



CONNECTIONS

Growing in Strength, Leadership, and Vision



Unlocking Doors to a Brighter Future

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Education Is An Ornament In Times Of Prosperity And A Shield In Times Of Adversity

By Grantley S. Adams

"My grandfather didn't understand why my father studied so hard but my father had others to encourage him to pursue his degree." – Dr. Duncan Harris

Connecticut Talent Assistance Cooperative (CONNTAC) held its 48th Annual Breakfast Meeting on Friday, October 16, 2015. The audience filled the room, as usual, and for those of us who have attended previous Annual Breakfast Meetings the stage was set for another

series of inspiring, enlightening, emotionally gratifying presentations that will be made not only by those deserving students who will, on this day, be awarded scholarships but also by the other designated speakers who will take the podium. There was a sense of anticipation in the air.

The theme of this year's meeting, **"Strengthening our Bond, Role and Partnerships,"** was manifested by the people seated at the

tables who represented a broad spectrum of organizations and institutions.

After Ms. Cecilia Nugent, Executive Director of CONNTAC, presented her report on the year's outstanding achievements through the work that is done at the organization's Educational Opportunity Centers located within ten of Connecticut's Community Colleges, Board member Ana Gonzalez took to the podium to introduce the Keynote Speaker, Dr. Duncan Harris, Dean of Student Affairs and Interim Academic Officer of Manchester Community College.

Dr. Harris thanked the CONNTAC Board for the invitation and then acknowledged several friends and colleagues who were in the audience. He however, singled out Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, President of Capi-



From left to right: Lawrence Hall, Dr. Duncan Harris, & Kenneth G. Armstrong

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tal Community College for being "A role model, mentor and friend who opened the door for me." He acknowledged that Dr. Nieves was especially helpful in advising him and very instrumental in guiding him along his career path that enabled him to get to where he professionally and to some extent, personally resides.

Dr. Harris also proclaimed that he is a believer in CONNTAC's goals, "This is a noble organization that is committed to the citizens of our state. The members 'roll their sleeves up' to ensure that the individuals they serve, as the theme for today suggests, have **ACCESS**, and what we have begun to ensure beyond access, **SUCCESS**, in educational endeavors. I am a true believer in our TRIO programs and am aware of the transformative impact they have on the lives of their participants." He then shared with the audience the following CONNTAC 2015 statistics:

- CONNTAC served 3,207 participants of which 83% were low-income, first-generation college bound students.
- CONNTAC serves approximately 300 participants in each of the 10 service areas within the state.
- Nearly 65% of students who did not have a secondary school diploma actually went on to receive a secondary school diploma or its equivalent during the project year.

Harris then returned to his theme of **ACCESS** and **SUCCESS**, which he then placed into the context of ME, YOU and WE. He began by defining ME. He said, "ME is about the

two people who had the greatest influence on education in my life- George and Gloria- my parents." George, the tenth of 12 children hailed from Opelika, Alabama. His father, a sharecropper moved his family north to New Haven, CT, in the late 1930's, in search of better opportunity. George was lucky to be enrolled in public schools since his older siblings, while in Alabama, were not able to attend school because they had to work the farm. George ultimately graduated from Hillhouse High School, after a short stint in the Army, he went on to Southern Connecticut State University, received his degree in Elementary Education, became a teacher and then went on to complete a master's degree in School Administration at the University of Bridgeport. George later became a school principal, then assistant superintendent of schools for New Haven and then he received an offer for a doctoral fellowship at Michigan State University. "He accepted the fellowship and moved there with the love of his life Gloria, and two young boys, recognizing that **ACCESS** to this educational opportunity was worth uprooting his family and leaving the comfort the Elm City had provided all of these years."

Gloria came from the small Caribbean island of Nevis, near St. Kitts. She was orphaned at the age of twelve and she and her sister were taken in by an aunt and uncle, Bob and Lilian Williams, who owned a corner store, Bob's Groceries, on Dixwell Avenue. Gloria also attended Hillhouse High School and after graduating, met George and they got married shortly thereafter. "She wanted to be a homemaker,

to provide her children with the parental presence and security she never had. She put her all into raising her three boys and is in large part the reason I was able to read by the age of three and know my multiplication tables by age five. I hope that you can see that the liberation - **ACCESS** to education - provides is a part of my family history and an integral part of me. Something I am committed to providing to others."

Dr. Duncan Harris then moved on to the YOU in his ME, YOU and WE construct. The YOU in his presentation refers to students who were being honored by CONNTAC with scholarships. After acknowledging them, he said, "You are the ones smart and brave enough to ask for support from the CONNTAC program. It's not always easy to ask for help or to admit we don't know something. Some of you are parents, some of you are the first in your families to attend college, some of you are returning to school after being away for some time, and some of you have had to work through certain things in your life to be in a position to be in school right now." He then asked the YOUs to copy and keep the following quote from Aristotle that someone had shared with him years earlier, when he was about to leave for college:

"EDUCATION IS AN ORNAMENT IN TIMES OF PROSPERITY AND A SHIELD IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY."

Lastly, Harris addressed the WE in his paradigm. WE, according to the Dean, are the College presidents, administrators, board members, family members, faculty, counselors - these individuals are all



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here to support the YOUs. To open doors for you if you do your part - study hard, trust our counsel, be a responsible citizen - we will bend over backwards to see you SUCCEED. That's who WE are and what we are committed to doing for you.

In concluding his remarks, Dr. Duncan Harris told the CONNTAC students in the room that in the ME section of his presentation he had shared something of himself so that hopefully, some of them would see themselves in him and his story and recognize the value of education and what it means for them, their families and their future.

He then closed with, "YOU are in

the right place at the right time and have made the right decision to connect with CONNTAC. The recognition being bestowed upon you today is an affirmation that others see great potential in you. Don't let them or yourself down by not doing your best and giving it all you have. **WE** are here to support you in your academic pursuits, and as you saw just now are literally, and figuratively, willing to stand up for you and ensure you not only have **ACCESS** but also the support to achieve **SUCCESS** in your educational endeavors. **WE** have high expectations of you and take great delight in seeing you accomplish your goals. Know that we expect, and look forward to **YOU** becoming a part of the **WE** in the future."

After we heard the uplifting stories of determination, inspiration and survival from the scholarship recipients, the Friend of CONNTAC Award was presented to Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, President of Capital Community College. Then, the President of CONNTAC, Inc., Mr. Kenneth G. Armstrong, with his customary flair and insightful eloquence, presented his closing remarks.

Another CONNTAC Annual Breakfast Meeting has ended and it did not disappoint, many of us in the audience felt that familiar feeling of emotional warmth, satisfaction and pride in being connected with an organization that changes lives.

My Year In The Arnold L. Mitchem Leadership Institute

By Erica Coleman

During the past year, I had the opportunity to participate in the New England Educational Opportunity Association's (NEOA), Arnold L. Mitchem Leadership Institute. The Leadership Institute is designed to engage participants in building strong leadership skills that will, in turn, enhance their ability to expand educational opportunities for the students with whom they work. The Institute was a year-long commitment which allowed us to explore leadership styles and practice, while working with experts from both within and outside of the TRIO/GEAR UP/EOP community.

I was in a class with a diverse group of twelve individuals/col-

leagues, from all over New England, who I now call friends. We were engaged in a great deal of reflection, providing support along with constructive feedback, revealing vulnerability, and sharing ideas and goals. The Leadership Institute further developed my confidence and knowledge and gave me a strong, resourceful support system to build on throughout the rest of my career. It was truly an enriching experience, and I learned a lot about myself as a person and a professional.

My most successful accomplishments during this period of review were upholding my promotion as CONNTAC Inc.'s Lead Educational Counseling Coordinator and grad-

uating from the NEOA Arnold L. Mitchem Leadership Institute. I believe that my motivation and commitment to CONNTAC-EOC and all of the Educational Opportunity Programs helped me in achieving these goals. Learning new ways to advocate for myself, the students, and our programs continue to be a daily personal mission. In addition, the President and the Executive Program Director of CONNTAC-EOC have aided me in achieving these goals by including me in the process of training new staff and conducting major presentations at College Fairs and similar events. Their on-going support and encouragement is always appreciated and valued.



Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, Recipient Of 2015 Friend Of Conntac Award

By Grantley S. Adams

Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, President of Capital Community College is the recipient of the 2015 Friend of CONNTAC Award and was presented with his honor during the organization's 48th Annual Breakfast Meeting on Friday, October 16, 2015.

Dr. Nieves in his acceptance speech proclaimed that he was humbled by this special honor and that it was wonderful to share the day with the CONNTAC scholarship recipients - who inspire. He told the students, "You never know who will touch your life, CONNTAC opens doors, and we have to be portals - to open doors." He shared that in his youth, he was an Upward

Bound and Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) Counselor, and he reflected on his parents who instilled in him the value of education and the value of taking risks.

The Friend of CONNTAC Award, he said, is very personal to him especially because of the special relationship he has had with CONNTAC. "Being a friend of CONNTAC is special to me, the gift reinforces who I am as I continue to grow."



From left to right: Cecilia F. Nugent, Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, & Kenneth G. Armstrong

Connecticut's College Goal Sunday

By Shoshannah Henry

Connecticut College Goal Sunday is an annual event that college bound students and their parents attend for hands-on assistance with completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The financial aid process can be a stressful experience, especially for those who may have never done it before.

During College Goal Sunday, financial aid experts and professionals volunteer to help in demystifying the ins and outs of college expenses, scholarships, and programs on the federal and local levels that are available to help pay for school. Students and their parents are

often unsure how to interpret the data required, in order to receive federal, state, or college financial aid. Students learn about resources they can utilize to make funding their education as uncomplicated as possible.

This year, 15 events were hosted across the state of Connecticut. In January 2016, staff and counselors of CONNTAC-Educational Opportunity Center continued to carry on the tradition of being a part of the Connecticut College Goal Sunday initiative, and served as a helpful community resource for completing the FAFSA accurately and avoiding common errors, thus

making a better experience for families.



Photo Above: Educational Counselor, Shoshannah Henry helps a family get started on their FAFSA

2014-2015 Scholarship Recipients *(Continued from Page 4)*

Chelsea Austin • *Attending Three Rivers Community College*

Field of Interest: *Business Administration*

CONNTAC Representative: *Gloria Dover*



Chelsea is a mother of six children, and she is determined to be someone that her children can look up to and follow in her footsteps. After experiencing obstacles including, she and her husband being laid off in 2011, she found herself with little ambition and security. Then, in 2012, her oldest child went off to college and her youngest child started kindergarten. She knew that it was the perfect time to continue her education. In addition to her studies, Chelsea is in the work-study program at TRCC, and she is the youth group leader at Prince of Peace Church. She expresses gratitude for her CONNTAC Counselor, Gloria Dover, for discussing scholarship opportunities with her and how to apply. "Gloria has inspired and encouraged me every step of the way. She has instilled in me the drive to continue to succeed in the pursuit of my goals." She explains that the scholarship will assist her with tuition

and college costs.

Hope Baum • *Attending Charter Oak State College*

Field of Interest: *Psychology*

CONNTAC Representative: *Maldresa Pu'Sey*



Hope graduated from Manchester Community College last year, and she is currently pursuing her Bachelor's degree in Psychology with a concentration in Social/ Behavioral at Charter Oak State College. In 2012, she was diagnosed with Stage II breast cancer. She ended up taking a few semesters off from college in order to receive numerous cycles of chemotherapy and radiation therapy treatments. As a divorced, single mother of five children, she was determined to return to college with the support and encouragement of her children. Hope explains that she works extremely hard to balance her college education, her children's education, and life. Through all of her hardships, she is committed to becoming a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist so that she can help families. Hope shares that the scholarship will help her with rent, utilities, books, and a new laptop.



2014-2015 Scholarship Recipients *(Continued from Page 5)*

Dewayne Demace • Attending Gateway Community College

Field of Interest: Social Work

CONNTAC Representative: Margarita (Daisy) Aiken



Dewayne is a first-year student at Gateway Community College. He has had to reside with his grandmother because his father is incarcerated and his mother is battling cancer. Dewayne is the first person in his family to attend college, and he looks forward to providing a better life for his family. In high school, he was a member of the Varsity Football and Track & Field Teams for all 4 years and the Basketball Team for 3 years. In addition to his involvement in athletics, he held a seasonal part-time job. Dewayne thanks his CONNTAC Counselor, Daisy Aiken, for helping him step by step with the financial aid process. "Daisy and I spoke at length regarding my education and career goals, and she offered me very valuable information that I used to guide my decisions." Dewayne shares that the scholarship will assist him with costs

associated with attending college.

Yanyi Lam • Attending Stony Brook University

Field of Interest: Chemical and Molecular Engineering

CONNTAC Representative: Margarita (Daisy) Aiken

Yanyi is a first-generation student who attends Stony Brook University in New York. After overcoming obstacles including, her arduous Physics course and time management, Yanyi managed to graduate from East Hampton High School with high honors. She juggled an extremely busy schedule working over 40 hours each week in her parents' restaurant, being an active member on the math team and interact club, and keeping up with school and homework. She expresses gratitude to her CONNTAC Counselor, Daisy Aiken, for assisting her with the stressful college process. "Daisy and my guidance counselor helped me with completing the FAFSA and choosing a major based on my interests." Yanyi says that working with her parents has allowed her to see how much sweat and effort they put into every dollar they earn, and the scholarship will help with college costs to reduce added strain on them.

2014-2015 Scholarship Recipients *(Continued from Page 6)*

Essence McVay • Attending Norwalk Community College

Field of Interest: Education

CONNTAC Representative: Laura Blackwell



Essence has overcome many obstacles to be where is today but she has never allowed that interfere with her education. She believes education is the key to success and that many are blessed to have it. She thanks her CONNTAC Counselor, Laura Blackwell for helping her with financial aid, fee waivers for college applications and giving advice for college. After Essence graduates Norwalk Community College, she plans to become a teacher and give her and her family a better life. She shares that this scholarship will help her with college expenses.

Elizabeth Revangil • Attending University of Connecticut

Field of Interest: Political Science

CONNTAC Representative: Laura Blackwell



Elizabeth is a Political Science major at the University of Connecticut in Stamford. She is the youngest of five children born to Haitian natives. She explains that her parents moved to the United States to go to school and live the "American Dream." Elizabeth says that she watched her parents sacrifice as they work full-time and attend school simultaneously. They have always encouraged their children to do their best as well, because it will lead to a brighter future. Elizabeth has made her mark on her school and the community through volunteering at the Food Bank of lower Fairfield County every Friday, volunteering at Dolan Middle School helping kids create their own newspaper, and by being a proud member of the Build On Club. She gives thanks to her CONNTAC Counselor, Laura Blackwell, for helping her with completing the

FAFSA, exploring scholarship opportunities, giving career advice, and answering all of her questions. "Mrs. Blackwell's ability to understand my situation, her patience, and her expertise has made my dream of going to college a reality." Elizabeth says that the scholarship will assist her with purchasing books and other college necessities.



2014-2015 Scholarship Recipients (Continued from Page 7)

Jania Ross • Attending Central Connecticut State University

Field of Interest: Social Work

CONNTAC Representative: Margarita (Daisy) Aiken



Jania is a recent graduate of Middlesex Community College, and she currently attends Central CT State University. She describes herself as a student who had to overcome many personal obstacles in her journey of personal discovery. She explains that many adults in her life had given up on her, and forced various stereotypes upon her. She says, "I was looking for someone to believe in me for years, but because of my rebelliousness, my potential went unnoticed for quite some time. Now, I have transitioned from a defiant teenager in an alternative school who simply existed, into a young woman that strives for her future and stands up for others." Jania enjoys extracurricular activities including, singing in the choir, reading in the book club, and photography. She expresses extreme gratitude for her CONNTAC Counselor, Daisy Aiken, for providing a fee waiver for her college application and re-

assuring her in her transition from MxCC to CCSU. "Daisy made the experience and any worries that I had about the opportunity vanish within minutes of talking with her. Her smile is one that I will always remember." Jania shares that the scholarship will help her alleviate some of the financial burden that she is experiencing.

Nashay Smith, Prospect, CT • Attending University of Connecticut

Field of Interest: Communications

CONNTAC Representative: Jay Holley



Nashay transferred from Manchester Community College after earning her Associate's degree and is now in her first semester at the University of Connecticut. In 2009, her father passed away in a car accident. The following year, her mother was laid off from her job and the family began to struggle financially. Nashay did not allow the financial hardships to derail her education, career, and personal goals. She worked at the Kevin Ollie Summer Basketball Camp, and she has applied to be manager of the UConn Men's Basketball team. Nashay also volunteers at the Greater Hartford Pro-Am and the Doc Hurley Basketball Tournament every year. Additionally, she has volunteered at the Evening of Fine Wines and held the Treasurer's position of the Student Government Association at Manchester Community College. She expresses appreciation for her CONNTAC Counselor, Jay Holley, for providing application fee waivers and for offering advice regarding information about the colleges she applied to, financial aid, and grades. She shares that the scholarship will assist with the cost of tuition.

2014-2015 Scholarship Recipients *(Continued from Page 8)*

Ronald Tasker • Attending Manchester Community College
Field of Interest: Drug and Alcohol Recovery Counseling
CONNTAC Representative: Ruth Baez



Ronald is a Drug and Alcohol Recovery Counseling major with ultimate dreams of earning his Master's degree in this field that he is so passionate about. He has been faced with numerous obstacles as he is in recovery from alcohol and drug addiction, he has been homeless, and he is an ex-offender. As a result of his addiction, he has lost a house, car, a wife, and jobs. Ronald has been commendably clean and sober since July 2012. He has a passion to help others coming out of prison and/or struggling with addiction to integrate back into society and become productive members of society. He wants to teach them about addiction, recovery, being parents to their children, sons and daughters to their parents, and good spouses to their significant others. He credits his CONNTAC Counselor, Ruth Baez, with assisting

him with applying for financial aid and getting the funding in order to make college a reality. "I am very pleased with the help that Ruth was in navigating through the process." Ronald explains that the scholarship will help with paying for classes.

Maria Teixeira • Attending University of Saint Joseph
Field of Interest: Special Education
CONNTAC Representative: Arlette Taylor



Maria is a Special Education major at the University of Saint Joseph who believes it is her calling to work with children with disabilities. At the age of ten, her father passed away and her mother was left to raise three children on her own. She explains that times were not easy living off of one paycheck in addition to English being her mother's second language. Later, she experienced additional hardships as her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer during her senior year in high school. Maria stepped up to the plate as a caregiver for her mother while finishing high school and going through the college application process. She expresses extreme appreciation for her CONNTAC Counselor, Arlette Taylor, for guiding her through the application and financial aid processes. "Ms. Taylor took the time to answer every little question in order to ensure that I understood everything." Maria explains that the

scholarship will assist with the cost of tuition and books, and it will get her one step closer to being the first person in her family to graduate from college.

Alumni Spotlight

This year two CONNTAC - Educational Opportunity Center alumni were selected to attend the Council for Opportunity in Education's (COE) 36th Annual Policy Seminar to share their stories of success as TRIO students, with Connecticut's Congress and Senate members' Legislative Aides.

"Venturing to Washington!" *By Travis Brivett*

I am forever grateful and blessed to have been chosen to receive the CONNTAC Educational Opportunity Center Scholarship in 2003, to attend college. I am also eternally thankful that I, as well as fellow alumnus Jamar T. Brown, were asked to attend the CONNTAC Educational Opportunity Center Program in Connecticut. I am so impressed to have been informed that the Educational Opportunity Centers as well as the Student Support Services Programs continue to offer services to several high schools and colleges. This way, students know that they are being supported when they encounter academic difficulties. They are also able to seek out programs to financially assist them while



From left to right: Alumni Jamar T. Brown & Travis Brivett

seeking a college to attend, to further their educational goals. I'm glad I received the opportunity to share, directly with the members of the Congress and Senate about the benefits I received as a student from the above services. Therefore, they are aware of the necessity of the programs that TRIO offer that have been and can still be of benefit to others through their supportive assistance. I will forever cherish the opportunity I received

to tell others of the way my life has been positively influenced by receiving the services that TRIO programs like CONNTAC Educational Opportunity Center and the Student Support Services Program offer.

"From Lee Avenue to Capitol Hill" *By Jamar T. Brown*

The event was powerful, educational and inspiring and it allowed me to gain a greater

Alumni Spotlight

understanding of the federal legislative process. I truly see the importance and power of the VOTE. It was an incredible experience to share my success story on a national platform. In doing so, I believe we must continue to campaign for the future of the people. The Council for Opportunity in Education's 36th Annual Policy Seminar affords the TRIO and GEAR UP communities the opportunity to help educate Members of the 114th Congress, alumni, current students and congressional staff about the importance of TRIO and GEAR UP.

As a result of this opportunity, I learned you must network to get work and make sure you establish meaningful relationships as you advance personally and professionally. More importantly, this event gave me the chance to represent the interests of low-income and first-generation students, adult learners, veterans and students with disabilities. Thank you CONNTAC-EOC for your understanding, support, and dedication towards my future. To be chosen as an alumnus to represent myself, organization, family, and city

was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I made the best of those two days on Capitol Hill. My mentees can look at me as a living testimony and adapt the following thought process, it does not matter where you are from but it is always about where you are going. Who can really say they left Bridgeport, CT and went to Capitol Hill for educational improvement and development?



TRIO Alumni from Connecticut



Representatives from Student Support Services, Upward Bound, and Educational Opportunity Centers



Walking with a Purpose on Capitol Hill

This year's Policy Seminar focused on advocating for a funding increase for TRIO's 2017 Fiscal Year in order to restore services to 90,000 students across the nation. Success stories were shared by program Alumni from our state along with information on the 16 TRIO programs currently in Connecticut.



Connecticut Team on Capitol Hill



The Connecticut team and Senator Christopher Murphy's Legislative Aide