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It is with great excitement and pride that I welcome you to our 50th Anniversary Special Edition Newsletter. Since 1967, the Center for Academic Programs have changed the lives of thousands of students and their families.

Fifty years ago, the University of Connecticut launched its first Upward Bound program. Back then, it was called the Connecticut Pre-collegiate Enrichment Program (CONNPEP). Under the excellent leadership of insurance Professor David Ivry, 30 students from disadvantaged backgrounds were invited to participate in a summer residential program specifically designed to prepare them for access to and success in higher education. Also in 1967, an initiative for college students called Summer Program was launched. The goal was to prepare incoming low-income and/or underrepresented freshmen from the state’s urban centers for the rigors of University academics and acclimate them to campus life. CONNPEP and Summer Program were what we came to know as Upward Bound and Student Support Services. These two programs served as the foundation of the many initiatives we have today to address specific academic, economic and personal barriers facing low income, first generation to college and underrepresented students in Connecticut.

Since 1967, TRIO has played a critical role in the history of access and educational opportunity at the University of Connecticut. UConn has hosted Upward Bound, GEAR UP, Educational Talent Search, and in 2012, we received funding for our first McNair Scholars program. Throughout the years, we have experienced many name changes - CONNPEP, Summer Program, Special Academic and Enrichment Programs, Health Science Cluster, Committee for the Education of Minority Students (CEMS), CAP, SSS, ConnCAP, ConnCAS and most recently, the UConn College Access and Preparation Program (UCAP). Regardless of the name the goal has remained the same — to prepare low income and first generation students for access to and success in higher education.

This year, the Center for Academic Programs at the University of Connecticut celebrated fifty years with a gala held on Saturday, October 28th 2017. Over 250 people were in attendance. Alumni reconnected with old friends and mentors, current and former staff celebrated student accomplishments, and prestigious speakers offered remarks in recognition of the Program’s achievements. We were grateful to spend the evening with so many program alumni and friends and we are pleased to share the details of the event with our readers.

For fifty years UConn’s TRIO programs have benefited from having individuals that are committed to the TRIO philosophy. We look forward to continuing our ongoing commitment to access and educational opportunity for low income, first generation, and underrepresented populations. On behalf of our staff and students I want to thank you for your extraordinary support.

We hope to see you at our programs or at our offices in the Rowe building!

Maria D. Martinez, Assistant Vice Provost
Institute for Student Success
Director, Center for Academic Programs
UConn’s Center for Academic Programs commemorated 50 years of providing educational access and opportunity with a celebratory gala held on October 28, 2017 in the Rome Ballroom on the Storrs campus. The evening highlighted the incredible role that CAP has had in impacting the lives of its students. Over 250 guests were in attendance, including CAP alumni, current and former CAP staff, visiting dignitaries, and university faculty, staff, and community partners. The keynote address by Francisco Borges, a CAP alumnus and the current Chairman of Landmark Partners, marked a high point in the evening.

Welcoming remarks by Dr. Maria D. Martinez, Assistant Vice Provost of the Institute for Student Success and CAP Director, provided an overview of UConn’s first educational opportunity programs for underserved students, CONNPEP (Connecticut Pre-Collegiate Enrichment Program) and Summer Program, which both launched in 1967. Her comments offered a context for the entire celebration, showcasing CAP’s origins and its growth over time. Dr. John Volin, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, reaffirmed UConn’s commitment to CAP and its mission.

CAP’s achievements were also acknowledged by nationally recognized guests. U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, via video address, congratulated CAP on its long-standing success, and stressed the importance of political activism in preserving and expanding programs like those that CAP oversees. His praise was echoed by Maureen Hoyler, the President of the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) based in Washington, D.C., who acknowledged the important partnerships, both institutionally and externally, that have made UConn’s CAP program one of the longest running and most successful providers of TRIO and Educational Opportunity Programs in the U.S.

The evening concluded with dancing and well wishes. Gala attendees left with a sense of CAP’s illustrious past as well as the incredible potential of its next 50 years at UConn.

For more information about CAP’s history, please visit https://cap.uconn.edu/cap-history/.
Stamford Visits Indeed.com

A group of SSS Stamford students traveled to Indeed.com’s Stamford office on November 10, 2017 for the first in a series of meet-and-greet sessions. The students were able to network with current Indeed.com employees while getting a firsthand experience of company culture. The visit consisted of an office tour, a presentation on the company, tips on interviewing and preparing for a career fair, and a Q & A session. Indeed’s University Recruiter, Danielle Mende, hosted the event and provided snacks and swag for the students.

This was the second time in a few months that SSS Stamford students connected with Indeed.com employees. As part of an Alumni Success Panel during the 2017 SSS Summer Program, SSS alumnus Jason “Jay” Blake shared with the incoming freshmen his experience working in the sales department at the popular company. Several freshmen that participated in the November visit were excited to see Jay again when he surprised them with greetings and encouraging words.

The opportunity for students to visit Indeed.com came out of a long-standing partnership between SSS and UConn’s Center for Career Development. Career Counselor Eran Petersen, the CCD liaison for SSS, suggested the opportunity and worked closely with Danielle to make it happen. Danielle will continue working with SSS Stamford to host more events designed to help prepare students for successful job searches and careers.
In his keynote address at the CAP 50th Anniversary Gala, CAP alumnus Francisco Borges identified the importance of staff in the success of the various CAP programs that support first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students.

Mr. Borges noted the foresight and vision of Dr. David Ivry and the commitment of former CAP Director Iris Kinnard in steering CAP in its beginnings. He mentioned the vital mentorship of Dr. John C. Norman, the first official CONNPEP (Connecticut Pre-Collegiate Enrichment Program) director, and CONNPEP advisor Robert “Bob” Brown in his own intellectual development and success. In discussing his participation in the CONNPEP summer program, Mr. Borges described how each participant benefited “from the commitment and the support, and yes, love” of each staff person.

It is only fitting, then, that so many current and former CAP and University staff were on hand to celebrate these legacies. Dr. Norman, Dr. Taylor, Robert Brown, Alma Maldonado-Cordner, Bernice Taylor, Toni Moran, Beverly Sims, and Dr. Roger Buckley, to name a few, were some of the former CAP staff in attendance.

The event also welcomed many current and former University personnel that support CAP’s mission, including representatives from the Department of Educational Leadership, Enrollment Planning and Management, the College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources, Student Services, the Neag School of Education, First Year Programs, Enrichment Programs and the Honors Program, and The African American Cultural Center, among others.
Becoming a Global Leader in Salamanca

SSS student Rene Gaspar participated in a month-long study abroad experience in Salamanca, Spain as part of the Council for Opportunity in Education’s competitive Keith Sherin Global Leaders Program. The program, which took place in June 2017, brings together TRIO college students from institutions all over the United States to immerse themselves in Spanish language, academics, and culture.

Rene enrolled in three courses at the University of Salamanca while abroad: Spanish Culture, Spanish Language and Composition, and Latin American/Spanish Cinema. All were taught in Spanish, giving him an immersive learning experience. He also participated in several opportunities for cultural education. He learned how to make Spanish-style tapas, received instruction in flamenco dancing, and even learned about bullfighting from a professional matador!

Outside of class, the different cities and landscapes of Spain became Rene’s teachers. He had the opportunity to go on excursions to places in Spain such as Avila, Segovia, Arribes del Duero, Coimbra, Madrid, and to Lisbon, Portugal. Rene, a Human Development and Family Studies major, feels that his time abroad has already changed how he views his education. It helped him understand the interconnections of a wider global community and taught him the value of “different ideas.”

This experience will have significant life-long impact for Rene. He explains, “This experience taught me to be accepting of being outside of my comfort zone. It has also motivated me to make the impossible an actuality. In addition, by being exposed to such an international population, I have seen growth in my cross cultural communication skills, which will help me be more confident when interacting with individuals of all cultural backgrounds.”

CAP Alumna Recognized For Helping Hartford Students Succeed

CAP alumna Aneela Shah was selected as the 2017 recipient of the Connecticut Association of Educational Opportunity Programs (CAEOP) Alumni Achiever Award. Aneela accepted the award at the 31st annual CAEOP Conference held on October 13, 2017 at Goodwin College in East Hartford.

Aneela attended Bulkeley High School when she applied to UConn’s ConnCAP Program in 1999. Susana Ulloa, Program Director, remembers meeting a “very shy young woman, who had recently arrived to the United States from Pakistan. She was just learning English and adjusting to a new culture and a new life in a very different country.”

After Aneela received her Bachelor’s degree in Molecular & Cell Biology from UConn in 2007, she went on to earn a Master’s degree in Public Health from Independence University. Aneela currently works at Classical Magnet School as a School Counselor, after receiving a second Master’s degree in Education with a concentration in School Counseling from Cambridge College. She finds her work both challenging and rewarding, a perfect combination that tells her she is making a difference.

In addition, Aneela has been an outspoken supporter of the Center for Academic Programs High School Initiatives programs such as ConnCAP and has become an ambassador of TRIO Programs in general. She will also be attending the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) Policy Seminar in Washington, DC to further advocate for federal funding of TRIO Programs.

The CAEOP Alumni Achiever Award is not the first time Aneela has been recognized for her contributions to her community. In recognition of her work with students, Aneela received a Centennial Award in 2015 from Kiwanis International.
McNair Scholars Guest Lecturers in Chemistry Prep Class

Seven McNair Scholars participating in the 2017 Summer Research Program at the Storrs Campus had the unique opportunity to serve as guest lecturers in a five-week chemistry preparation class attended by UConn ConnCAP students. Cyrus Brown, Ekwok Dadzie Jr., Alexa Friedman, Giovanni Ninivaggi, Michael Reid Jr, Martial Sawasawa, and Courtney Wallace teamed up to design and deliver a lecture to educate the high school students about atomic structure.

The lecture on protons, neutrons, and electrons sparked great questions from the ConnCAP students, who were excited to have the Scholars visit their classroom. It also allowed the Scholars to practice teach, and to see themselves as not only the next generation of researchers, but of educators. The following week the Scholars returned to the classroom to review and discuss the accompanying homework assignment with the students.

The Summer Research component of the McNair Scholars Program is a nine-week experience that enables participants, during the summer prior to senior year, to conduct research in their field of study under the guidance of a faculty mentor. This experience often culminates in opportunities to present and/or publish their research.

CAP Alumnus Francisco L. Borges Delivers Keynote at 50th Anniversary Gala

Mr. Francisco Borges, alumnus of UConn’s Connecticut Pre-Collegiate Enrichment Program (CONNPEP), the university’s first educational opportunity program for underserved students, was the keynote speaker at the CAP 50th Anniversary Gala. Following his participation in CONNPEP while in high school, Mr. Borges went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, and a J.D. from the University of Connecticut, School of Law. He has had a distinguished career in law, business, and public service.

During his keynote address, Mr. Borges discussed the incredible difference that educational opportunity can make in a young person’s life. This was illustrated when he shared a personal story of the time he visited a Connecticut prison while serving as State Treasurer. During the visit, he came across a former classmate who was incarcerated. At that moment, Mr. Borges realized that educational opportunity had been the shaping force that had allowed him to walk in freedom on one side of the bars even while his classmate, remembered by Borges as “brighter” with greater “intellectual acuity,” was imprisoned.

Mr. Borges's accomplishments demonstrate that the opportunity to attain higher education, combined with self-motivation and advocacy, can lead to incredible personal and professional accomplishment. In his address he explained, “whatever modicum of success I or others have had, it would not have happened but for those people [CAP staff and counselors] and the TRIO program. I stand in front of you today as an example of that.”

Currently, Mr. Borges is Chairman of Landmark Partners, a private equity and real estate investment company specializing in secondary funds. He is also Chairman of the Board of Directors of Assured Guaranty, Ltd., and is a member of the Board of Directors of Leucadia National Corporation. He also dedicates time to his community, serving on the boards of the Knight Foundation, Selected/Clipper Funds, the Connecticut Public Broadcasting Network, and Millbrook School. Mr. Borges is a former member of the Board and Treasurer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and served on the boards of Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the University of Connecticut Medical/Dental School and Health Center.
The McNair Scholars Program, Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Program (LSAMP), and High School Initiatives collaborated to design the first-ever STEM CAP Conference for nearly 60 high school students participating in UConn’s ConnCAP and First Star Academy programs. This partnership was an exciting first for the program for many reasons. McNair and LSAMP students were able to develop teaching skills in preparation for graduate study. At the same time, First Star and ConnCAP students were able to learn more about exciting possibilities in the STEM fields. By working together and sharing their talents, the high school and undergraduate students grew professionally and intellectually. The event, which took place on November 4, 2017, explored the theme of “STEM is Amazing.”

Dynasti Johnson, a junior from Bulkeley High School in Hartford, stated, “I really enjoyed going around to the different rooms. My favorite activity was tracking infectious diseases and the lemon and battery activity.” The conference was a good example of how ISS programs can work together to provide unique opportunities.

CAP Recognized at Annual Conference

UConn’s Center for Academic Programs was recognized at the Connecticut Association of Educational Opportunity Programs (CAEOP) annual conference for 50 years of promoting educational access, retention, and opportunity in the state. CAP has served first-generation, low-income, and/or underrepresented students for 50 consecutive years through a variety of TRIO Programs (funded by the U.S. Department of Education) and Educational Opportunity Programs (funded by the state and/or host institution), including CONNPEP, Upward Bound, GEAR UP, ConnCAP, Educational Talent Search, Student Support Services, and McNair Scholars, among others. This makes UConn one of the longest-standing providers of educational opportunity programs for underserved students in Connecticut and the nation.

Programs Partner for Amazing STEM Conference
Dr. Bidya Ranjeet Honored for Commitment to Education Abroad

Dr. Bidya Ranjeet, CAP Executive Director and Director of Student Support Services (SSS), was honored at the CAP 50th anniversary gala for her innovative work in promoting accessible education abroad experiences for UConn SSS students. Dr. Maria D. Martinez and Anthony Brooks, SSS Alum, presented her with the award.

Since 2002, Dr. Ranjeet has worked tirelessly to ensure that SSS students, most of whom are from low-income backgrounds, have access to an international education and the chance to grow as global citizens. Knowing the barriers that SSS students face in studying abroad, such as funding concerns and responsibilities within their families, Dr. Ranjeet has collaborated with numerous university departments to develop affordable, short-term summer education abroad programs designed exclusively for SSS students.

Currently, SSS offers education abroad programs in London, England; Cape Town, South Africa; and Prague, Czech Republic. The programs run for three or four weeks, from mid-May through early-June, enabling students to return home to work and/or take classes during summer break. Each program has a pre-departure component held during the spring semester so that participants may bond as a group as they prepare for their international experience. Dr. Ranjeet’s efforts ensure that students are well-prepared for the rigors of international travel and that they can make the most of their time in a new country.

During the presentation of the award, CAP announced an opportunity for its alumni and friends to support Dr. Ranjeet’s vision through a donation to the CAP Education Abroad Scholarship Fund. This giving campaign helps make education abroad opportunities accessible to CAP students by helping to subsidize the costs associated with their travel. More information about this exciting project is available here: https://uconn.givecorps.com/causes/9901-center-for-academic-programs-education-abroad-scholarship.

First Star Academy Graduate Continues Her Journey

UConn First Star Academy graduate and current Student Support Services (SSS) student at the UConn Waterbury campus, Tabitha Valentino understands the value of dedication, hard work, and making the most of every opportunity. This inspiring young woman, affectionately known as “Tabby”, is an incredible example of resilience. Tabby refuses to allow her challenging past to dictate her future. In July 2017, she was featured in a newspaper article in the Record Journal. The story highlighted her successes and her positive outlook toward the future despite facing difficult circumstances, including a failed adoption.

Always a committed student, Tabby made the most of her education in high school and the UConn First Star Academy. For her senior capstone project, she orchestrated a clothing and supply drive for youth in foster care. She talked about the challenges that foster youth face, as well as the need to better recognize this population of children. In addition to her strong academic performance, Tabby was a basketball player at Lyman Hall High School and worked full-time at a local restaurant. She never gave herself much time to rest, demonstrating her strong drive.

Tabby began her college career in the fall 2017 semester having already earned 12 college credits, nine of those with the UConn First Star Academy in summer and three through an Early College Experience course at her high school. She was invited to be the alumni speaker at the 2017 First Star Academy summer program closing ceremony. Recognizing the benefit of college access programs like the First Star Academy, Tabby plans to continue working with current and former First Star students as a mentor.

Tabby is currently a pre-teaching major in UConn’s Academic Center for Exploratory Students.
ConnCAP Students Participate In STEM Lab Experience

Dr. Sabato Santaniello, Assistant Professor in UConn’s Biomedical Engineering Department, invited ConnCAP students to participate in a hands-on lab experience at UConn. Dr. Santaniello created this pilot program for Summer 2017 with the hope of expanding the program to more students pending funding from a National Science Foundation Grant (NSF). The aim of this laboratory experience was to expose low-income, underrepresented, and first-generation college students to STEM fields and to motivate them to consider majoring in one of these areas. This lab demonstrated that engineering could be fun while also reinforcing complex concepts from physics and biology. Rising high school seniors from ConnCAP were invited to apply to this unique, highly competitive opportunity and four were selected. The students conducted research for five hours a week in Dr. Santaniello’s laboratory during the entire six weeks of the ConnCAP summer program.

The selected students for this experience knew that this was an outstanding opportunity to do research alongside graduate students working on brain waves. As Lena Lac, a senior from Bulkeley High School, stated “The STEM lab this summer, taught me a lot about how unique STEM can be.” Ke’Ahja Prather, a senior from Hartford Public High School, explained, “I liked that the class was challenging […] It helped us get our work done quicker. It was cool, like let’s be real, I don’t get to see that in LGA [Law & Government Academy].” This experience was also eye opening for Zinodene Steward, another senior from Hartford Public High School, who commented, “The STEM lab was a great experience for me. It introduced me to a new skill I did not know that I had. I learned how to program and operate specific structures I had created. The STEM lab had many exciting projects and it was a pleasure being in that class.” Regardless of the outcome of the NSF grant application, Dr. Santaniello plans continue with this collaboration during the summer of 2018.

The UConn First Star Academy, in partnership with the Department of Children and Families, completed its fifth summer program at the end of July 2017. There are numerous challenges in creating, operating, and sustaining an educational opportunity program like the First Star Academy. Along the way, many people have come together and shown incredible support for the program.

During the 2017 summer program graduation ceremony, two important advocates of the program were recognized for their unwavering support over the past five years. Former Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and current UConn professor at the Neag School of Education Dr. Sally Reis, and DCF Commissioner Joette Katz, have been champions in their respective fields of education and child protection. Their support of this program has been instrumental in providing life-changing opportunity to the students who are served.

Special Thanks
Regional and National TRIO Colleagues Attend CAP Gala

Leaders of the New England Educational Opportunity Association (NEOA) and the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE), based in Washington, DC, turned out to support and celebrate CAP's 50th anniversary gala on October 28, 2017. Both organizations work to advance access and success in post-secondary education for students who are first-generation to college and from low-income backgrounds. The crux of their advocacy is maintaining and/or increasing federal funding for TRIO programs, which have proven track records of success for this student population.

Maureen Hoyler, COE President, recognized UConn’s long-standing, institutional commitment to serving Connecticut’s first-generation, low-income students as the driving force behind CAP’s longevity, as well as the internal and external partnerships that enable students in CAP’s various programs to thrive. NEOA President Jane Foley, and Past-Presidents Gaelyn Hastings and Randy Schroeder, came from Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, respectively, to help mark the milestone event. Marian Belgrave-Howard, co-founder and first president of NEOA, came out of retirement to celebrate.

Each of these attendees, all of whom have extensive experience in TRIO programs, consider CAP’s 50 years of providing educational access and opportunity to underserved populations a remarkable accomplishment, especially given the competitiveness of federal TRIO grants and the budget fluctuations they have undergone since they first launched in 1967.

Avery Point Networks with State Representative

Avery Point’s SSS Program hosted Representative Chris Soto on Wednesday, July 26, 2017. Representative Soto, a passionate advocate for college access and opportunity, took part in ice breaker activities with SSS students, discussed “intimidation” and “empowerment,” and even enjoyed a helping of Avery Point’s very own ice cream flavor, Coastal Crunch. After meeting with students, Representative Soto spoke briefly with Aaron Collins, Avery Point’s SSS Coordinator, about community engagement, equal rights, and educational access and opportunities.

Representative Soto serves as the Founding Director of Higher Edge, an organization dedicated to guiding Eastern CT’s low-income and first-generation college students to four-year degrees by providing support and resources. While visiting Avery Point, he had the opportunity to interact with some of his past participants in the Higher Edge Program. These included freshmen students Ayzel Morales, Da’Relle Johnson, Jovan Aimetti, Queenie Diaz, and Garylisse Lebron. Elizabeth Santana, a 2017 graduate and Higher Edge alumna, was also able to participate in the event with Representative Soto. They also discussed student success stories, like Luisanna Cabrera, an Avery Point alumna who now works as the Success Program Director for Higher Edge.
The Center for Academic Programs was awarded its second consecutive grant to continue UConn’s McNair Scholars Program for another five years. The 1.1 million dollar U.S. Department of Education TRIO Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program grant serves first-generation, low-income undergraduate students majoring in STEM fields that seek to pursue doctorate or other advanced degrees. The program connects participants with faculty in their field of study, provides them with research opportunities, exposes them to graduate schools and professional networks, and prepares them for applying to graduate school, among other services.

Thirty-five UConn McNair Scholars have graduated with a Bachelor’s degree since the program was launched in 2012. Among the graduates, the majority are pursuing graduate or doctorate degrees. One former Scholar, Jacob Ferreira, will soon earn a Pharm.D. from UConn’s School of Pharmacy. Ronald E. McNair was an African-American astronaut and physicist who died when the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded in 1986. CAP is honored and grateful to be able to play a role in continuing his legacy.
CAP Alumni Make Gala a Celebration

One of the highlights of the CAP 50th Anniversary Gala was the presence of so many accomplished alumni, two of whom played active roles in the evening’s events. Desi Nesmith (SSS ‘97) guided the program as the Master of Ceremonies. Nesmith earned his BS in Elementary Education in 2001 and went on to earn two MA degrees, one in Education and one in Educational Leadership. He has had many roles in educational settings, serving as a classroom teacher, a consultant focused on improving student learning, and a principal. Nesmith has received many awards in recognition of his achievements, including the Connecticut Association of Educational Opportunity Programs Award in 2009, the UConn Neag School of Education Promising Young Professional Award in 2010, and the prestigious Milken Award in 2014. Most recently, Nesmith uses his talents at the state level as the Chief Turnaround Officer for the CT Department of Education.

Nesmith was joined by Justis Lopez (SSS ‘10), who kept guests energized with musical entertainment. Lopez received his BS in Education in 2014 and completed his MA in Education in 2015. He has taught courses in social studies in Connecticut as well as New York. His classroom work emphasizes social justice, empowerment through music and the spoken word, and the innovative use of technology. His work as a community activist and educator has been recognized by the Greater New England Alliance of Black School Educators in 2014, the Community Foundation of Greater New Britain in 2014, and the Connecticut General Assembly in 2017. Lopez got every guest out of their seats and on their feet for a final song. Current and former staff, alumni, and friends of the program danced together in joyous celebration.

McNair/SSS Alumna Discusses Mentorship with Queen of Sweden

It’s not every day that one meets a queen, but that is exactly what UConn SSS and McNair Scholars alumna Prekiya Kennebrew did when she attended the Mentor International annual conference in Sweden on January 25, 2018. The conference brings together affiliates from all over the world dedicated to empowering youth and preventing substance abuse to discuss programs, fundraising, and branding ideas. As Program Manager for the affiliate Mentor Foundation USA, based in Virginia, Prekiya spoke with HM Queen Silvia of Sweden about the opioid crisis in America, and the peer-to-peer programs her organization has developed to promote healthy living among youth. HM Queen Silvia, who founded Mentor International in 1994 in collaboration with the World Health Organization, was impressed with the organization’s work and vowed continued support moving forward.

Prekiya earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with a minor in Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies from UConn in 2015. In addition to her full-time work, she is pursuing a Master of Public Administration degree at George Mason University and will graduate in May 2018.
SSS Alum Builds Community Abroad

Dequan Zhu took a unique path that led him to the Ukraine after earning his BS in International Business Management in 2015. Zhu joined the Peace Corps after graduation, and this volunteer opportunity has allowed him to apply his degree in exciting ways. He currently serves as a community development volunteer in Zhytomyr Oblast at the Pulin Community and Business Center. This Center is dedicated to supporting and facilitating “social and economic development projects by creating a sustainable impact.”

Zhu has participated in programs for people of all ages, from teens to widows, within the community. Most recently, he has been at work on an initiative called “Green Pulyny” which is designed to educate and encourage recycling in schools. In addition to lessons about the importance of the “3R’s: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle,” the Pulin Community and Business Center has set up recycling containers in multiple locations. When he is not actively serving his community, Zhu records the experiences of volunteers on the Pulin Community and Business Center’s website.

Alum Rachael Gavin Inspires Students at SSS Leadership Conference

Rachael Gavin (SSS ’10) returned to UConn in August 2017 to serve as a keynote speaker at the Student Support Services (SSS) Leadership Conference. The theme was Under Construction: Building the Professional within You.

Rachael shared her moving story of growing up in a biracial family and being raised by a single father, to which she attributed her strength to promote social justice and women empowerment by way of artistic media. Her journey to womanhood, as a born activist, has been influenced by intense experiences. She expressed how her study abroad opportunity to London, England with the SSS program allowed her to construct herself as an influential leader.

Rachael has since founded her organization, Fraternizing with Feminists, and authored a book of poems, entitled Unscathed. She is currently a Master’s candidate at Goldsmiths, University of London, further immersing herself in the city that changed her life. During her keynote address, Rachael offered valuable tips and advice on achieving career goals with a purpose to help other young professionals succeed in the community. Students walked away from her opening session feeling empowered to pursue their passions, amazed by her resilience, and excited for the remainder of the conference schedule.

The fun, educational three-day conference allowed rising sophomore, junior and senior students to participate in a lineup of self-constructing workshops, including “Google Yourself,” “Building Your Personal Brand,” and “Framework of What Employers Are Looking For,” among others. All sessions provided the occasion to explore the question of what makes an effective leader, and introduced students to leadership opportunities on and off campus.
Student Awarded Gilman Scholarship for Summer Education Abroad

Political Science major Leann McLaren was awarded a Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship for her 2017 education abroad experience with SSS Summer in Cape Town. While abroad, Leann engaged in service learning with her internship site, Right 2 Know, a human rights activism campaign, while being enriched with the culture of South Africa.

A junior from Manchester, Leann is currently completing the UConn Honors Congressional Internship Program in Washington, D.C., where she is interning with Congressman John Larson. Her goal is to become a lawyer, and she is excited to add this experience to her growing list of accomplishments as she prepares for law school.

As a rising sophomore, Leann participated in the Prelaw Undergraduate Scholars Program at the University of Maine, School of Law, where she was exposed to numerous aspects of the legal system and developed her leadership skills. She has been part of the UConn Discovery Leadership Program and was selected to be a member of the CLAS Student Leadership Board. In addition, she has served as a research assistant in the Political Science Department.

Leann has already made connections between her experiences abroad and her congressional internship. “One of the best things you can do in life is to live beyond your comfort zone. I’ve done this through pushing myself to explore places and seek opportunities far beyond what I ever could have imagined was possible,” she said. By living outside of her comfort zone abroad, Leann is now encouraging others to do the same. She added, “If I can do it, there’s nothing stopping someone who wants to as well.”

The Gilman Scholarship, which is overseen by the U.S. Department of State, yields a highly competitive applicant pool. The collaboration with UConn’s Office of National Scholarships and Fellowships has been instrumental in increasing the number of SSS Gilman recipients, like Leann. Additional past recipients include Ravneet Gill (South Africa, Spring 2017), Tashana Brown (Brazil, Fall 2015), and Tarif Brown (Singapore, Fall 2014).
Czech It Out! SSS Summer in Prague

Fifteen SSS students had the opportunity to participate in the inaugural SSS Summer in Prague program in 2017. The three-week, intensive education abroad program introduced them to Czech Republic language, culture, and academics.

While abroad, the students enrolled in a three-credit course, Contemporary Czech Art, Culture and Literature: Urban Semiotics, in which they studied how Czech art and music connected with activism, minority groups and mainstream culture, as well as the impact of Communist occupation on Czech culture. Classes took place at Charles University, one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Europe, and included field trips to museums and historical sites throughout the city, bringing what they were learning to life. One notable class trip included the unique opportunity for students to learn and record a song in the Czech language at a recording studio owned by the father of their Charles University professor.

“I was always delighted to attend classes,” said Economics major David Garcia. “The tram ride from my dorm to Charles University was an adventure of its own. Each day was a different experience.”

Every day in Prague was a chance for the students to step out of their comfort zones as they navigated the unfamiliar city, tried new foods, and practiced speaking the language. On weekends, they kept busy by hiking the Bohemian Forest, visiting a church made almost entirely of human bones in Kutna Hora, and touring the beautiful Czech town of Cesky Krumlov. For all of the students, a night out at the opera was a first.

For Education major Anne Dennerville, her experience in Prague was nothing short of Zen. “Studying abroad in Prague was one of the best decisions I have made in my college career so far. I learned to enjoy getting lost, navigate my way back, and be more independent. Mostly, I learned to truly live in the moment, which I feel is usually lost in American culture.”

Summer in Prague joins two other short-term programs designed exclusively for SSS students: Summer in London and Summer in Cape Town. The program also encourages students to participate in other education abroad experiences offered by the university. In 2017, 68 SSS students studied all over the world in a variety of short- and long-term programs, including Europe, South America, Asia, and South Africa.
SSS Nursing Students Receive Dose of Inspiration from Alumna

Eleven SSS nursing students gathered on November 8, 2017 to hear SSS alumna Rubby Koomson share her experiences as both a former UConn nursing student and a current nurse at Hartford Hospital’s post-operative unit. Rubby shared insight on everything from successfully tackling specific courses to studying abroad to getting involved with health-related causes as an undergraduate.

“You’ve got this,” Rubby told the group, most of whom were freshmen navigating their first semester of nursing school. Her words provided a much-needed dose of inspiration for the students, especially as they were preparing for a second round of mid-term exams in some challenging courses.

By sharing her undergraduate experience in the nursing program, and outlining what a day-in-the-life of a nurse is like, Rubby brought the profession to life for the students. Several of them exchanged contact information with her to stay in touch as they progress through their program.

Rubby’s nursing journey started after she volunteered in a women’s clinic in Ghana with UConn Medical Brigades the summer after her freshman year. An Allied Health major at the time, she planned to work in the field of Public Health, but her experience abroad made her realize that her true passion was hands-on nursing. Soon after, she applied and was accepted to the School of Nursing.

Nine SSS freshmen were admitted to UConn’s nursing program in fall 2017, the largest cohort yet, bringing the total number of current SSS nursing students to 34.

Incoming Freshmen Tour Labs

Research labs on the Storrs campus were buzzing with energy on August 8, 2017, when 71 participants in the SSS Summer Program had the unique opportunity to tour 11 of them. Faculty and graduate students were on hand during the tours to discuss their research, answer students’ questions and show them around. SSS and LSAMP alumnus Christian Caceres, the SSS Summer Assistant Residential Coordinator, who was heavily involved with research during his undergraduate career, facilitated the series of tours.

The goal was to expose students to what it means to be a researcher at UConn.

Labs included in the tours were Nutritional Sciences, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Chemistry, Psychology, Molecular and Cell Biology, and Animal Science. Scheduled simultaneously were discussions with faculty from the School of Business and the Political Science Department to allow students interested in fields other than STEM the chance to speak with professors in those disciplines.

Student feedback on the lab tours was overwhelmingly positive. It exposed students to research in disciplines that they were previously unaware of, prompting some to consider new majors. Several students even landed interviews with faculty to potentially join their labs.

SSS thanks the faculty and graduate students who welcomed the students into their labs for volunteering their time and expertise to this exciting event.
Hartford Alum Excels in Accelerated Pharmacy Program

After graduating in 2015 with a degree in Allied Health, Janiel Green, an alumna of the SSS Program in Hartford, is excelling in a competitive, accelerated pharmacy program at the University of Saint Joseph. As an undergraduate, Janiel had extensive experiences in healthcare as a Pharmacy Assistant Intern and a Physical Therapist Assistant Intern in South Africa. After graduation, she built on these experiences by becoming a Home Care Supervisor in Connecticut. Here is how she describes the keys to her success:

It is December 2017, and I am extremely ecstatic because I have successfully completed my first semester at the University of Saint Joseph, School of Pharmacy. I had mixed feelings being accepted to the pharmacy program at the University. First, I was very excited and felt very accomplished. On the other hand, I was shaken with nerves wondering if I would be able to manage an accelerated program with its intensity. I was still in the mindset of studying and taking assessments the traditional undergraduate way, and not fully grasping that being in a professional program now required more rigor and time. I was quickly in a predicament where I failed to make the 84% requirement, forcing me to retake an exam. However, as classes went underway and I learned the rules, I developed strategies to ensure that I attained the passing grade of 84% on all my exams/tests, thus completing the semester with honors. This achievement was supplemented by me winning the position of class secretary.

Since my graduation from UConn in 2015, I have come to the realization that self-motivation has been the foundation of my journey. This motivation has fueled my drive to continuing education and hence my acceptance to the pharmacy program at USJ. The choice to breach my educational voyage and not go directly into graduate school was not taken lightly. However, I made the decision to work in a role as a Homecare Manager, travel, and gain more hands-on experience before embarking on the road to becoming a pharmacist. Re-engaging back into school after being out for almost 2 years was a challenge in itself, but my thirst for solid accomplishment fueled my motivation to work hard to get enrolled into college and work hard towards my achievement. The experience, although challenging has been very rewarding, and it has taught me how to budget my time effectively and work closely with others to achieve goals. I wholeheartedly enjoy the course, it is enlightening and informative and I look forward to my up-coming classes. In closing, I would like to recognize my first college experience being enrolled in the SSS program. This is where I developed my fundamentals in higher education, which have supported my personal and academic developments and my achievements thus far.
CAP Receives Citation from Connecticut General Assembly

State Senator Mae Flexer presented a citation from the Connecticut General Assembly in honor of the Center for Academic Program’s critical role in supporting first-generation students’ educational goals. Dr. Maria D. Martinez and Dr. Bidya Ranjeet accepted the citation on behalf of the Center. The General Assembly recognized CAP’s 50 years of “providing educational access and opportunities for populations traditionally underrepresented in higher education.” During her remarks while conferring this honor, Senator Flexer spoke about her own experience as a first-generation college student and the value of college for this student population. Senator Flexer has been an outspoken advocate for higher education in Connecticut and a staunch supporter of CAP’s mission.

SSS Junior Selected For Leadership Legacy Experience

CAP extends congratulations to Xavier Arriaga for being selected as a member of the Leadership Legacy Experience at UConn. In this program, he will be among a cohort of some of UConn’s strongest leaders to further develop his skill set. Xavier will have the opportunity to build mentoring relationships with two professionals, to engage in critical reflection through a variety of programs, and to build upon his strengths as a leader.

Xavier, an Economics major from Hartford, enters this program with an impressive resume of leadership experience. He has served as a SSS mentor and a teaching assistant for the First Year Experience program, an assistant trip director for an Alternative Spring Break with Community Outreach, and a peer mentor for the SSS Summer in Cape Town education abroad program in 2016. Xavier is a member of the inaugural SSS Leadership Board and has completed internships with United Technologies Aerospace Systems and Right 2 Know, a human rights activism campaign in South Africa. He was also accepted into the Master of Public Administration program at UConn.

Xavier is passionate about encouraging men of color to pursue leadership positions and consistently leads by example. His previous leadership experiences, his educational background, and his access to intentional learning activities through Leadership Legacy will prepare him well for his post-graduate goal of making educational and political impact in the city of Hartford.

Congratulations again to Xavier Arriaga on these outstanding achievements.
SSS/LSAMP Alumnus Receives Full Scholarship to UConn Medical School

SSS and LSAMP alumnus Christian Caceres, who graduated in May 2017 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Nutritional Sciences, was not only accepted to UConn’s School of Medicine for fall 2018, he was awarded a full tuition and fees scholarship for all four years from the Health Career Opportunity Programs (HCOP). Currently, Christian has a paid postgraduate research position at the Yale School of Medicine’s Department of Infectious Diseases, where he is working with Dr. Raymond Johnson on chlamydia pathogenesis and vaccine development. Congratulations to Christian!

SSS Student Work Featured on UConn’s Archives and Special Collections Blog

Three students from an ENGL 1010S class had excerpts of their final papers showcased on the Archives and Special Collections Blog. Armani Maldonado, Sarah Hernandez, and Nikki Wilson conducted research in the Dodd Center under the direction of an archivist and created portfolios that analyzed the historical foundations of activist movements. Check out their work here: http://blogs.lib.uconn.edu/archives/2017/09/18/teaching-activism-and-leadership-through-archives/

Student Receives Co-op Legacy Fellowship

ConnCAP alumnus and current SSS freshman Erdit Abedini has been awarded a Co-op Legacy Fellowship of $5,000 for his proposal to fund a new summer soccer club for high school students in the Hartford area. Hartford United, as he plans to call it, will support students’ athletic development, build confidence, and offer a safe and fun summer activity. Erdit secured support from multiple donors in addition to the grant funds and established an advisory board with personnel from Bulkeley High School, which has also agreed to be the host institution for this exciting program. Way to go, Erdit!

SSS/LSAMP Student Receives First Year Excellence in Innovation Award

While SSS and LSAMP student Christina Valera was a member of Innovation House in 2017, under the supervision of Dr. Hadi Bozorgmanesh, she designed a bracelet that automatically tracks blood pressure every two hours and relays this information to an app. If the bracelet measures a blood pressure so high that it is unsafe, it contacts emergency responders. Her idea came from health problems that she saw in her own family, and she imagines a large audience for this product, particularly amongst the elderly. She received the First Year Excellence in Innovation Award at the Student Life Awards for this device. Kudos to Christina!

SSS Sophomore Inspires Incoming Freshmen at 2017 Closing Ceremony

SSS sophomore and Chemical Engineering major Leana Santos was a guest speaker at the 2017 SSS Summer Program Closing Ceremony, held on the Storrs campus on August 11, 2017 in the Student Union Theater. Leana shared with the incoming freshmen and their families the challenges she faced as a non-native English speaker and a recent immigrant to the United States. She emphasized the importance of the SSS program and mentorship in her development at UConn. Leana’s successes and growth inspired attendees, and she concluded by encouraging them to use all of their resources while at UConn.

SSS Student Keeps the Stamford Community Connected

In fall 2017, SSS Digital Media and Design (DMD) student Isabella Montenegro became the Social Media Manager for OneUPL, a publication sharing the talk and creativity of UConn Stamford. She created a plan to connect with students via multiple social media platforms and kept them informed on University announcements and downtown Stamford events. In addition to this exciting opportunity, Isabella has also served as the Social Media Marketing intern for W8X alternative weight training. She is excited to be able to utilize her experience collaborating with the OneUPL team and the Stamford campus community at her new internship with CNN.
Center For Academic Programs Mission

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.

Center For Academic Programs Staff

Assistant Vice Provost, Institute for Student Success
Director, Center for Academic Programs
Maria D. Martinez

Executive Program Director, CAP
Director, Student Support Services
Bidya Ranjeet

SSS Regional Campus Coordinators
Avery Point: Aaron Collins
Hartford: Lynn Papacostas Ginolfi
Stamford: Ruben Casseus
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SSS Counselors
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Director, High School Initiatives
Susana M. Ulloa

UCAP Program Advisor
Christina Rivera

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David Mrotek

McNair Scholars Program Coordinator
Renée Gilberti

Assistant to the Assistant Vice Provost
Cathie Mirakian

Administrative Services Assistant
Maggie Judy

Business Manager
Cynthia Donnelly

Center for Academic Programs
University of Connecticut
368 Fairfield Way, Unit 4170
Storrs, CT 06269-4170
www.cap.uconn.edu
The most beautiful things are never in plain sight

The most beautiful things are never in plain sight.
THIS is where there are more dreams, everyone has wings.
The odds are against us, but we still fly because here is where there is more devotion because the absence of privilege did not/will not/cannot stand.
We say —
Give us the platform and we will write our names in excellence.
Give us the platform and we will make our dreams real.
We will shake hands with our futures and become in charge of our destinies.
We say —
Give us the platform and we will write our names in excellence, dance through obstruction with grace.
Become a part of something bigger than ourselves.
How does one become so graceful?
How does one progress without example?
You must come from a place of magic in disguise.
After so many “you can’ts” and “you won’ts”
We sit here, people of we can, we will, and we did.
Give us the platform and make way for our stories to manifest themselves.
The most beautiful things are never in plain sight.
Until they refuse to go unnoticed.
Until they refuse to be forgotten.
Here is where hardship fought, but could not conquer.

Sadejah Blake ’20 (CLAS)

While the CAP 50th Anniversary Gala honored past achievements, it also celebrated current students and the future they represent. Two SSS students, Marlene Kabeya and Sadejah Blake, shared their talents with attendees. Kabeya moved the audience with a stirring rendition of the song “Man in the Mirror,” reminding everyone that change always needs to start with the individual. Blake inspired attendees by her powerful reading of an original poem, “The most beautiful things are never in plain sight.”