



Philly Stanley

CS Major, Math minor

Hometown: Queens, NY

Previous Leadership Roles: Founder and Co-President of the Wellesley ColorStack Chapter, Social Chair, Vice President, and President of the Wellesley Caribbean Club, Match Secretary of Rugby, Ministrare in the Civic Engagement Office

Summer 2026: Software Engineering Intern at Upscale AI, Santa Clara, CA

\*Thank everyone for the opportunity to speak\*

I want to start by painting a picture of the household I grew up in.

At 19, my mom immigrated from Jamaica with very little and began building a new life for us. She chose to leave me behind in Jamaica with my grandmother while she adjusted to the new language and culture and figured things out that I realized many people would have given up on. By the time I immigrated here at 8 years old to live with her, she made sure I was well taken care of. Watching her do so, whether it was graceful or not, with so much quiet determination, is how I first learned what it means to not let your circumstances write your story for you.

But I also learned that there are real walls between where you start and where you want to go. And those walls aren't always about talent or effort. Sometimes they're just about money. About geography. About whether your family has a safety net when you need to take a risk.

That's the kind of context I carry with me and it's the reason I'm here today.

When I got an engineering internship at Northrop Grumman in Los Angeles the summer after my first year of college, I was proud. In my mind, it was a place where real engineering happens at a massive scale, and they wanted me there and that feeling was incredible. To me it was an accomplishment almost as exciting as getting admitted to Wellesley.

And then I did the math considering flights, housing, food, and transportation as a nondriver living in Los Angeles for three months making \$21.75 per hour and with my mom also supporting our family which had grown to four back home. The numbers didn't work and this wasn't a situation where I could just figure it out.

I needed real support and was panicking until I learned about WSAS. What struck me immediately was how responsive and ready Kat Longee and Catherine Kefalas were. There was no runaround and no making me feel like I was asking for too much. WSAS truly showed up for me. And it wasn't just the big things. The Amazon gift cards helped cover the unexpected costs that quietly crept up, the things you don't think to budget for until you're already stretched thin, like cleats or gloves. Those small gestures signaled that someone had actually thought about what students like me really need.

That first summer, I showed up in LA knowing I had been given a real shot. I remember thinking *this is what I'm supposed to be doing*. Not just the technical work, but just gaining the experience of being in a professional environment and feeling ready. I was a college student from Queens, New York, an immigrant, and sitting at that table with real engineers and professionals who could open doors for me. And I never forgot that WSAS helped me get through that door in the first place.

So when given the opportunity to return for a second summer, I took it. I worked with another team that my previous mentors and manager thought aligned more with my interests, and this time, I came back with more confidence and a clearer sense of what I wanted to get out of the experience. I knew the environment and how to ask better questions, and I had relationships to build on. That second summer further enabled my understanding of how I could build a successful career and life for myself. And it was because when I reached out to WSAS again, it came through.

Spending two summers back to back in Los Angeles doing engineering work at one of the most well-known aerospace and defense companies in the world is not something I could have made happen on my own. We talk a lot about hard work and merit, which I do believe in deeply, but I also know that hard work doesn't always get you across the finish line when the finish line requires resources you don't have. WSAS was the bridge that made it possible for me to compete on an even playing field and the bridge for many other students like myself.

When I think about what those two summers gave me beyond the resume lines, I think about the proof they gave me that I could walk into a room full of experienced engineers and hold my own and proof that my background didn't disqualify me from anything. If anything, they gave me a work ethic and a sense of gratitude that I carry into every room I enter.

To the chairs in this room: what you are building and sustaining matters in ways that are hard to fully quantify. You're not just funding trips. You're funding trajectories and moments for a student to realize they belong in spaces they were never sure they'd get access to. That's what happened to me. Twice. The senior gift was a final reminder, at the end of this chapter, that WSAS was still thinking about us even as we were walking out the door. Five hundred dollars to a new grad navigating the next step means more than it might seem from the outside.

But honestly, their support did not stop there for me. I just requested \$7,500 to help me actually get to Santa Clara this summer. A plane ticket, finding an apartment, a security deposit, groceries, and other things one might need while waiting on their first paycheck is a lot. While the startup I will be working at, Upscale AI, offered me a great opportunity to start my career, getting there and keeping myself stable while I got on my feet was a whole other thing. But even now, I knew I could reach out to WSAS one more time and they would not make me feel small for asking. And that meant everything.

And to the alumni: thank you for staying connected to this community. It shows students like me that there's a path forward, and while I am still walking mine, I am so grateful I didn't have to do it alone.

Thank you.