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ALUM PROFILE



J'REYESHA BRANNON '15

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"A village raised me," says J'reyesha Brannon '15. A fourth-generation Portlander, the deep roots in her community shaped her varied interests and sense of civic duty. It also made University of Portland a natural fit. "With its Catholic basis, it had a familiar sense of morality, giving back, and altruism," she says. "Community service was always

part of my life." At the Shiley School of Engineering, Brannon was able to use her studies and experiences as a launchpad into a career rooted in both public service and a passion for environmental justice.

Her middle school robotics team originally got Brannon interested in engineering, and at UP she studied civil engineering with a goal of helping people through service and infrastructure. She had a solid base of encouragement from home and her local community, and small class sizes at Shiley meant that she had support from faculty, too. "My professors

all knew me," she says. "I wasn't just a number in class. If I was struggling, they knew. I felt cared for." She maintains a strong rapport with her professors—and close friends she made in the program—well into her career.

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Today, Brannon is a professional licensed engineer working as a Designer and Project Manager for the City of Portland Collections Systems Design Group. "It's not always the most glamorous work," she says, "but it's incredibly essential." Sewer management is not something folks often consider until something goes wrong, but with her work in environmental services, keeping Portland's rivers clean, handling storm water, and sewer infrastructure, Brannon's job is indeed critical. "We pick

projects where we have to fix something," she says, "most of the time in communities or assets that haven't been served in a while."

Brannon's public service doesn't end with her job. Most of her free time is spent volunteering and serving on multiple boards and committees, and she is President of the National Society of Black Engineers Portland Professionals Chapter (NSBE PRO-PDX). Brannon recalls growing up with a picture of Mae Jamison, the first Black female astronaut, on her wall. Today she notices a stark lack of representation in the field. "Most of my volunteer work comes from wanting to see a more diverse workforce in STEM," Brannon says. "I want more kids who look like me to go into these fields, but not just because they look like me. There are economic development opportunities for communities who have been excluded. There is access to the table where decisions are being made."

A legacy of Brannon's commitment to giving and uplifting others is the Brannon Diversity in Engineering Scholarship that she founded to support BIPOC female students at the Shiley School of Engineering. "During the pandemic, I had a feeling of wanting to do more," she says. "I know any sort of funding makes a difference,

especially with students who come from families with historic exclusion to wealth access." In 2021 she raised over \$8,000 and granted four scholarships. Beyond the financial support, Brannon makes her time available to students for career support—whether it's talking over coffee, resume reviews, or connecting them to internship opportunities. Her message to students, current and prospective, is: "You belong here."

