

Ingram Scholar Alumni Spotlight



LAUREN McCABE, Class of 2018

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DEGREES

B.S. Special Education, Vanderbilt University

M.Ed. Special Education, Vanderbilt University

CURRENT LOCATION

Nashville, TN

CURRENT EMPLOYER

Williamson County Schools

CURRENT OCCUPATION

High School Special Education Teacher

DESCRIBE YOUR CAREER PATH

My career path is defined by my Ingram experience and the scholar community. As a first year Ingram looking for service opportunities, the amazing fellow Ingram Scholar Abby Morgan connected me to Vanderbilt's inclusive higher education program Next Steps at Vanderbilt (Fun fact: Abby hosted me during finalist weekend, and we both eventually ended

up in the special education field together! The power of the Ingram community!). Next Steps at Vanderbilt provides a postsecondary college experience for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (<https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/departments/nextsteps/>). Although I had no previous experiences with this population, I decided to become a peer mentor supporting these students in inclusive spaces as part of the Vanderbilt community. From that first mentorship experience my career path became clear. I also owe much gratitude to former Interim Ingram Director and Vanderbilt Special Education Department Chair Joe Wehby, who helped guide me onto my academic path in majoring in Special Education with a focus on those students with the most complex needs after seeing how much I loved my Ingram work with the disability community. I became increasingly passionate and involved with not only Next Steps at Vanderbilt, but service and advocacy work within the greater Nashville and Tennessee disability and special education community for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

After my 2018 graduation, I decided to stay at Peabody to complete my M.Ed. in Special Education to gain more hands-on experiences in the areas of special education I am most passionate about: finding meaningful, equitable, and person-centered postsecondary outcomes for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities—motivated by the students in Next Steps at Vanderbilt. This meant in my research a focus on state-wide high school teacher training and technical assistance programs, disability policy opportunities at the state level focused on the adult service system, and coursework centered on individuals with disabilities having the most complex needs. Often referred to as the “special education cliff”, postsecondary navigation is not easy for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It is my goal to find meaningful employment, education, independent living, and community access opportunities for my students to find belonging in their adult lives, despite the complex system they are entering.

I recently have accepted a position in the greater Nashville area as a High School Special Education teacher (which means I get to continue on with amazing Nashville organizations I worked with since my days as a scholar like teaching piano at the W.O. Music School and spending time with my mentee little brother through Big Brothers, Big Sisters!).

HOW DID THE INGRAM SCHOLARS PROGRAM PREPARE YOU FOR WHAT YOU ARE DOING TODAY?

Ingram provided me not only my academic and professional career path, as described above, but the tools to look at each of my students and their unique personal and community-based needs. It prepared me to be their best advocate and teammate towards the futures they deserve. Through both the valuable hands on direct service experiences with this population and weekly Ingram meetings, I gained the analytical problem-solving skills that are critical when addressing issues in the fairly modern field of special education. Because of Ingram, I am not only committed to ensuring my students have equitable in classroom experiences, but also that I personally have an understanding of the policies, rights, and systems that will impact them after they leave.

IF YOU COULD DESCRIBE THE INGRAM SCHOLARS PROGRAM IN THREE WORDS WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

Community, Impactful, Motivating

WHAT DOES THE INGRAM SCHOLAR COMMUNITY MEAN TO YOU?

Everything! I am constantly inspired and motivated by each and every scholar. Their passion in diverse fields of impact continue to push me to think and grow in new ways. They are the most consistent community and I am indebted towards all the support I have received. I truly do not know what I would be doing today with the impact of Ingram on my life.

BEST INGRAM SCHOLAR MEMORY

My Ingram summer project in New York City solidified my interest and commitment to special education equity and advocacy work. So many of our special education students right in our backyards face injustices every day. Being able to create a sustainable resource to provide increased access to crucial technologies for special education students, as well as opportunities like participating in citywide advocacy efforts for increased accessibility in schools, gave me holistic hands on experiences surrounding the issues these students face. Being in the education field is a privilege and one that I strongly believe requires systems level understanding to ensure rights are being met. I will carry this student-centered, rights-based mindset with me as an educator. On a more general level, there was never a Wednesday afternoon I never looked forward to! Seeing my fellow scholars through conversation, learning, and shared experiences was the highlight of each week.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR CURRENT SCHOLARS WHO WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR INGRAM SCHOLAR EXPERIENCE?

Take the leap into areas of service and conversation you aren't familiar or comfortable with. I leaned into an area of service because of a fellow scholar's encouragement, and it led me down a career path I never would have imagined. I tried to challenge myself to learn from the areas of impact all my fellow scholars were touching because even if it wasn't directly education, I knew it would impact my students in some way.