

# Aya M. Waller-Bey

500 S. State Street | Suite 3126 LSA Building| Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1382  
awallerb@umich.edu

## EDUCATION

- 2025 University of Michigan (Expected)**  
Doctorate of Philosophy in Sociology  
**Research Areas:** Sociology of Education, Race and Ethnicity  
**Dissertation:** *Is It Worth It? Trauma Narratives in College Admissions Essays*
- 2021 University of Michigan**  
M.A. in Sociology | *Summa Cum Laude*
- 2016 University of Cambridge, Clare Hall**  
MPhil in Education (Arts, Creativity, Education, and Culture)| *Distinction*
- 2014 Georgetown University**  
B.A. in Sociology, Social Justice Concentration, Minor: African American Studies| *Cum Laude*

## PUBLICATIONS & WRITINGS

- Waller-Bey, Aya.** 2024. "Stop Telling Black Kids to Write about Trauma in their College Admissions Essays." *The Detroit Free Press*. September 2024. <https://www.freep.com/story/opinion/contributors/2024/09/25/black-students-college-race-conscious-admissions-essays-trauma/75281589007/>.
- Waller-Bey, Aya.** 2024. "I don't need to tell you my whole [story], even if I do have a story. I am here, and that's enough." Resisting Trauma Narration Expectations in College Personal Statements. *Social Problems*. Under review.
- Waller-Bey, Aya** and Sow Aminata. 2024. "Why We Cannot Afford Another Four Years of Trump." *Bridge Detroit*. July 2024. <https://www.bridgedetroit.com/opinion-why-we-cannot-afford-another-four-years-of-trump/>.
- Waller-Bey, Aya** 2024. "Conservatives' Anti-DEI Efforts Showcase America's Anti-Black Agenda." *Michigan Chronicle*. July 2024. <https://michiganchronicle.com/conservatives-anti-dei-efforts-showcase-americas-anti-black-agenda/>.
- Waller-Bey, Aya.** 2024. "Dr. Claudine Gay's Forced Resignation Highlights Anti-Blackness in Higher Education. *Michigan Chronicle*. January 2024. <https://michiganchronicle.com/dr-claudine-gays-forced-resignation-highlights-anti-blackness-in-higher-education/>
- Hamilton, Laura T., Caleb Dawson, Elizabeth A. Armstrong, and **Aya Waller-Bey.** 2024. "Racialized horizontal stratification in US higher education: politics, process, and consequences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 50.
- Waller-Bey, Aya.** 2023. A Big Problem With College Admissions Could About to Get Worse. *The Atlantic*. June 2023. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/06/affirmative-action-supreme-court-college-admissions-essays-trauma/674314/>.
- Waller-Bey, Aya.** 2023. "College Doesn't Have to be a Debt Sentence." *Michigan Chronicle*. November 2023. <https://michiganchronicle.com/college-does-not-have-to-be-a-debt-sentence/>.
- Waller-Bey, Aya.** 2021. The (T) Word: Resisting Expectations To Share Trauma In College Essay. *Forbes*. December 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/civication/2021/12/10/the-t-word-resisting-expectations-to-share-trauma-in-college-essays/?sh=69f01aee66a4>
- Waller-Bey, A.** 2020. Rediscovering Voices in Uncertain Times. *Contexts*, 19(4), 84–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504220977947>

**Waller-Bey, Aya.** 2019. Universities must do more for graduate students' mental health. *The Hechinger Report*. April 2019. Web. <https://hechingerreport.org/opinion-graduate-students-mental-health/>

**Waller-Bey, Aya.** 2016. Fighting the politics of access to higher education. *University World News* [World News] December 2016. <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20161205174452812>

**Waller-Bey, Aya.** 2016. Survivor's Guilt. *Huffington Post* [United Kingdom] May 2016. [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/gates-cambridge-scholars/survivors-guilt\\_1\\_b\\_9867786.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/gates-cambridge-scholars/survivors-guilt_1_b_9867786.html)

## TEACHING

- 2022 University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts: Democracy Lab Teaching Consultant
- 2022 Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America Summer Institute at **Princeton University**: Aspects of Leadership
- 2020 **University of Michigan**: Introduction to Sociology: Health and Society—SOC 302, Department of Sociology
- 2020 **University of Michigan**: Race and Ethnicity Learning Community, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (Training and Professional Development), The College of Literature, Science, and The Arts (LSA)
- 2019 **University of Michigan**: Law and Society—SOC 354, Department of Sociology
- 2019 Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America Summer Institute at **Princeton University**: Aspects of Leadership

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- 2024 **Waller-Bey, Aya.** “HBCU v. HPWI: Black Student Sense-Making of Narratives in College Essays,” Paper Presentation at the American Sociological Association. Montreal, Canada.
- 2024 **Waller-Bey, Aya.** “Storytelling in College Essays Post-SCOTUS” Presentation at SXSW EDU. Austin, Texas.
- 2023 **Waller-Bey, Aya.** “How Admissions Officers Make Sense of Black Trauma Narratives in College Admissions Essays. Paper Presentation at the American Sociological Association. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- 2023 **Waller-Bey, Aya.** [“No More Trauma: Pain Narratives in College Admissions Essays.”](#) Presentation at SXSW EDU. Austin, Texas.
- 2022 **Waller-Bey, Aya.** “I didn’t want it to be a sob story”: Black Student Identity Narration in College Personal Statements. Paper Presentation at the American Sociological Association. Los Angeles, California.
- 2022 Berman, Elizabeth and **Waller-Bey, Aya** “Not Even Five Percent”: Student Experiences of Racial Representation at the Post-Affirmative Action Flagship University.” Paper Presentation at the American Sociological Association. Los Angeles, California (selected).
- 2022 **Waller-Bey, Aya.** “I didn’t want it to be a sob story”: Black Student Identity Narration in College Personal Statements. Paper Presentation at the Pacific Sociological Association. Sacramento, California.
- 2020 **Waller-Bey, Aya,** Nojan, Saugher, Robinson, Candice, Tillman, Korey, Allen, Shaonta, Martinez, Rodrigo, Moody, Myles, Forbes, TehQuin, Joseph, Jalia . #SocAF: Building Community with an Online Presence. Workshop Presentation at the Pacific Sociological Association. Virtual.
- 2019 **Waller-Bey, Aya** and Harris, Sidney. “Colorblind Admissions: Black Student Self-Narration in U.S. University Admissions.” Paper. Sixth Annual ACGS Conference: Racial Orders, Racist Borders. Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

## INVITED TALKS & PRESENTATIONS

- 2024 Georgetown University Multicultural Graduation Ceremony Keynote. Washington, DC.
- 2024 Claremont McKenna College, The Future of Affirmative Action at Colleges and Universities: A Discussion. Claremont, CA.
- 2024 Rise Alliance, Law School Admissions Council Webinar, “Confronting Trauma Narratives in College Essays Post-SCOTUS.” Virtual.
- 2024 University of Michigan Career Center, “Skilled and Savvy: Contributing to a Diverse Workplace.” Ann Arbor, MI.
- 2023 University of Michigan Trotter Multicultural Center, “Trauma (Essay) Narrative Post Affirmative Action.” Ann Arbor, MI.
- 2023 Detroit College Access Network Keynote, “The Next Level: Trauma (Essay) Narrative Post Affirmative Action” Detroit, MI.
- 2023 Students of Color of Rackham (SCOR) “What’s Next?: The Future of DEI” Panel. Ann Arbor, MI
- 2023 Ed Reform Now College Advising Post-SFFF Advising Webinar: Great Lakes. Panelist. Virtual.
- 2023 Centering Black Children in Education Virtual Conference. “Navigating Graduate School.” Panelist. Virtual.
- 2023 Newlab. “The Future of Talent Post-Affirmative Action.” Detroit, MI.
- 2023 Ethics of Storytelling, National Association of Fellowship Advisors (NAFA) Keynote. New Orleans, LA.
- 2023 Voices of Social Equity- International Festival of Arts and Ideas. New Haven, CT.
- 2023 Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporate Leadership Development Committee *Build Your Pink & Green Resume* Workshop Panelist. Rochester, MI.
- 2023 Horizon Upward Bound Senior Weekend Keynote. Bloomfield Hills, MI.
- 2023 FLi Sci Research Scholars. Virtual
- 2023 Renaissance High School Senior Excellence Awards Celebration Keynote. Detroit, MI
- 2023 Detroit Rotary Club, “No Pain, No Gain: Sharing Trauma to Get In.” Keynote. Detroit, MI
- 2023 “The White Wall” Fireside Chat Conversation with *New York Times* Author Emily Flitter. Detroit, MI
- 2023 University of Michigan. OS DEI Committee Meeting Presentation. Ann Arbor, MI.
- 2022 [Is My Pain Your Gain?](#) TEDxDetroit. Detroit, MI
- 2022 “Narratives of Resistance: ‘I am here and that’s enough’—the Case of the College Essay” Creating Connections Consortium (C3) and Middlebury College. Virtual
- 2022 [“I am here and that’s enough” Narratives of Resistance.](#) University of Florida Center for Public Interests Communication, frank gathering. Virtual
- 2021 “To Share or Not to Share: Storytelling as Self-Advocacy,” Aspen Center of Physics Winter Conference. Virtual
- 2020 [“No Pain, No Gain: Sharing Trauma To Get In”](#): University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School King Talks. Ann Arbor, MI.

## INTERVIEWS

- Waller-Bey, Aya Interview with Andre Ash. Changing the Narrative on College Admissions Essay. *Michigan Chronicle*. September 6, 2023.
- Waller-Bey, Aya Interview with Stephen Henderson. “Why demanding Black students to share their trauma often reduces them to stereotypes.” Detroit Today. WDET, August 31, 20223.
- Waller-Bey, Aya Interview with Cherri Gregg and Avi Wolfman. “College Admissions Post Affirmative Action. Studio 2. WHYY.org. August 9, 2023.
- Waller-Bey, Aya. Interview with Saida Grundy. “How Clarence Thomas orchestrated a new obstacle for Black students. *The Guardian*. July 1, 2023.
- Waller-Bey, Aya. Interview with Jillian Berman. How college admissions will change in America after the Supreme Court knocked down affirmative action. *MarketWatch*. June 29, 2023.
- Waller-Bey, Aya Interview with Orlando Bailey. Trauma Narratives in College Admissions. Authentically Detroit Podcast. June 13, 2023.

## CITATIONS

- Murphy, James. I have a simple solution to the college essay problem. *Slate*. September 25, 2023.  
<https://slate.com/human-interest/2023/09/college-essay-personal-statement-narrative-common-app.html>

Downey, Maureen. Opinion: Will students of color face pressure to speak to toll of racism? *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*. July 24, 2023.

<https://www.ajc.com/education/get-schooled-blog/opinion-will-students-of-color-face-pressure-to-speak-to-toll-of-racism/ZLGM5TQ5PZHYNPWHRNZNIAAJM/>

Brownless, Scott. How Much Is Too Much Information In Your MBA Application? *Poets and Quants*. December 27, 2023. <https://poetsandquants.com/2023/12/27/how-much-is-too-much-information-in-your-mba-application/>

Ash, Andre. Changing the Narrative on College Admissions Essay. *Michigan Chronicle*. September 6, 2023.

Carroll, Tobias. The Current State of College Admissions is Even Frustrating Applicants From Affluent Families. *Inside Hook*. September 3, 2023. <https://www.insidehook.com/culture/college-admissions-affluent-families-frustrated>.

Rim, Christopher. Why The Common App College Essay Can't Be An Affirmative Action Loophole. *Forbes*. July 18, 2023. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christopherrim/2023/07/18/why-the-common-app-college-essay-cant-be-an-affirmative-action-loophole/>.

Starkman, Ruth. Let's Ditch the Personal Essay. July 10, 2023. [https://ruth.substack.com/p/lets-ditch-the-personal-essay?utm\\_medium=reader2](https://ruth.substack.com/p/lets-ditch-the-personal-essay?utm_medium=reader2)

Harper, Tyler. I Teach at an Elite College. Here's a Look Inside the Racial Gaming of Admissions. *The New York Times*. June 29, 2023. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2023/06/affirmative-action-ruling-race-conscious-college-admissions-essays/674590/>.

<https://signededucation.com/resources/lets-get-tactical-affirmative-action-and-diversity-essay/>

Wong, Matteo. The Supreme Court Killed the College-Admissions Essay. *The Atlantic*. June 30, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/29/opinion/college-admissions-affirmative-action.html>.

Gui, Melody. I don't want to sell my trauma to admissions. *Daily Trojan*. March 31, 2022. <https://dailytrojan.com/2022/03/31/i-dont-want-to-sell-my-trauma-to-admissions/>

## RESEARCH PROJECTS

**2020 – 2022** University of Michigan: **Research Assistant**  
*“Not Even Five Percent”: Student Experiences of Racial Representation at the Post-Affirmative Action Flagship University*

**2018 – 2019** University of Michigan: **Research Assistant**  
*Leaders and Laggards: Exp-g Variation in University Responses to Sexual Violence in a Changing Legal Environment*

**2015 – 2016** University of Cambridge: **Thesis**  
*Started from the Bottom, Now We're Here”: Exploring Hip-Hop's Usefulness and Barriers of Implementation within non-black Classrooms*

## AWARDS & HONORS

Gates Cambridge Impact Prize Nominee (2024)  
American Sociology Association Minority Fellowship Program (2024)

Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship (2023)  
Bouchet Honor Society Inductee (2022)  
NCID Anti-Racism Summer Research Grant (2021)

Rackham Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor Award (2021)  
Rackham Gupta Values Scholarship (2021)  
Sociology Department's Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor Award (2021)  
Non-Tradish, Inc. Scholarship (2020)  
Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship (2020)

University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School  
 International Travel Grant (2019)  
 Department of Sociology Travel Grant (2019)  
 University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School: The  
 Great Equalizer Award (2019)  
 University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School: The  
 Triumph Over Adversity Award (2019)  
 University of Michigan Students of Color of Rackham:  
 New Addition Award (2019)  
 University of Michigan Department of Sociology  
 Research Grant (2018)  
 Rackham Merit Fellowship (2018)  
 Department of Sociology Schweitzer Fellowship (2018)  
 University of Cambridge Distinction (2016)

University of Cambridge First Class Distinction on Thesis  
 (2016)  
 Gates Cambridge Scholarship (2015)  
 Lena Landegger Scholarship Award (2014)  
 Georgetown University: Katherine Kraft Medal (2014)  
 Georgetown Corp Coke Scholarship (2014)  
 Georgetown Terrance Davis Spirit Award (2013)  
 Teach for America Rising Fellow (2012)  
 Georgetown University Center for Multicultural Equity &  
 Access Pangaea Prize (2012)  
 GU Comunidad Scholarship (2010)  
 Georgetown Scholarship Program (2010)  
 Georgetown Community Scholar (2010)

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

The Kresge Foundation, *Troy, MI*

**Jun 2024 -Aug 2024**

### Education Team GSI

- Co-managed race-conscious admissions grantee portfolio; convened grantees and other relevant stakeholders to identify synergy, gaps, and opportunities for collaboration
- Met with local and national ecosystem members to support the development of an HBCU scholarship; designed methodology and criteria for scholarship through interviews and portfolio scans
- Briefed team on research reports and current developments in higher education

Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America Summer Institute, *Princeton NJ*

**June 2022-Jul 2022**

### Aspects of Leadership Facilitator (Academic Instructor)

- Led five weeks of instruction with 100 high-achieving historically underrepresented students from across the country providing training in ethical leadership, critical thinking, and text analysis on the campus of Princeton University
- Completed evaluations and assessments for Scholars according to the guidelines shared during training
- Participate in departmental meetings biweekly and interdepartmental meetings
- Seamlessly include LEDA visitors (e.g. staff, board members, funders) in the classroom during site visits,
- Fostered and participated in the larger LEDA community by attending key community events and collaborating with LEDA staff to provide holistic student support

Arizona State University: Office of University Initiatives (UI), *Tempe, AZ*

**Jul 2017 – Aug 2018**

### University Innovation Fellow

- Led university-wide collaborations on key issues—education access, workforce development, postsecondary diversity and inclusion—prioritized by the Office of the President
- Organized and implemented ASU’s bi-annual Frank Rhodes Lecture featuring Rebecca Winthrop, a senior fellow and director of the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution, boasted over 80 guests
- Convened two meetings with 32 diverse stakeholders across the university who engage with foreign guests and international programs/activities to build capacity; Curated and employed community-power problem solving exercises to share meaningful ideas and resources to solve the identified challenges of members
- Outlined key issues in the “New Higher Ed Advocacy Group Makes Nontraditional Students Its Priority” article and collaborated with UI’s research team to identify ASU’s resources that support nontraditional/post-traditional students. Collaborated with UI’s Design Specialist to develop a visual that highlights ASU’s resources and support for post-traditional students across the educational continuum

Georgetown University Office of Fellowships, Awards and Resources, *Washington, DC*

**Aug 2016-July 2017**

### Program Manager

- Advised eligible students on the Rangel, Soros, Gilman International Scholarship and Pickering Fellowship
- Partnered with program offices—Georgetown Scholarship Program, Center for Multicultural Equity & Access—to coordinate sessions and panel discussions to raise awareness of fellowships and the Carroll Fellow Program

- Supported the Carroll Fellows Initiatives Assistant Director with the CFI recruitment plan, management of information sessions, intake of CFI applications, and the establishment of the selection committee

Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America Summer Institute, *Princeton, NJ*

**Jun 2015 – Aug 2015**

**College Guidance Coordinator**

- Oversaw a 7-week intensive academic program of 100 high achieving, underrepresented high school juniors that provided training in ethical leadership, critical thinking, and analysis of multifaceted texts
- Conducted one-on-one guidance meetings with 50 Scholars on weekdays to support their college process
- Facilitated "Mock Admissions" College Guidance class of 50 Scholars

Georgetown University Office of Undergraduate Admissions, *Washington, DC*

**Jul 2014 – Jun 2015**

**Admissions Officer & Coordinator of Multicultural Recruitment**

- Reviewed applications for 1000+ candidates—Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana—made admissions decisions
- Met with prospective students and parents and informed them of University Admissions policies, procedures, academic programs, cost of attendance and all other matters related to choosing a college
- Oversaw 9 Alumni Admissions Program Committee chairs that manage 100+ alumni interviewers
- Represented Georgetown University at college fairs targeted towards first generation and low-income college bound students, and in other states, to facilitate outreach to underrepresented communities
- Coordinated admitted student weekends in March and April with the Center for Multicultural Equity & Access to invite accepted African American, Mexican American and Native American students to free, overnight visit
- Organized and conducted fall high school visits and met with counselors and prospective students of over 84 high schools in the Midwest

<b>SERVICE &amp; SELECTED ACTIVITIES</b>
--

**University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School King Talks Coach**

**Oct 2021-Jan 2024**

- Co-facilitated King Talks graduate student selection process
- Mentored and coached 3-6 graduate students through weekly meetings, practice talks, and public speaking training in support of university-wide TED talk like forum during university-sponsored MLK events

**College Admissions Storytelling Workshop**

**December 2022**

- Facilitated college essay workshop with 30 high school and seniors at local high school

**Conversation with Student Opportunities for AIDS/HIV Research (SOAR) Undergraduates**

**May 2022**

- Hosted intimate virtual conversation and interactive workshop about navigating graduate applications with undergraduate students at the University of Michigan

**College Admissions Storytelling Workshop**

**November 2021**

- Facilitated college essay workshop with 30 high school juniors and seniors at local teaching college

**Department of Sociology Graduate Admissions Committee**

**Dec 2020 – Feb 2021**

- Reviewed the applications for entry into the graduate program and the associated joint programs
- Actively participated in the student recruitment process and campus visit day

**Department of Sociology First Gen Student Affinity Group Co-Chair**

**Sep 2019 – May 2020**

- Collaborated with co-chair to design programs to connect first-generation graduate students in the department to resources, units, and people on campus to increase visibility of the first-gen graduate student experience

**Sociology Opportunities for Undergraduate Leaders (SOUL) Volunteer and Mentor**

**Oct 2018 – May 2020**

- Mentored undergraduate students and attend SOUL classes every fall to share my first-generation college story and advice to navigating higher education and post-graduate opportunities

**National Center for Institutional Diversity (NCID): Young, Gifted and Resilient**

**Sept 2019 – Nov 2019**

- Designed and facilitated conference to promote student mental health and wellness at the University of Michigan for undergraduate and graduate students
- Managed the @UMichStudents Twitter page of over 24K followers and live tweeted conference highlights

**Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America Policy Corp Member**

**Aug 2018 – May 2019**

- Selected through a competitive application process to engage with policymakers and represent LEDA and their communities at education policy convenings throughout the country

**The White House Summit on Advancing Postsecondary Diversity and Inclusion**

**Nov 2016**

- Invited to join scholars, practitioners and educators at the White House to discuss challenges and strategies to access, affordability, equity, and inclusion in higher education

**Georgetown University Affordability and Access Advisory Board Member**

**Oct 2016 – Jul 2017**

- Contributed to committee composed of students, faculty, staff, and administrators dedicated to examining critically the experiences of low-income and first-generation students and ensuring that all students regardless of socioeconomic status or background have the necessary tools and resources to succeed and thrive

<b>PROFESSIONAL &amp; ACADEMIC AFFILIATIONS</b>
---

Bouchet Honor Society  
 Ford Foundation Fellows  
 American Sociological Association

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated  
 Georgetown Alumni Club of Detroit  
 The Gathering Spot