know, I just, I want to make sure that people walk away feeling like, yeah, that is really interesting. That is a great idea. I'm excited, but I'm extremely nervous. I haven't finished writing yet, which means that I can't really rehearse and practice because I haven't finished writing my talk. And it's less than two weeks away, so I've got a lot of work to do.

N: And you are also going to be one of our MCRPA speakers for the Retreat. So, yeah, you have two jobs.

J: I've got multiple jobs coming! So, what's crazy is, obviously, in my full-time capacity at Montgomery College, I'm Director of Student Affairs and I'm co-leading with my colleague, Beverly Coleman, the Ascend Parent initiative. But I also started my own company last year, and so, I have a lot of work coming in through my company where I write a weekly blog. And then, I'm doing keynotes, talks, presentations and facilitating workshops. And so, I am incredibly busy right now, which is again, it's really exciting. But then, the other side is it's exhausting and really, you know, tiring. So, there's a lot going on. It's insane.

N: Okay, so aiming for the TIME magazine's Top 100 Woman in the future? [Laughs]

J: Hey, you never know! [Laughs] Anything is possible. I'll start wishful thinking about that to see if I can begin wishful doing that somehow.

N: So, many exciting things for you coming up. That's nice.

J: I think honestly, for me, what makes it feel really special and important right now is it really does

kind of go back to what I'm going to be talking about. It's all the things that you think about and making those things come to fruition, and the fact that I have been able to go through what I've gone through to get to this point and these things are happening. I always define luck as preparation meeting opportunity. It's not necessarily me even actively pursuing and going after things at this point. It's just really wild and interesting to see how the things are actually coming to me without me really having to exert much energy. Right? I mean I'm working incredibly hard. I'm doing all the things that I need to do to prepare, you know, to set myself up. But somehow it's almost like, if you build it, they will come. So, I'm kind of in that really interesting space right now, which for me, reaffirms that I am doing what I'm supposed to be doing, that I am where I am supposed to be because there's a certain ease as if I'm, like, moving with the current of the water. I'm not fighting against it, and so to me it just really makes me feel good to know that I feel very clearly that I am on the path that I am supposed to be on for this journey.

N: And congratulations on your PhD. You just got it a few months ago, right?

J: Yeah, I earned my doctorate in Organizational Leadership in 2020 and that was another thing that I thought about from my earliest memories. Honestly, I mean from the days I was watching the Crosby Show, I was like I want to be a doctor. And I didn't know if I wanted to be a medical doctor or a PhD essentially, but, I mean I've been thinking about that since I was a child and I remember when I went to Hood and when I was wrapping up my master's. They didn't have the doctorate program at the time. But I knew I wanted to do my doctorate at that point. I didn't know how. I didn't know when. But what I did know was I really wanted to do it at Hood, and I pretty much was like praying and crossing my fingers that Hood would eventually have a doctoral program [Laughs], and somehow, I manifested that. It's a complete coincidence, but the fact that Hood ended up creating and starting their own doctoral program, it was perfect for me because that's really where I wanted to do it. And it was because I had such an amazing experience at Hood, and again, that really is the beginning of my journey as a teen mom, and there were so many people at Hood that provided the support that I needed so that I would become successful. I talk all the time about Dean Olivia White who pretty much was like, yeah, you are not going to become a victim of your circumstances. You're going to do the thing. And so, I knew that it was a safe and supportive space for me where I would be able to thrive. And it really just means everything to me that I was able to finish, start and finish my education with Hood.

N: That's great. So, as we head into the MCPRA 10 year anniversary, and you're one of those founding members, do you have any recommendations to our group, or words of wisdom, for all the other members? [Laughs]

J: Oh my gosh. So, I have to tell you, one, I just feel so incredibly proud of what MCRPA has become, because you were with me right there at the beginning when we started this. And one of—at least the vision that I had—was that the sign of a good quality program is that it can be built, and the people that built it, can walk away from it, and it will continue to thrive and grow and be a vibrant program that brings value to people. And so, the fact that we built something, that 10 years later is still going so strong, that so many folks at the institution value, that it has just continued to build momentum, and now some of the things that we had talked about almost 10 years ago, like the student scholarship are happening. We were talking about that for years. We knew that we wanted to accomplish that. And so, to see that it has happened, it is so heartwarming, and just, you know, to be a little selfish here, I mean I helped build this thing, right? Like to have created something that means something to people is really part of the legacy that you're leaving at the College, that I'm leaving at the College and so many others. I don't expect anybody to ever be like, oh, Ja'Bette Lozupone, she started this thing, you know, at the very beginning. And I don't need people to know that. But the fact that it's still here, and I mean right now, it looks like it could very well be here when I'm no longer here.

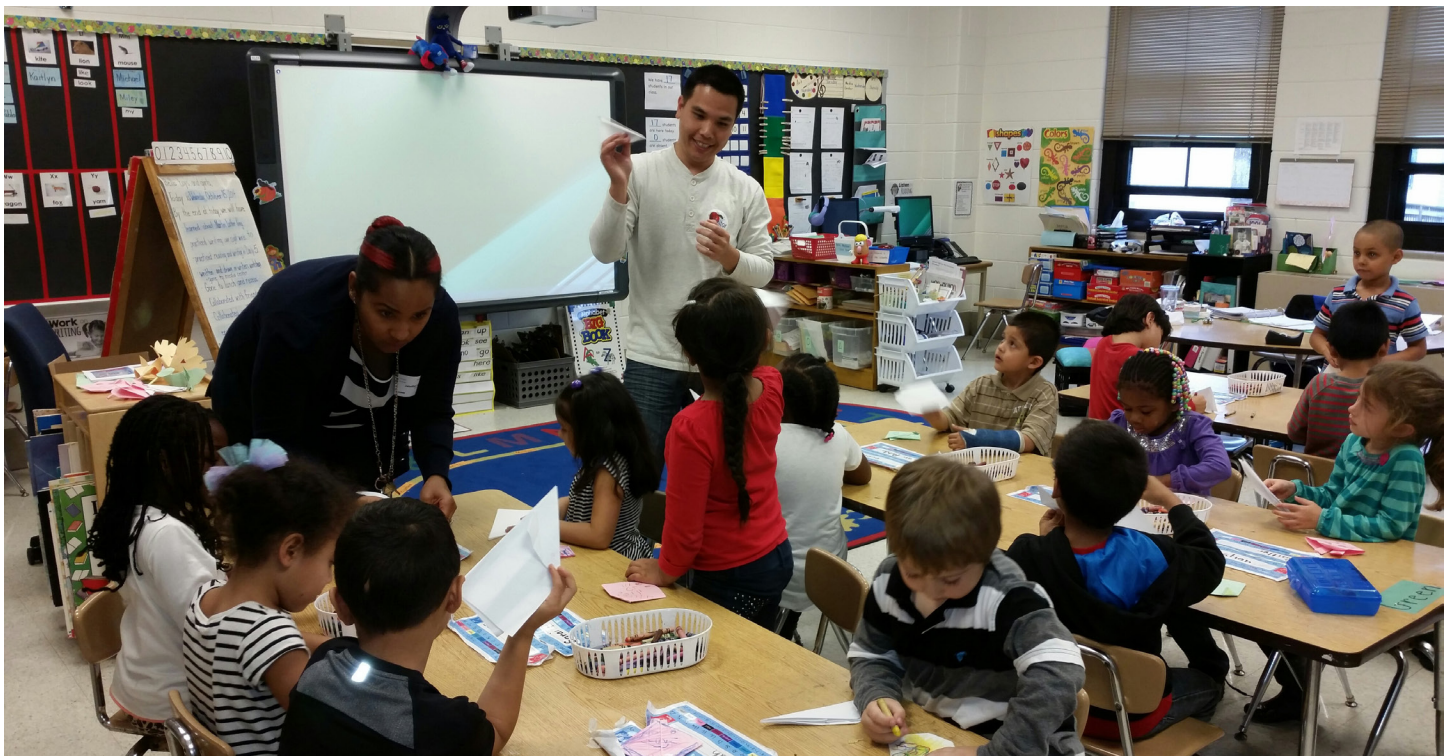
[Both laugh] Like it's going to outlive me maybe and that's really cool.

N: And looking ahead to the next 10 years. What do you think should be added or improved, or anything, changes...if any?

J: I think the sky is the limit, truly. I mean I think the only limitation is the limitation that anybody would put on it. Ideally, you know, one of the things that we used to talk about all the time that still hasn't happened, but I think needs to happen, and with time it will happen, is that MCRPA has the potential to be a national model for having affinity groups embedded into, obviously, higher education institutions. But I think that the model could be customized to work in all different types of settings. I think employees at the institution need something that is led by them, run by them, and not to take away from the importance of having, you know, an HR group or something like that, leading the way, but I think what makes MCRPA so special and so valuable and so impactful is the fact that it is run by employees. And so I think if we could bottle that up and get that resource into the hands of other organizations, I think it would do a lot of good. So, that's kind of like my big picture, that has always sort of been this burgeoning kind of dream from the very beginning. And there's no reason that can't happen.

N: Another thing is the Impostor Syndrome workshop that we've been doing with Student Affairs and the Office of Equity and Inclusion. It is also something that has been on our, you know, agenda. Now it has been accomplished, so that's also something that's exciting. Hopefully, we have more chances to work together with other departments.

J: Well, you know, it's so funny. I love working with folks across the College and partnering and collaborating. I think it really is the best way to develop strong relationships and to gain understanding about the importance and critical work that other parts of the College are doing. When I was talking with Jeanette in the equity office and she mentioned like, yeah, you know, we're thinking we want to do a workshop. We started talking about how we could bring students and employees



Nghi and Ja'Bette at the K to College event. 2015.

together, and something that would be relevant and kind of help humanize the employees, faculty, and staff for students. But then, also be something that everybody could take something away because that's part of what connects us as human beings, that experience as an imposter. And I was like, you know who we have to get in here? [Laughs] It's MCRPA. We really need to get MCRPA. This is the perfect topic to broach with this group because we are so focused on helping those that want to grow at the institution, and part of the struggle is really our own internal struggle, right?, with our confidence and, knowing that we're worthy of being in the spaces that we're in—especially when it's very easy to kind of get trapped in certain spaces, right? You're trying to grow, but now all a sudden, you've been labeled as a particular job title, and so you're wanting to step into other spaces and it can be incredibly difficult—especially if you internalize not believing that you belong in that space. If you don't believe that you belong in that space, other people won't either. So, it has to start with you and come from within, and I think that this workshop is just one of many that MCRPA is going to continue to build on in terms of doing really great rich programming that is college-wide, that steps out of just serving members of MCRPA, but really serving the larger institution.

N: Thank you so much for spending time with me today. I look forward to seeing you on part two of the Impostor Syndrome workshop, and then also at the Annual Retreat in May! And hopefully, you can make it to the anniversary event!

J: Yes, of course! I'm supposed to be there. [Laughs]



Group photo at the MCRPA Retreat. 2018.