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2021 Presidential Core Values Award for Leadership: Nivedita Hegdekar

May 05, 2021 | Jen Badie

A late bloomer on leadership, University Student Government Association president works with UMB administration to ensure that all student voices are heard on critical decisions.

To celebrate and promote the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) core values, the University hands out **Presidential Core Values Awards**, designed to recognize students, faculty, and staff who embody the seven values at the heart of UMB's mission: accountability, civility, collaboration, diversity, excellence, knowledge, and leadership.

Leadership Award Winner: *Nivedita Hegdekar, student, Graduate School and Francis King Carey School of Law*



Nivedita Hegdekar had no intention of pursuing an executive-level leadership role with the University Student Government Association (USGA). She was shy and introverted growing up, so the biochemistry and molecular biology student at the University of Maryland Graduate School didn't see herself as a leader.

But in 2017, when Hegdekar was a USGA senator, then-treasurer Alex San Nicolas nominated her as secretary. "A student leader saw something special and took a chance on me," Hegdekar said.

Now as president for the past two years, Hegdekar is a student advocate working closely with the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) administration to ensure that all student voices are heard on critical decisions.

She has led USGA during a turbulent year that has seen students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustice issues. USGA held listening sessions, created virtual events to keep students engaged, and reassessed its policies to make them more inclusive. She proposed creating a diversity, equity, and inclusion executive-level position and is leading the new USGA Equity Committee.

"The greatest challenge this past year was making sure that every UMB student felt heard and helped. I tried to address as many campuswide issues as possible," Hegdekar said. "We have also worked tirelessly to improve the culture of our campus."

Hegdekar has served on the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, where she has been instrumental in voicing student concerns and providing collaborative solutions, and on the search committees that chose the UMB president and chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer.

"When policies were being framed, it was important to make sure there was adequate student representation," said Hegdekar, who also is pursuing a master's degree in patent law at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law.

In addition to USGA, Hegdekar serves as a UMB representative on the University System of Maryland (USM) Student Council, where she plays an active role in addressing policies and issues that impact students across the USM system.

Cynthia Rice, director of student development and leadership, calls Hegdekar a responsible and caring leader.

"Instead of coming to UMB to only obtain a degree, she has been actively involved in leaving the University a better place than it was when she entered," said Rice, who nominated Hegdekar for the 2021 Presidential Core Values Award for Leadership.

Hegdekar says empathy has helped shape her into the leader she is today.

"Leadership is ultimately about serving others. It means motivating others and leading them in a direction that is compelling and inspiring. And empathy is the foundation of these actions," she said.

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Hegdekar has enjoyed working with students from across the UMB schools and student leaders from the USM institutions as well as UMB presidents Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, and Jay A. Perman, MD. And she is grateful to one person in particular: San Nicolas.

“His decision forever changed my life for the better,” she said.

Honorable mention: Robyn Palmeiro, LCSW-C, School of Medicine; Thomas Leone, UMB Police Department

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