A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

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DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Welcome to the spring 2021 edition of the Center for Academic Programs Update, our annual publication featuring stories about the exciting activities our students and staff have been engaging in this academic year.

To say it has been a year like no other would be a vast understatement. From holding our 2020 summer programs and research experiences virtually to finding new ways to engage students remotely, CAP, like every other department on campus, has had to learn, grow, and evolve in ways we never imagined just a little over a year ago. Yet, somehow, like all of you, we have. We successfully delivered multiple summer programs entirely online in 2020, continued to provide high quality services to our students remotely, and learned new, and in some cases improved, ways to engage with students using technology. Like our students, we have learned to be flexible, adapt quickly, and master new technology. While it is clear that nothing will ever be quite the same after this past year, one thing remains so: CAP is dedicated to increasing access to higher education and providing educational opportunities to help our students succeed in high school, college, and beyond. CAP staff went the extra mile this year, not only pivoting to an online model, but also making sure students remained connected with each other and our programs. Staff held in-person, socially distant high school graduations in parking lots, delivered care packages to students across the state, and offered innovative programming for our high school and college populations. A special congratulations to Aaron Collins, Avery Point SSS Coordinator and Alex Katz, Rising Scholars Coordinator, for being recognized by the University with awards for their excellence this year. Thank you, CAP staff, for your unwavering dedication to our students.
On a hot summer day in August 2020, Dr. Tadarrayl Starke and his family arrived at their new home in Storrs, CT after several long days of driving from Tallahassee, Florida. Since then, Dr. Starke has survived his first New England winter and settled into his new role as Associate Vice Provost of the Institute for Student Success (ISS) which oversees the Center for Academic Programs. He has been busy getting to know the campus and the many departments within ISS and is excited about the future here.

As a first-generation college graduate, Dr. Starke sees his work to support student success as his purpose in life and works to develop and support initiatives and structures related to access, educational equity, persistence, and graduation for all students, with a particular focus on first-generation college students and those historically underserved in higher education.

When asked why he chose to come to Connecticut, he said, “UConn has a long history and commitment to student success, particularly as it relates to access and educational equity. The opportunity to work alongside staff who are committed to ensuring students, regardless of their background, have the ability to not just attend UConn, but thrive and fully engage in our campus experiences speaks to my purpose. I’m excited to be a part of this community of professionals committed to our students’ success.”

Before coming to UConn, Dr. Starke served as Director and Department Chair of the Florida State University (FSU) Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement (CARE), similar to UConn’s Center for Academic Programs. From 2011 to 2020, he led many of FSU’s nationally recognized efforts to encourage enrollment and persistence in higher education for first-generation, low-income, and other student populations traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

Dr. Starke is a three-time graduate of Florida State University where he received a Doctor of Education in Higher Education, a Master of Science in Higher Education with a focus on Student Affairs, and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a minor in African American Studies as well as Certificates in Institutional Research and College Teaching.

The Center for Academic Programs is fortunate to have a leader with Dr. Starke’s background and commitment to underrepresented students at the helm of the Institute for Student Success. Welcome Dr. Starke!
If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is the importance of connection and community. The 2020-2021 academic year was atypical because of the pandemic, and many students, whether living at home or on campus, reported feelings of loneliness and isolation. To create a greater sense of normalcy among students, SSS held a series of events throughout the year, both in-person and virtually, to engage students, build community, and promote academic success and personal well-being.

SSS offered in-person, socially distant opportunities for residential students on the Storrs campus to explore their creative sides. A Drum Circle in the Sundial Garden event led by SSS staff member Gideon Ampeire brought students out of their rooms in November to create music while surrounded by nature and community. Visual artists had the opportunity to showcase their artistic talents during SSS Paint Day in March. Gathered at the center of campus on a beautiful spring day, students were guided by a graduate student in the Fine Arts department as they painted trees and landscapes with words of affirmation.

SSS students at all five campuses were invited to a series of virtual workshops and events, often hosted by UConn faculty, staff, and alumni partners. Dr. Tom Van Hoof from the School of Nursing presented two well-attended sessions on The Science of Learning, which taught students strategies for learning and improving memory. McNair Scholars Program Coordinator Dr. Renee Gilberti held a Grad School and You workshop for students interested in learning the ins and outs of graduate studies. SSS alumna Christina Edwards presented a dynamic workshop titled Overcoming Adversity, and current SSS student Julio Serna-Pedraza presented Beginning Steps to Building Wealth as part of SSS’s financial literacy initiatives. SSS Assistant Director Carl Dean Jr. and Gideon Ampeire hosted an Open Mic for all members of the UConn community as part of UConn’s Fresh Check Day activities. A SSS signature event, the annual SSS De-stress for Finals Success was also held virtually, and included guided meditation with ISS Executive Assistant Berkeley Nowosad, creating a vision board, and conversations on self-care.

These are just some of the many workshops and events SSS held over the course of the academic year to engage students. Many thanks to the folks who volunteered their time and talent to bring art, music, and a sense of community to our students.
CAP HOSTS FIRST-EVER “CAPPY HOUR” AS PART OF UCONN GIVES

With change comes opportunity. Such was the case when the chance to host a virtual alumni event during the 2021 UConn Gives campaign arose, something that might never have happened if not for the pandemic introducing us to remote possibilities. On March 23, CAP held its first-ever “CAPpy Hour” on Zoom, with a theme of “A Walk Down Memory Lane.” Over 60 CAP alumni and former and current staff joined the reunion, demonstrating CAP’s lasting impact on the lives of its students. Alumni and staff alike took turns sharing experiences and stories from their time in various CAP programs, which have been in existence at UConn since 1967. From recent graduates to old-timers, nearly everyone had a happy and often humorous memory to share. Not only did attendees agree that the event was a much welcome chance to reconnect with old friends, but they were also more than generous, donating a total of $3,755 toward the various CAP/Student Support Services UConn Foundation funds, which are used to provide CAP students with high impact educational opportunities, such as study abroad. Furthermore, they expressed a desire for more reunion events in the future to stay connected to CAP. Many thanks to our alumni for their contributions and CAP looks forward to holding more virtual events like this in the future.

CAP STUDENTS GATHER FOR 4TH ANNUAL STEM IS AMAZING CONFERENCE

The Center for Academic Programs 4th annual STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) is Amazing conference was held on Saturday, November 7, 2020. This year, 28 high school students from the UConn College Access & Preparation (UCAP) and UConn Rising Scholars (URS) programs, along with 15 UConn undergraduates from the LSAMP and McNair Scholars programs, met remotely to discuss college preparation and
staying motivated in the face of challenges. Participants enjoyed discussions with peers and mentors, motivational talks from guest speakers, and competing for prizes through games that tested their knowledge of STEM.

SSS alumna and McNair Scholar Leana Santos inspired students with her story of coming to the United States from the Dominican Republic during senior year of high school, without knowing any English, and the resilience this helped her develop, which led her to pursue a Ph.D. in Structural Engineering at UConn. Dr. Tadarrayl Starke, Associate Vice Provost of the Institute for Student Success, also shared words of wisdom with the students. Participants shared that the conference made an impact on their career goals, with 63% of students sharing that they are now interested in pursuing a career in STEM.

One student said their biggest takeaway from the day was to “always give it your all, even if you don’t feel confident.” Another student shared that they learned “it is important to do whatever you can as early as possible to move in the right direction.” Now that’s amazing!

UCAP ALUMNA PERSEVERES DESPITE OBSTACLES AND DOUBTS

Achievement can seem impossible in the face of doubt and impending sacrifice, but for UCAP alumna Teyana Whyte, a Hartford native, these hurdles became her greatest motivators. As a student at the Nursing Academy of Hartford Public High School, some people did not believe she would accomplish her goals. Despite this, Whyte enrolled as a freshman at the University of New Haven to study Forensic Science.

Like many first-generation college students, Whyte had little time to engage in the kinds of activities that make college a pleasurable experience. As a Division 2 athlete working two on-campus jobs, Whyte found herself swamped with coursework and responsibilities. Despite feeling isolated in her experience and even considering dropping out, Whyte resolved to let her challenges drive her success. She sharpened her focus and completed her bachelor’s degree, and later went on to earn a master’s degree in Forensic Technology. Today, Whyte serves as a State of Connecticut Judicial Marshal.

Whyte’s accomplishments were hard-earned and it is precisely this fact which makes them so rewarding. Having sacrificed and succeeded in the face of doubt, Whyte wants students like her to remember that “Sometimes the only support system you have is yourself and may soon need to learn how to keep pushing alone. The outcome will be greater than your sacrifices and you are capable of doing everything you put your mind to.”

UCONN RISING STAR ALUMNA KEEPS KEEPING ON

UConn Rising Scholars alumna Mila Bray has come a long way since she was a participant in the 2014 inaugural cohort of what then was known as The First Star Academy. As a high school student, it was evident to all who knew her that, despite the challenges she faced as a child in the foster care system, Mila was poised to achieve through her drive, perseverance, and resilience.

Mila attended First Star again in 2015 and graduated from high school in 2016. From there, she moved on to study criminal justice at Delaware State University. College brought new challenges to her, such as adjusting to a new state, working long hours as a Recovery Assistant for mental health services, and earning her bachelor’s degree during a worldwide pandemic.

Mila’s most important piece of advice to current Rising Scholars students is to “stay focused, it’s going to get hard but you will be great. You are doing just fine.” This is advice we can all benefit from. Congratulations, Mila, on your accomplishments and best wishes in your plan of attending law school.
As a sophomore at UConn Waterbury, Michael Reid’s hunger for research, goal of graduate study, and desire to be a part of a community of like-minded students inspired him to pursue a McNair Fellowship in 2016. In May of that year, Michael shadowed a graduate student in Dr. Menka Jain’s physics research group on the Storrs campus. The skillsets Michael honed extended beyond foundational skills to be a physics researcher, to realizing he wanted to dive into quantitative research and train to be a graduate student. Michael continued his research journey by way of their CCC and USG peers for this important initiative. Thanks to their efforts and those of other volunteers, students in need were able to wear warm clothes and eat nutritious meals during the 2020-21 Winter Intersession.

CCC has made great strides in its efforts to destigmatize what it means to be an independent student at UConn and to educate other students, faculty and staff about their unique needs and barriers to success. Their work has resulted in campus-wide recognition: USG generously allocated $5,000 to CCC to purchase nonperishable food, winter clothing, hygiene products and other supplies for independent students.

If you are aware of any student in need of food, supplies or winter clothes, please contact cccatuconn@gmail.com.

As a McNair Scholar, Michael was able to align his research project with his passion for education in low socioeconomic neighborhoods. With Dr. Betsy McCoach’s research group within the Neag School of Education, Department of Research Methods, Measurement, and Evaluation, Michael studied the relationship between district income segregation and achievement. He also had the opportunity to present his work at conferences and poster exhibits to prepare him for a career in research.

In addition to being a part of the McNair Scholars community, Michael was also part of the first cohort of the SchOLAR2RS House Learning Community, an experience that afforded him the chance to study abroad in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. After graduating UConn in 2019 with a bachelor’s degree in English, Michael was admitted to the University’s Master of Arts in Educational Psychology program, and simultaneously began pursuing a second bachelor’s degree in physics. He also obtained a graduate assistantship with SchOLAR2RS House and eventually became its Assistant Director. Michael also served as President of BROS (Brothers Reaching Our Society), a student organization dedicated to the academic, professional, and personal growth of males of color.

Soon Michael will be on his way to the University of Texas at...
Austin to pursue a Ph.D. in Education Policy and Planning in their department of Education Leadership and Policy. With his acceptance, Michael was offered a prestigious UT Austin McNair Scholars Graduate Fellowship that includes several years of funding. From starting as a UConn McNair Fellow to being named a McNair Scholars Graduate Fellow at his new institution, the opportunity feels like a full circle moment for Michael.

Of his time as a McNair Scholar at UConn, Michael says, “My McNair experience opened my mind towards new career paths and opportunities, practical ways to answer my research questions, and a network of lifelong friends, colleagues, and mentors who mutually support each other on the journey for academic and career excellence. I do not know where I would be today without taking a chance on the McNair experience.”

After earning his Ph.D., Michael’s goal is to work in education administration, education policy, or in a state or federal education agency.

CAP STUDENTS TESTIFY AT APPROPRIATIONS HEARING

Each year, CAP students speak at the Appropriations Committee Public Hearing, expressing the impact of their UConn education. On March 4, 2021, four CAP students testified at the virtual Public Hearing, sharing their stories and advocating for increased support to CAP’s programs and the University at large.

Two of the students highlighted the role of SSS in their experience at UConn. Laura Bedoya, a senior at the Storrs campus, shared, “SSS helped me navigate a huge campus and prepared me academically and professionally.” She thanked the program and the University for investing in her as a student and a person. Lauryn Ashong, a senior at the Stamford campus, said, “I viewed that education was going to be a struggle, however, despite the challenges thrown my way, I am victorious and accomplished because of the SSS program. The SSS program provided me tools, opportunities, and resources to achieve my degree.”

Two students reflected on their participation in the McNair Scholars Program. Steven Santos, a senior, wrote, “Four years ago, I was unsure if I would get into UConn, but today I feel accomplished as a student and researcher, and prepared for my career,” crediting much of his success to the mentorship and opportunities provided by the McNair Scholars Program. Nichali Bogues, a junior, reflected on his experience in the UConn College Access and Preparation Program (UCAP), the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) and McNair, stating, “Investing in...programs that support underrepresented students is essential for a better Connecticut. It gives Connecticut the ability to enhance its economic growth and prosperity though the hands of research. This will attract some of the brightest and best minds to the state.”
PEER MENTORING IN A PANDEMIC

In the midst of a pandemic, it is comforting for first year students to have an opportunity to make personal connections with peers a little older and wiser than they are. **Grace Roy**, a Hartford SSS student, volunteered her time and talent this past year to help guide new SSS students through a rather unusual first year of college.

Grace’s passion for building relationships with her mentees is evident in her commentary: “Peer mentoring has been the greatest opportunity to foster connections with students. When beginning working with a new student, you only see a glimpse into their life. But this role allows for so much more. We are continuously meeting throughout the semester, which creates a deeper connection. Students are able to become familiar with me, and hopefully see me as a resource, ally, and friend. This sense of support is crucial, especially beginning University online during a pandemic.”

Although meeting on WebEx was difficult, Grace, like so many other peer mentors in the SSS program, has been able to make a positive impact and learn some things: “What I admire most of all about mentoring is learning the different paths each student took to get to the University. For instance, some students are first-generation, some are local, and some students grew up in other countries. Hearing journeys, as well as the enthusiasm to attend University, is inspirational. While I provide support to the students, they teach me to be passionate and enthusiastic in the pursuit of my goals as well.”

A huge thank you to Grace and all of the peer mentors who have dedicated their time, provided support, and shared their experiences so that our first-year students can connect, learn, and grow despite that pandemic.

SSS ALUMNUS RECIPIENT OF ACHIEVER AWARD

Since graduating from UConn with both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in Sports Management, in 2011 and 2012 respectively, SSS alumnus **Emmanuel Omokaro** has personified what it means to be an achiever. Co-founder of the non-profit organization Team Up, whose mission is to volunteer and raise money for community projects, Emmanuel has dedicated his life after UConn to serving his local and global communities.

In 2018, as a member of buildOn, Emmanuel helped raise over $40,000 to build a primary school in Senegal, West Africa and personally oversaw its construction. That same year, he traveled to Chad in North Central Africa to help build water pumps with Water4Chad, so the local community could have access to clean, safe drinking water. In 2019, also through buildOn, he helped build a primary school in Guatemala.

Emmanuel’s spirit of giving back has extended to his local community. In 2018, he got the idea to build an outdoor basketball court in his hometown of Danbury, CT in honor of a close friend who had passed away. Spearheaded by Emmanuel, through a combination of fundraising, donations from local businesses, and volunteer recruitment, the basketball court now stands on the grounds of Saint Gregory Elementary school, where Emmanuel attended school with his friend.

Emmanuel’s commitment to service also has extended to his employment. As a Corporate Citizenship Coordinator for ESPN, he oversaw and managed local and national volunteer efforts for employees. His hard work and dedication earned him the company’s Volunteer of the Year Award his first year on the job.

These efforts earned Emmanuel the New England Educational Opportunity Association’s 2021 Achiever Award, which he accepted virtually on April 8. Emmanuel attributed his passion for giving back to his time at UConn where, as a member of the football team, he would spend his off days
volunteering to read to students in East Hartford and was a member of the organization Husky Sport.

In his acceptance remarks, Emmanuel also thanked Dr. Maria D. Martinez and Dr. Bidya Ranjeet from UConn’s Center for Academic Programs for their support and encouragement throughout his college career and beyond. He was especially grateful for the opportunity to study abroad in Liverpool, England with the Student Support Services program, an experience he found life changing and that has informed his volunteer efforts overseas. True to form, Emmanuel has generously contributed to the CAP Education Abroad fund, which has enabled several SSS students to have the transformative experience of studying abroad.

CAP congratulates Emmanuel on receiving the prestigious NEOA Achiever Award and thanks him for his tireless service and generosity.

SSS MARINE SCIENCE STUDENT ATTAINS INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SHARK RESEARCH EXPEDITION

As our world slowly re-opens into a “new normal,” students are ready to hit the ground running in pursuit of in-person professional experiences. Avery Point SSS student Melissa Sanchez will be traveling to Mossel Bay, South Africa in summer 2021 to complete her internship for Oceans Research on great white sharks. The internship is being funded by Minorities in Shark Science (MISS) which aims to make shark science more accessible for women of color. During the month of August, Melissa will be monitoring shark populations, managing Remote Operated Vehicles, and learning how to tag sharks.

Melissa’s guiding belief is, “Passion is the driving force for success.” This mindset, along with hard work and dedication, has opened doors for her to work at two UConn laboratories as well as to become one of the lead members of the UConn Avery Point Marine Science Club. Melissa’s goal is to make the public aware that achieving your goals, particularly in the STEM field, is possible for underrepresented students. Through gaining experience this summer with Oceans Research, Melissa hopes to show the public there is always something you can do to get involved in the world’s current climate crisis.

Melissa, a Marine Science major and chemistry minor, shared that the UConn SSS program has helped her find a community where she is accepted and surrounded by individuals with similar backgrounds. Congratulations to Melissa on securing this fantastic internship for the summer.
HARTFORD CAMPUS SSS STUDENT FACILITATES 2020 CENSUS PANEL DISCUSSION

CAP has a strong track record in providing civic engagement opportunities among students to help them make a positive, lasting impact while enrolled at UConn. At the Hartford campus, SSS sophomore, Jonathan Santana, helped facilitate a 90-minute panel discussion entitled “2020 Census: All You Need to Know to Activate Your Power.” The goal of the event on March 10, 2020 was to encourage attendees to complete the Decennial Census and inform them of the implications it has on individual communities across the nation. The discussion attracted undergraduates, graduate students, and staff from the campus.

Jonathan facilitated the panel, alongside Angela Bellas, a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Social Work, Valeriano Ramos, Director of Strategic Alliances and Equity Officer for Everyday Democracy, and Catherine Marx, Partnership Specialist from the New York Regional Census Center Field Division.

Jonathan was selected for this opportunity because of his broad involvement in the campus community, including his position as a Coach for the Academic Achievement Center at the Hartford campus. Jonathan is currently studying Social Work with a concentration in Human Development and Family Sciences. CAP looks forward to seeing the impact that Jonathan continues to make in his community as a student, and beyond.

SSS STUDENT JONATHAN SANTANA, FAR LEFT, FACILITATES CENSUS PANEL

G.R.I.T. RETREAT HELPS STUDENTS PREPARE FOR SUCCESS BEYOND ACADEMICS

CAP ran its inaugural Growing Resilience and Inspiring Transformation (G.R.I.T.) retreat for SSS students participating in the Promoting Academically Successful Students (PASS) program. The three-day retreat, held virtually in late August 2020, offered workshops focused on developing students’ academic self-efficacy, mindfulness, and motivation. Approximately 30 students attended the retreat.

SSS alumna Paris Pruitt, now working on her MA in Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at UConn, kicked off the retreat by delivering an inspiring keynote address that detailed her own college journey. In it, she offered advice from her personal experiences as an undergraduate student and emphasized the importance of asking for help.

Day two of the retreat featured Dr. Rebecca Acabchuck, who facilitated a meditation and yoga session that taught specific techniques for gaining clarity and reducing stress. Despite the remote modality, Acabchuck had students breathing deeply, moving their bodies, and performing visualizations, all mindfulness techniques that would serve them not only as students but for a lifetime.

Later that day, Dr. Clewiston Challenger gave a rousing lesson on achieving academic resilience through membership in extra-curricular involvement. Dr. Challenger’s down-to-earth presentation style kept students laughing and engaged as he taught them skills for self-motivation and developing a sense of belonging to the campus community.

The final day of the retreat featured a deep and heartfelt conversation with International Leadership Coach Natalie Griffin. Griffin demonstrated the way in which story telling can be a powerful process for developing authenticity. In her workshop, she encouraged students to have the courage to take ownership of their own life stories.

CAP looks forward to holding the second annual G.R.I.T. conference in-person on the Storrs campus in August 2021.
Two SSS students were selected to participate in the most recent cohorts of the BOLD Women’s Leadership Network at UConn, an initiative that seeks to empower young college women to become courageous leaders in their careers and lives.

Senior Laura Bedoya, a Political Science major who is currently also pursuing a Master’s in Public Administration, received a BOLD scholarship for her thesis, *Gender, Equity, and Political Participation in Colombia from 2000-2020*. In 2020, Laura interviewed elected Colombian officials from the political party MIRA (The Independent Movement of Absolute Renovation or *Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absolutato*) for her research. Laura shared, “The purpose of my research is to highlight the mechanism of the gender quota laws in political parties in Colombia and analyze how international legislative intervention has an impact on women political leadership… The BOLD Scholarship has allowed me to design and execute my own research project, allowing me to combine my passions for research and advocacy, and paving the way for my graduate studies in Public Administration, and eventually, International Human Rights Law.”

Junior Kenniece Coker, an individualized major whose focus is on community health and wellness, and who is currently enrolled in the Master’s in Public Health Fast Track program at UConn, is a certified Doula who is passionate about women’s reproductive health. For her BOLD project, she is studying teen mothers and the additional support needs they have outside of the realm of medical practice. Kenniece served as a trip leader for the HIV Advocacy and Awareness Alternative Break through the UConn’s Community Outreach office. “It was an amazing feeling to be able to utilize my previous knowledge from my research on HIV/AIDS for my master’s program on this trip,” she said.

The application process to be a BOLD Scholar is highly competitive and only a small group of women are selected to each cohort. The program was founded by Helen Gurley Brown, former editor-in-chief of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Nine higher education institutions participate in BOLD. UConn joined in 2018.

Like most of us, SSS student Isabel Herrera-Naranjo has had a year which she says, “has proved anything but normal as everything turned upside down.” A Biological Sciences major with a minor in Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies, Isabel started her UConn career during the 2018 SSS Summer Program. In 2019, she decided to temporarily put her studies aside to join the U.S. Army National Guard as an Army Medic. Isabel’s decision to enter the military would push her to the forefront of some of the more prominent events that have transpired in the last year.

When the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a national lockdown in March 2020, Isabel bravely joined the ranks of frontline workers, a small, yet vital portion of the workforce allowed to continue going to work. Putting her own health at risk, she selflessly administered COVID-19 tests to thousands of worried Americans. As the Pandemic spread over the course of spring 2020 and hope for a quick end to it vanished, workers like Isabel persevered in their tasks, despite a growing threat to their own health and safety.

Isabel was again called for duty in the early days of 2021, after rioters violently stormed the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. on January 6, in an effort to stop the
UCAP SUMMER PROGRAMMING ADAPTS TO CONDITIONS OF GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Under typical circumstances, summer programming in UConn’s College Access and Preparation Program (UCAP) is highly interactive, with students living on campus, taking classes, engaging with tutors and hall coordinators, and having fun with peers, all in person. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 summer programming took place online. Carrying out programming remotely for high school students with the same in-person impact required special planning and hard work by the UCAP staff. It also took flexibility and a willingness to adapt to unusual circumstances on the part of the students. Because of the dedication and cooperation of those involved, 2020 was a summer that will be remembered as a success.

As usual, UCAP rising juniors and seniors enrolled in Early College Experience (ECE) courses, though this year they were delivered remotely via WebEX. Introduction to Biology allowed juniors to hone their STEM skills while earning UConn credits. Seniors thrived in the ECE course, Introduction to Human Rights, in which they examined international human rights law, the United Nations, and other mechanisms that support global justice, allowing them to better understand the role both authorities and individuals play in protecting basic human rights. The seniors applied their new understanding as they worked in small groups to develop meaningful action research projects focused on local human rights issues.

Human Rights instructor James Skrzypiec commented, “I was incredibly impressed at the dedication and commitment of these young people to work together, advocate for themselves, and present in front of their peers a meaningful project that addressed key human rights issues and solutions here in Connecticut, all in the short span of five weeks.”

UCAP tutors and hall coordinators had a key role to play in the students’ academic success. They were able to innovate and use fun strategies for remote learning. Before exams, for instance, the tutors and hall coordinators worked together to create and then play a game of “Kahoot” based on student’s study questions.

Students also took part in some of UCAP’s favorite traditions like “Trivia Night” and “Thursday Hall of Fame.” On Thursday afternoons, staff recognized those students who had demonstrated excellence that week, whether in class or during an extracurricular activity. At the end of the summer, a movie night was held via a “Netflix Party” where students were able to chat online and watch a movie together. These events were well-attended and served to keep morale high.

Overall, 2020 UCAP summer programming highlighted the resilience of our high school students to adapt to new and challenging circumstances, and to learn and thrive despite them.

Isabel exemplifies a rather exceptional UConn student. Devoting this much time to the nation with her military duties and completing a full semester of coursework would seem daunting to most college students. Not so for Isabel, a student whose perseverance and dedication to her studies and nation is unwavering. While Isabel had a bit of a late start to the Spring 2021 semester, she has quickly caught up and has worked brilliantly to balance everything. “Juggling college life and work with the Army has definitely proved difficult,” she said. “But not impossible. I have had so many great moments as a soldier that it truly pays off.”

CAP is proud of Isabel’s accomplishments and deeply grateful to her for her service to our nation.
UCAP SENIORS LOOK FOR **SILVER LINING IN PANDEMIC**

It is no secret that students in all grade levels are struggling in this pandemic. Online learning combined with continued isolation has taken its toll. But what if you are a high school senior experiencing your final year of not just high school, but the culmination of 12 years of primary and secondary school? Senior year is supposed to hold such promise, from the last homecoming and senior picnic to senior prom and graduation. Instead, many seniors are finding that they have to will themselves to stay motivated, and grasp whatever small joys they can.

UCAP senior *Kadeya Khouri*, who attends Hartford Public High School, has found comfort in being with family. “This virus has created some barriers for me such as not being able to interact with other humans, which may not seem like a big deal, but I am an extremely social person and love to connect with others,” she said. “I am trying to cope by finding other ways to occupy myself and staying connected with people through video calls. I find that I spend more time with my immediate family at home and we have discovered new ways of bonding and having fun, like having movie nights.”

*Mario Roque*, a UCAP senior at Windham High School, not only had to deal with online learning and isolation, but the fear that came when his father became ill with COVID-19 and had to quarantine, which also resulted in him being out of work for a while and the financial stress that accompanied it. “To say this pandemic caused stress on many levels for me would be an understatement,” he said. “However, I tried my best to stay positive through it all. During moments of exhaustion, I would try to take time to go outside and enjoy nature. This pandemic has also allowed me to appreciate the small things differently such as sitting in my front yard and enjoying everything around me.”

To all of the high school seniors out there, CAP would like you to know that we hear you, we see you, and we believe in you. Despite the difficulties of the past year, we are confident in your success and look forward to all of the amazing turns your lives will take after graduation.

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**CAP NEWS BRIEFS**

**CAP STAFF KUDOS**

CAP staff are rocking it this year! Avery Point SSS Coordinator *Aaron Collins* won the 2020 Avery Point Excellence in Student Engagement and Support Award, a student nominated award that recognizes Avery Point faculty and staff who make significant contributions to students and programs on campus. UConn Rising Scholars Coordinator *Alex Katz* was selected as the winner of the 2020 First Year Experience Excellence in Teaching Award. For the second year in a row, Storrs SSS Counselor *Summer Spaderna* and Stamford SSS Coordinator *Rawan Shilleh* were both nominated by their students for the Outstanding Undergraduate Advisor Award. Congratulations to all four staff members! We are so proud you, and grateful for all that you do for our students.

**#KINDNESSPROJECT INSPIRES HOPE**

You may have seen the bright yellow signs around campus and on social media in fall 2020 with messages like “You Belong” and “You Got This.” The signs were part of a new campaign initiated by Student Support Services (SSS) as part of Suicide Prevention Week activities at UConn. The idea was the brainchild of Storrs SSS counselor *Summer Spaderna*, and it gained momentum across all five campuses, with students posting signs with messages that inspired hope and a sense of community all over campus and Instagram. Even one of UConn’s police pups, *Tildy*, got in on the action. The uplifting messages were a kind reminder to students that despite the difficulties of living through a pandemic, and whether they were living on campus or at home, they were in it together, one UConn Nation.
SSS WATERBURY STUDENT TO WORK WITH HOMELESS POPULATIONS

SSS Waterbury student Sheylian Berrios, a sophomore majoring in Human Development and Family Sciences, has obtained an internship with the Department of Children and Families in New Haven. The internship will allow Sheylian to gain experience working with homeless families. Sheylian’s role will be to check in with the families to assess their status in the areas of school and food insecurity and connecting them to community resources. Congratulations to Sheylian on what will no doubt be a transformative experience!

HARTFORD CAMPUS SSS STUDENT’S ESSAY ON GRAFFITI ART WINS CONTEST

SSS sophomore Ruthmary Hernandez was selected as the winner of the Sustainable Global Cities Initiative’s “Writing Hartford” 2019-2020 Undergraduate Writing Contest for her piece entitled, “Taking Ownership: Uncovering Urban Spaces.” In her essay, Ruthmary shares her personal connection to the graffiti art of the Hog River tunnels located in Hartford. She describes the risk of personal safety inherent to the graffiti lifestyle and the importance of public tagging as an artistic expression with both aesthetic value and political importance in the city. Ruthmary originally wrote this essay for an English assignment in the fall of 2019 and her Professor, David Olio, encouraged her to submit to the contest. Congratulations Ruthmary!

KEEPING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ENGAGED THROUGH CREATIVITY

UCAP students had the chance to show their artistic talents and spend quality time together during a Virtual Paint Night on February 26, 2021. At the end of a busy week full of classes and responsibilities, UCAP students were able to unwind while Muse Paintbar guided them through a painting class. Step by step, students created their very own island beach scene, which was a welcomed sight during the cold of winter in Connecticut. At the end of the evening, students showed off their masterpieces and applauded each other’s work.

UCAP has been no stranger to creative endeavors. In 2021 alone, the high school students have gotten to enjoy virtual activities such as an engaging lecture about the Civil Rights Movement, an interactive cooking class led by the Department of Nutritional Sciences, virtual game nights, and an Academic Day devoted to youth advocacy and social activism, led by SSS alumnus, Justis Lopez.
Graduating from college is a remarkable achievement. The turning of the tassel, the “Pomp and Circumstance,” and for UConn students, posing with the Jonathan Husky statue, are traditions that help students to close that chapter before embarking on an amazing journey ahead. For first-generation college students, this milestone moment represents not only a major accomplishment filled with joyful sentiments, but a dream realized, for themselves and for their families and communities. Student Support Services (SSS) honored its 2021 graduating class on March 31 through its first ever Virtual Senior Recognition Ceremony, helping students to reflect on how far they have come and offering some much deserved celebration.

The Senior Recognition Ceremony, which is traditionally held in the Alumni Center Great Hall, welcomed SSS seniors, faculty, and staff from across campus. Despite the ongoing presence of “Zoom fatigue,” the ceremony brought joy, emotion, and engagement to the attendees. Highlights of the ceremony included a musical performance by SSS Academic Coach, Gideon Ampeire, a poem performed by SSS Assistant Director, Carl Dean, and acknowledging Dr. Mansour Ndiaye as the recipient of the annual SSS Faculty Recognition Award for his unwavering commitment to the SSS program and its students. Dr. Ndiaye is the Assistant Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) and Executive Director of the CLAS Academic Services Center. SSS was honored to have Dr. Ndiaye and his colleagues, including CLAS Dean Juli Wade, join the ceremony in recognition of SSS seniors’ accomplishments.

SSS counselor Yesenia Cajigas and her Ceremony Planning Committee honored SSS seniors with a tribute video, a reflective activity to highlight their milestone moments, and a surprise guest! SSS alumna Stephanie O’Neill, who served as a residential SSS Community Leader at Storrs in summer 2017, joined to share words of wisdom and inspiration with the graduating class. Stephanie mentored many of the 2021 graduating seniors as a Community Leader. Her presence represented a full-circle moment for the seniors. Kudos to the entire planning committee for creating a meaningful ceremony for the students.

To the SSS graduating class of 2021: Although this year did not go as planned, nothing and no one can ever take away your accomplishments or the lessons you learned while at UConn. From all of us in CAP, congratulations on your achievements!
The Center for Academic Programs provides educational opportunities and access to higher education for students who are first-generation to college, from underrepresented populations, and/or from low-income backgrounds.