

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

**Maria D. Martinez, Assistant Vice Provost
Institute for Student Success
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Welcome to the 2014-2015 edition of *Update*, the annual newsletter of the Center for Academic Programs (CAP). Inside, you'll find articles about events, activities, and student accomplishments.

We are pleased to share highlights such as the National First Star Academy Retreat, the participation of SSS students in the 2015 Leadership Legacy Experience, Neag School of Education Diversity Dinner, McNair Scholar publishes important research, SSS Alumni honored with TRIO Achiever Awards, ConnCAP students experience community service and more. We hope you enjoy learning more about these activities in the articles and stories that were selected to be included in this newsletter.

We welcome your support and involvement with the Center. Every year we reaffirm our commitment to access and educational opportunity for low income, first generation, and underrepresented populations. As always, I express my appreciation to the staff and to the readers for your continuous support.

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SSS ALUMNI RECEIVE TRIO ACHIEVER AWARDS

Two UConn SSS alums, Jane Sampeur and Anthony Brooks, were 2014 recipients of regional and state TRIO Achiever Awards, respectively, for their outstanding leadership and service.

Jane earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from UConn in 2006 and a Juris Doctorate degree from UConn's School of Law in 2009. She currently works with The Legal Aid Society in the Criminal Defense Practice Brooklyn, NY office, where her legal expertise centers on helping impoverished populations and people of color. She was the recipient of the New England Educational Opportunity Association's Rising Star Award.

Anthony, who graduated from UConn in 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and earned a Sixth Year Diploma in Professional Education from the Neag School of Education in 2013, currently serves as Resident Principal for Jefferson Elementary School in New Britain, CT. He was named Pulaski Middle School Teacher of the Year in 2013. Presently, Anthony is pursuing Educational Administrator Certification through Neag. He received the Connecticut Association of Educational Opportunity Programs (CAEOP) TRIO Achiever Award.

Anthony's heartfelt acceptance speech was greatly appreciated by the TRIO community. In it, he outlined critical points along his journey from his first days as a UConn freshman to becoming a principal. Following are excerpts from the speech which CAP would like to share with the UConn community:

Let me begin by thanking all the people of CAEOP who thought me worthy of being named an



Jane Sampeur (left) and Dr. Bidya Ranjeet at NEOA TRIO Achievers Awards

“Achiever.” ...I know I didn't arrive at this point by myself, so I'm thrilled to have this opportunity to show my gratitude for the work of so many people on the frontlines of educational opportunity and behind the scenes who impacted my life tremendously...

I arrived at UConn in the summer of 1996, having never set foot on campus before. I was a low-income student with great potential (and fewer pounds around my waist). I was, at best, reluctant about entering UConn as an SSS student. I had a teenager's ego, and the love and support of my family, but no belief in myself and my capabilities. My world was so small, and I liked it that way. I had no idea what kind of support I was going to need to be successful in college and beyond...

As time passed I began to feel just how much the folks at SSS believed in me. The countless conversations I had with the counselors about time management, study skills, and the power of visiting professors during office hours got me through classes.



(left to right) Marie McCain, Joel Brooks, TRIO Achiever Anthony Brooks, Dr. Bidya Ranjeet

I became a peer tutor for the program. I was hired as an RA and a Hall Director for several SSS summer programs.

In 2001, I was SSS's first participant in TRIO's Shared Journeys study tour at the University of Liverpool and Erasmus University... That experience changed how I perceived everything. It made my tiny world a lot bigger. I felt like anything I wanted to do in it was within reach. I can't thank CAEOP, NEOA, and COE enough for making that possible. It's clear to me now that not only have these programs impacted me, but the investments of time and energy and resources that were made in me will give my own children a vantage point that I didn't have until my SSS experience. These opportunities changed their futures, as well...

Maya Angelou famously said, "People don't always remember what you say, or even what you do, but they will always remember how you made them feel." Well, Marie McCain, Dr. Bidya Ranjeet, Dr. Maria D. Martinez and others at SSS have always made me feel special, and I'll never forget it...

As I understand more about educational organizations, I realize that the work we do in education never ends, especially if our aim is to get low-income, first generation students through college and beyond... there are so many people involved in our work, and each person is critical to our students' success. I see now that anyone who reviewed my SAT scores and high school transcripts, or secured funding for programs I've participated in, or talked me through my struggles, or put a mailing label on my acceptance letter to UConn is a part of my success, and to them I say, thank you... Please continue to support our students as you have.

To the people of CAEOP, NEOA, COE, and SSS; you strengthened me. To my students; you invigorate me. To my wife; you inspire me. To my children; you fulfill me. To my brother, you complete me. And to my mother; "You're the real MVP." (from Kevin Durant). Thank you!

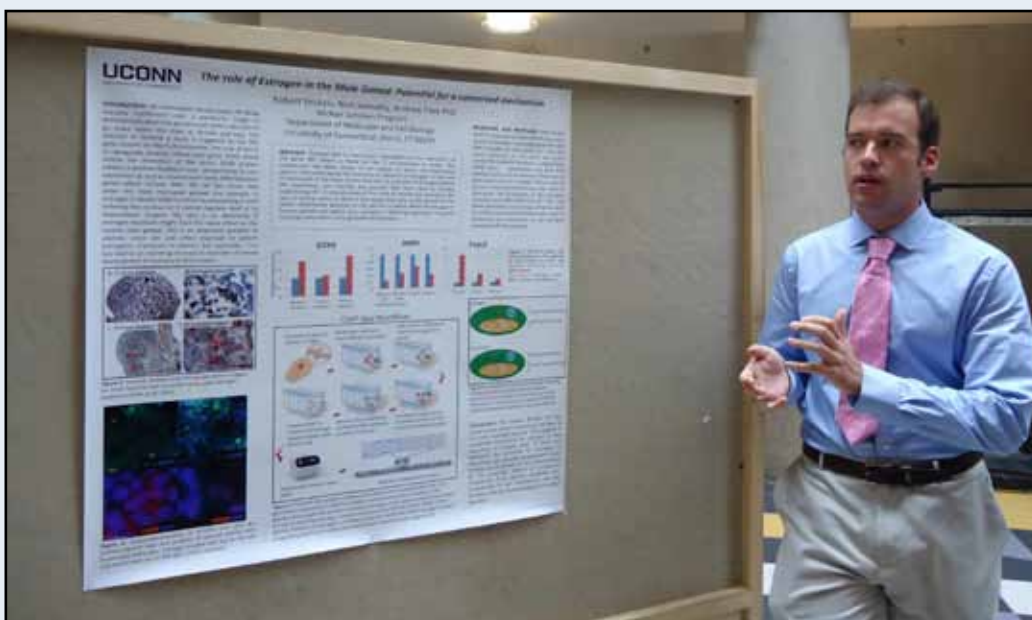
MCNAIR SCHOLAR IS FIRST AUTHOR ON PUBLISHED RESEARCH

CAP congratulates UConn McNair Scholar Robert Stickels for having his research published in the journal *Biology of Reproduction* in fall 2014. Robert is first author on the manuscript, which is a huge accomplishment for an undergraduate student.

Since his sophomore year, Robert has spent multiple summers and the academic year conducting research with the Pask and O'Neill laboratories at UConn. His research has focused on investigating the correlation between BPA-free plastics, estrogen, and male reproductive development, using the tamar wallaby as a model species. He has presented his work at various undergraduate research symposia at UConn.

Robert, a senior, is applying to Ph.D. programs in Molecular Cell

Biology, Genomics, and Genetics to continue investigating research questions using techniques honed as a McNair Scholar. Robert's published research can be accessed at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25395677>.



McNair Scholar Rob Stickels presenting his research

NEAG SCHOOL OF EDUCATION DIVERSITY DINNER

SSS students aspiring to be teachers had the opportunity to connect with SSS alumni currently working in the education field during the Neag School of Education's "Celebrate Diversity in Education Dinner." The event was held on October 20, 2014 at the Alumni Center on the Storrs campus. Nearly twenty current SSS students and alumni attended the event, which served as an opportunity for the former to network and the latter to reflect on and share their experiences.

First year SSS student Bricherland Quinones said, "I was nervous at first [about attending], but it turned out to be very comfortable and inviting. I made some connections and feel better about going into the field. This reinforced my desire to work with a diverse group of children in the future." SSS Freshman Marianna Bedoya echoed Bricherland's words, and added, "To be here surrounded by individuals I can identify with and network with, it's truly a blessing."

SSS alumnus Desi Nesmith, current principal of Metacomet Elementary School in Bloomfield, CT, appreciated the opportunity to give back to UConn and SSS students. "As a 1997 participant in the SSS program, it was important to be able to connect with others that have had similar experiences at UConn. SSS was the starting point for many of us and helped to lay the foundation in which we have had success." Anthony Brooks, an SSS alumnus and current Resident Principal at Jefferson Elementary School in New Britain, CT, said that the event "reminds us we have more to do, and gives us an opportunity to strengthen our connections moving forward."

Over the years, many of UConn's SSS students have enrolled in and graduated from Neag's Teacher Education programs, becoming educators who greatly impact the lives of the students they work with. Events such as this are important, allowing for educators, new and aspiring, to come together in a spirit of community and diversity.



SSS students and Alumni at "Celebrate Diversity in Education" dinner

STUDENT ELECTED PRESIDENT OF ASSOCIATED STUDENT GOVERNMENT

Rafael Perez, SSS class of 2017, was born in Colombia and came to the United States as a child in hopes of achieving the “American Dream.” Currently a sophomore majoring in biology, his role as ASG president has helped to sharpen his leadership characteristics and has pushed him to become a more active community member.

Recently, Avery Point SSS regional coordinator Aaron Collins was able to sit down with Rafael and ask him a few questions about the ASG and his role as president.

Aaron: What is ASG?

Rafael: The Associated Student Government is a student run university organization formed to give students the opportunity to create clubs, plan events and take part in other university related activities. Our job is to create an environment for students to thrive socially, academically and personally.

Aaron: What inspired you to run for ASG president?



Rafael Perez, President of the Associated Student Government, Avery Point campus

Rafael: After attending my first meeting as a freshman, I felt welcomed and connected to the campus. The previous president and board created a community-oriented environment for freshman, like myself, to voice their opinions. I knew at that moment I wanted to be a part of the big picture and make a difference in the lives of UConn students.

Aaron: What have you learned through your participation in ASG?

Rafael: I’ve learned that I have the potential to do great things. I can be a successful leader if I continue to listen, learn, set my priorities and make wise daily decisions.

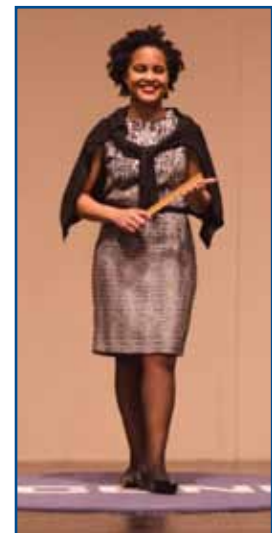
Aaron: Is there anything else you’d like to add about your experience at UConn so far?

Rafael: I’ve learned that UConn does want every student to succeed. Through SSS I was given the opportunity to begin my academic journey, become a leader, and a TRUE HUSKY!!!

SSS STAMFORD STUDENTS HOST BUSINESS ATTIRE FASHION SHOW

SSS Stamford students demonstrated how to look your best in business attire with a fashion show. Displaying styles ranging from business casual to black-tie affair, 20 student models dazzlingly illustrated how dress affects all individuals in business from a CEO to an entry-level employee. Spearheaded by SSS students Ophelia Barnett, Jada Pinto, Treasen Hooper, and Dahja Robinson, the participants spent six weeks coordinating their outfits and practicing their walk-throughs. The models who were chosen as “Best Dressed” won tickets to a UConn basketball game.

The show received financial assistance from Campus Director Dr. Sharon White. Career Services Director Halina Holloway and Library Director Phara Bayonne helped plan the show and served as judges for the student models. The students were able to receive support for this activity from local clothing stores such as GAP and Ann Taylor. These experiences also helped SSS students gain a variety of skills related to communication and delegation of responsibilities.



UCONN FIRST STAR ACADEMY STUDENTS SET SAIL WITH PROJECT OCEANOLOGY

Students of the UConn First Star Academy (FSA) tested their academic skills considerably during the four weeks of the 2014 Summer Program. Luckily for them, it was not all work and no play. They were also treated to a variety of fun and exciting trips. One that stood out from the rest was a chance to go to the University of Connecticut's Avery Point Campus in Groton, Connecticut on July 12th to participate in Project Oceanology. This trip gave the students a unique experience that combined science, learning, and the adventures that come with spending a day on a boat in Long Island Sound.



The 41 students boarded one of "Project O's" specially designed research vessels, Enviro-Labs, in order to explore the local marine ecosystems and coastal habits. This oceanographic research cruise, which lasted two-and-a-half hours, gave students the chance to conduct scientific experiments on water temperature, salinity, and sand composition, and to learn about the various ways our environment is impacted by pollution.

The real highlight of the trip was the up close and personal interaction that students had with myriad sea creatures caught during the cruise. Led by professional marine scientists, students were able to hold and directly observe these animals, including

various species of crabs, lobsters, jelly fish, and squid, among many others. Screams of delight and fear were heard throughout the cruise as students cautiously tried to hold and interact with these marine animals. All of the animals were returned to the sea at the end of the trip, unharmed.

While the scientific and educational benefits of this program were the focus, the simple act of getting on a boat and cruising the ocean was a new experience for the vast majority of the students. The warm, salty ocean air, the waves, and the views of the beaches and lighthouses that dot Connecticut's coastline featured in the background of many "selfie" portraits. Though most students loved this adventure, there were a handful who, unfortunately, did not earn their "sea legs," as the boat did encounter some fairly large swells.

A few upset stomachs aside, the trip was a great success. It provided an educationally enriching experience, while also providing the thrill of sailing on the ocean during a picture perfect day. The First Star Academy would like to send a special thank you to the dedicated people involved with "Project O". The trip was truly a highlight of the summer and a day that the students will remember for a lifetime.

WATERBURY SSS STUDENT EXPLORES THE CHIRICAHUA MOUNTAINS

SSS Waterbury student Jawara Lashley had the unique opportunity to participate in a two-week animal behavior research expedition in Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains. While there, he learned field research techniques, and studied birds and insects, such as Mexican jays, honey pot ants, and antlions. Jawara also had the chance to study under Dr. Howard Topoff, a prominent scientist who was a consultant for the movie *Ants*, as well as to meet students from across the globe.

When asked about his trip, Jawara, who is studying biological engineering, said, "I love biology and this trip was a life changing experience! I believe it will prepare me for the hardships in the near future and will be useful to my studies as a biomedical engineer. I am grateful for all the opportunities I am given."

Jawara is currently studying abroad at the National University of Singapore, where he is continuing his training as a dynamic scientist.



SSS Waterbury student
Jawara Lashley

UConn Hosts National First Star Academy Retreat

Launched in 2013, in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, UConn's First Star Academy immerses high school foster children in university life and academics in order to prepare them for success in higher education. In October 2014, UConn hosted a highly successful first-ever retreat for First Star Academy leaders from across the nation. The retreat, which was coordinated by UConn Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) Professor Preston Britner and First Star Academy staff, enabled participants to share ideas about program evaluation and models, academic curriculum, and summer programming. The retreat proved to be a productive endeavor for creating a common mission on how best to address the needs of youth in foster care. Attendees in-

cluded Peter Samuelson, President and Co-Founder of First Star, and First Star representatives from UCLA, Loyola University, and the University of Rhode Island. Funding was provided by Professor Britner, Philip E. Austin Endowed Chair from HDFS.

Although the newest of the four First Star Academies that have been established nationwide, UConn's program has quickly become a model for other institutions as a result of its creative and innovative academic-based programming, and its collaborations with key internal and external partners. Recently, the program was awarded a \$72,370 grant from the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority to support programming initiatives.

GAINING PREPARATION THROUGH INTERNSHIPS



Sita Pokhrel, (center) with a fellow intern (right) and ACT employees

Sita Pokhrel, a UConn SSS alumna (December 2014), never imagined when she began her internship at Pratt & Whitney in summer 2013 that the experience would change her career trajectory. After securing the internship through INROADS, a non-profit organization dedicated to preparing underserved students for corporate and community leadership, the accounting major realized she had a "passion for finance" and changed her major accordingly. "I developed some valuable skills while at Pratt & Whitney," Sita said. "I worked on financial planning,

work creation, producing process flow charts and studies, and documenting standard processes." The internship also provided her with an excellent stipend.

Initially, Sita hoped to return to Pratt & Whitney as an intern in summer 2014, but another opportunity arose that she couldn't resist: The chance to intern as a project coordinator with the American College Testing (ACT) Summer Internship Program in Iowa City, Iowa. The prestigious internship, which ran from June 2 to August 1, provided Sita with "valuable experience in project and resource management" and she also "learned a lot of leadership and people skills by attending various seminars organized by ACT." As with her previous internship, it provided a generous stipend.

Both of these experiences enabled Sita to receive the training, skills, and leadership development needed to help her land a position as a Fund Administrator at the State Street Corporation in Boston. Of her experience at UConn, and with the SSS program in particular, Sita said, "I had a wonderful four years at UConn attributed to the valuable experience I gained being part of the SSS program. SSS not only provided me with a springboard for my success at the University of Connecticut but also helped me build a foundation for my career in finance."

CONNCAP ACADEMIC DAYS TAKE LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

During the school year, ConnCAP students get opportunities to dynamically learn outside of the classroom through participation in Academic Days. Comprised of a mix of presentations and field trips, these sessions engage the students with hands-on activities that help to prepare them for the world of college.

Students participating in the Academic Day held on October 18 were treated to a day at Spring Valley Student Farm, where they explored the farm and reflected on the importance of community service. The farm was established in spring 2010 through a collaboration between Dining Services, Residential Life, and First Year Programs and Learning Communities as an extension of the EcoHouse Learning Community. It is located just a few miles from the main campus but, according to the students, it felt like a world away from the hustle and bustle of daily life. The students spent part of the day learning about organic farming methods, tasting edible flowers, petting chickens, and hiking along the Willimantic River. In the afternoon, they participated in workshops facilitated by the brothers (*hermanos*) from La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc., which emphasized the importance of social responsibility.



ConnCAP Students in Workshops during Academic Day at Spring Valley Farm

In addition, they heard from members of the EcoHouse Learning Community, who shared their community service experiences and gave advice about how to fit such activities into a busy schedule. The day concluded with a meal at Whitney Dining Hall that included fresh produce grown at the farm.

The second Academic Day, held on November 8th, brought ConnCAP students to the University of Connecticut's Puerto Rican Latin American Cultural Center (PRLACC). PRLACC Director Fany Hannon

and Dr. Daisy Verduzco Reyes of El Instituto both shared their inspirational stories about getting into college and achieving their dreams. Students also heard from mentors from the Mentoring, Educating, and Training for Academic Success (METAS) Program. The mentors led discussion groups to provide students with personal insight from their experiences with the financial aid process, balancing heavy academic course loads, finding academic support on campus, getting involved in clubs and activities, and making new friends on campus. Students also played trivia games to match the mentors with facts about their lives and got the chance to hear about each mentor's journey to UConn.



ConnCAP Students Visit UConn

SSS STUDENTS EXPERIENCE MEDIEVAL LIFE WHILE STUDYING ABROAD



Students participating in the 2014 SSS Summer in London program were given exclusive access to rooms normally closed to the public in Knole House, a centuries-old English country house located in west Kent that was once inhabited by King Henry VIII. Knole House volunteer Brian Farley arranged private showings of the un-renovated top floor and basement areas. The students were also able to ascend the steep steps of the clock tower to the roof, where they took in vistas of the beautiful surrounding 1000-acre Knole Park. The highlight of the day occurred when the students dressed up in medieval costumes and pretended to be inhabitants of the house as they mingled with other visitors.

The SSS Summer in London program is going into its fourth year. Approximately 12-14 SSS students participate in it each summer. While abroad, students enroll in a three-credit course, London's Global Geographies, which mixes classroom work with field trips to related points of interest, such as London's West and East Ends, the Museum of Immigration and Diversity, Brick Lane, and the Docklands. Additionally, students participate in excursions, such as the Knole House visit, that expose them to London's history, arts, and culture.

ETS STUDENTS GET A TASTE OF COLLEGE

Rising high school seniors participating in UConn's Educational Talent Search (ETS) program in New Haven and Windham had the opportunity to earn college credits in summer 2014, thanks to a partnership with the Office of Early College Programs. Twenty-five students enrolled in the University's English 1004 course, which gave them a head start on developing their college-level reading and writing skills along with the

credits. Students who successfully completed the six-week course received a stipend supported by a Nursing Workforce Diversity grant in the School of Nursing at UConn. This enabled the students to bypass full-time summer jobs in favor of engaging in an academically rigorous experience that will help to prepare them for college.

2015 LEADERSHIP LEGACY EXPERIENCE

We are pleased to announce that three SSS students have been selected for the 2015 Leadership Legacy Experience: Gabriel Bachinelo, Veronica Fields, and Francine Quintino. This is the second year in a row that three SSS students were



Francine Quintino



Veronica Fields



Gabriel Bachinelo

Francine Quintino is a junior Political Science major with a minor in Spanish. She studied abroad in Spain during spring 2014 and she is also interested in pursuing a career in higher education. Her Legacy mentor is Elsie Gonzalez,

Executive Assistant for Residential Life.

Gabriel Bachinelo, a junior accounting major, is currently the UConn Campus Ambassador for the auditing conglomerate KPMG. Bachinelo has also interned at KPMG for the past two years. His Legacy mentor is Leo Lachut, Director of Academic Support.

Veronica Fields is a junior Human Development and Family Studies major. Currently, she is an undergraduate fellow at NASPA, a program that assists undergraduate students with an interest in higher education careers. Her Legacy mentor is Chelsea Cichocki, SSS Counselor.

Executive Assistant for Residential Life.

All three students will be working closely with their faculty and alumni mentors, as well as participating in various workshops, lectures, and mentoring activities.

UConn's Leadership Legacy Experience invites the university's most exceptional student leaders to participate in a year-long leadership enhancement experience designed to build their personal and professional repertoire. It is a highly selective program that recognizes students with demonstrated personal accomplishment, academic commitment, integrity, and a history of community service.

UConn First Star Academy Students Form Lasting Bonds

One of the most unfortunate consequences for children in the foster care system is the lack of consistent supports in their lives. UConn's First Star Academy (FSA) provides a safe and stable environment, populated with peers going through similar situations, where participants feel comfortable opening up and connecting with their fellow students and the staff. Whether they need a shoulder to cry on, or just someone to motivate them, these students finally have a place to turn and people to help them on their journeys.

The relationship between two seniors who formed a close bond exemplifies the level of support and understanding the students found by participating in the FSA. The two young ladies did each other's hair and make-up, picked out one another's silverware and drinks at the dining hall, and began to finish each other's sentences. As a way to honor their friendship, they purchased two halves of a locket during one of the field trips and promised to wear their half every time they got together. To date, neither has taken off her locket half since this promise was made.

With the summer program over, the FSA family stays connected via social media. A closed Facebook page is dedicated to the students and staff in the program. Updates about the program are posted on the page, but its real purpose is to provide a forum for the students to remain in touch. Students often post what this program has meant to them or share updates about new or exciting things going on in their lives. The page also provides a place where students can seek advice or support from their peers, a virtual version of the summer program residence hall.

In addition, monthly academic days are held to bring the students together. The academic days are much more than a way of continuing the college preparation message; the gatherings are like family reunions. They reinforce the continued existence of the support system these students found over the summer, and the program's dedication to serving the students all year round.

SSS SUMMER CLOSING CEREMONY

August 7, 2014 marked the conclusion of another successful summer program for Student Support Services in Storrs. This year's closing ceremony featured Congressman Joe Courtney who delivered the keynote address. Two SSS student speakers, Jose Ortiz, Jr. and Paris Pruitt, were recognized with awards, which was a surprise to both the recipients and their peers who were among the audience in the J. Louis von der Mehden Recital Hall that day.



Congressman Joe Courtney with Students and Staff at SSS Closing Ceremony

Jose received the Alma E. Maldonado-Cordner Outstanding Achievement Award, named after a long-time UConn staff member devoted to supporting the retention and graduation of low-income, first generation, and underrepresented college students. Jose expressed gratitude for the award, saying, "After receiving the award, I realized I could succeed. My college career became lucid; my diploma was tangible."

Paris was the recipient of the Maria D. Martinez Outstanding Leadership Award, named after the Assistant Vice Pro-

vost of the Institute for Student Success at UConn. When asked what the award meant to her, Paris said, "It means that I was a vital aspect of SSS and it encourages me to become more of a leader here at UConn...This day showed that I will be successful here at UConn if I continue to persevere."

This was the first time students were selected for these awards.

Many nominations were received from residential staff, summer instructors, and SSS counselors. The award recipients also had the opportunity to meet Congressman Joe Courtney, who was present for the ceremony as well as to speak to the SSS students. Highlights of his speech included congratulating SSS students for their accomplishments, acknowledging higher education as a catalyst for SSS students' personal growth, and addressing post-secondary education reform. Many students voiced how the closing ceremony, coupled with Congressman Courtney's speech, reminded them of how fortunate they are to be furthering their education and to be in a position to change the trajectory of their lives.



Alma Maldonado-Cordner with Award Recipient Jose Ortiz, Jr.



Dr. Maria D. Martinez with Award Recipient Paris Pruitt

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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.