On February 17, 2018, Monica Fray, a junior BSW student, won Miss Black OU at the Black Student Association’s Mister and Miss Black University of Oklahoma 2018 Scholarship Pageant. Her platform was "Not Alone" and focused on mental illness in college students with an emphasis on students of color. You can find her essay below. Way to go Monica!
NOT ALONE
ENDING THE STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

Monica Fray
CONTESTANT #1
2018 Miss Black OU Pageant
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Our Lives Begin to End the Day We Become Silent About Things That Matter.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The name of my platform is "NOT ALONE". This initiative is focused on bringing awareness to the experience that many black students have when attending a primarily white institution (PWI) like the University of Oklahoma and the mental tenacity required to be successful. Many students are in a stage of life where they are trying to not only gain a sense of identity but also face the reality of being Black in America. My mission is to bring attention to the increased stress many black students are under at PWIs while also promoting the need for mental health care reform at OU.

Here at the University of Oklahoma, statistics show that black students represent the lowest percentage of students who graduate within four years. Our white students are 37% more likely to graduate sooner, incur less financial debt, and enter the work place before their black cohorts, all things which contribute to an increase of stress. My goal is to let other black students know that they are "NOT ALONE". I was once an 18-year-old black student at a PWI who failed out after my first year and ended up joining the military to run away from my problems. I could never run fast or far enough. I suffered in silence with depression and anxiety for many years. Fortunately, I had people in my life who told me that I was "NOT ALONE." They supported my decision to seek treatment, a decision which ultimately saved my life.

As the next Miss. Black OU I will work as an Advocate of mental health care. I will seek out grants and sponsors who can help me break barriers black students have in obtaining access to mental health care. Black students are faced with an increased resistance to seeking treatment and the fees attached to mental health care at Goddard can be used as a barrier. Through my platform "Not Alone" I will ensure that no black student at Oklahoma University feels like that are not equipped to face life's challenges. I want to use my platform to let the black students know that they are "Not Alone" and that seeking help is not a sign of personal weakness. Without mental health, we cannot be fully healthy.