

# What Does It Mean To Be A “sHERO”?

By Olivia Beach, CAPAW INTERN

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The sHERO program was designed to foster increased levels of self-confidence, conscious choices in both professional and personal life, positive social impacts around racism, the influence of others for a better chance of success, and mastery of professional relationships for women of color who have been working professionally for less than five years. From the most recent sHERO class of 2022, Diari Toure and Michelle Burris have shared with me their sHERO experiences and the impact the program has had on them as young, professional women of color.

Diari grew up in Guinea and came to the U.S. for college. This big life change left her feeling out of place and very aware of the fact that she was different than the American kids she was going to school with. This led to her being extremely shy, especially in the classroom. Wanting to do things differently in law school, Diari says the sHERO program could not have come at a better time. When asked to describe her experience she responded with one word: growth. The growth she experienced resulted in a transformation of her mindset and confidence. Rather than allow the fact that she was different hold her back from doing things, she came to the conclusion that she could simply do them differently. When her mindset had become her own worst enemy, the sHERO program opened her eyes to the fact that life is so much bigger than many of the small problems we allow to consume us. Now, finding confidence in being different, Diari talks openly about her experiences in hopes of influencing other young women of color while sharing her newfound wisdom about self-care, confidence, and mindfulness. Having finished her first year of law school, Diari is no longer afraid to be called on in class and has taken on leadership roles to foster community and further her ability to encourage other young women of color to be confident in their difference. Working toward leaving a legacy of happiness, helpfulness, and experience, Diari hopes to bring all the lessons she has learned in the sHERO program to her efforts of aiding the development of her home country.

Another testament to the reach of the sHERO program, Michelle Burris grew up in the D.C. area where she quickly became familiar with the impact of educational disparities, racism, and underfunding. She took these experiences and observations to college where she studied educational equity, race, and education at Spelman College—a historically Black liberal arts college for women—with the hopes of one day being able to make an impact on her community. Her time at Spelman and experiences with Black women in professional spaces reaffirmed her journey to empower other young women of color to pursue their goals. Michelle described what it meant to be a sHERO by saying it is about women of color finding strength and ability within themselves, their professional development, and their community. Having flow at work and being able to reflect on where you are in your professional development journey as well as your next steps, the need for self-care both in the workplace and in your personal life, and the ability to create your own definition of success were just a few of the lessons Michelle found essential to her sHERO experience. Perhaps one of the most impactful lessons Michelle shared with me was the idea that work does not have to become your identity, rather, we should learn how to connect our identity and life purpose to our work. Imparting this wisdom on others is one of Michelle’s biggest goals as she continues to cultivate her leadership development by resisting society’s definition of success and societal timelines to accomplish such. Through her efforts to encourage other women of color to define success on an individual level while dismantling boundaries about what success looks like and creating a space for women of color to celebrate each other, Michelle is well on her way to leaving an impactful legacy on this world and her community.

About the Author: Olivia Beach is a second-generation Vietnamese American currently residing in Allen, Texas. She is a rising senior at Villanova University majoring in Political Science and minoring in Peace and Justice. After graduation she is looking to attend law school and find a career in public policy.