

Kaplan program focuses on urban student challenges

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Community college students—often non-traditional with families, working and sometimes first generation college-goers—face many obstacles in attaining an associate degree.

But a new effort by the Kaplan Education Foundation is helping a handful students at two-year colleges in urban areas overcome those challenges. This year, four New York community college students from low-income backgrounds have not only graduated, but are also now attending selective four-year institutions.

Hamissou Samari, who arrived in the U.S. from Togo only four years ago, is now enrolled in the honors program at American University in Washington, D.C. Keisha Carrington, an aspiring pediatrician from Queens, N.Y., is now at Goucher in Baltimore. Bolaji James, a Nigerian immigrant and budding entrepreneur, has started at Morehouse College in Atlanta. And Martha Santos, a single mother who wants to eventually start her own school, attends the New York University.

“There are numerous programs designed to help needy students in elementary and high school, but students in urban community colleges are often overlooked,” said Melissa Mack, chair of the Kaplan Educational Foundation and senior vice president of Kaplan. “This program is designed to provide intensive support to high achieving community college students who want to attend four-year schools.”

The foundation is already working with a second group of five community college Kaplan Scholars who will apply for admission to four-year institutions for the fall of 2008. It is recruiting for a third cohort. To help selected students, the foundation provides: scholarships to help pay tuition and other educational expenses, tutoring, SAT preparation, academic counseling, stipends to help cover living costs. They also receive assistance with transfer and admission into four-year programs.

“The admission process for selective four-year schools can be difficult for families with parents who are college graduates. For many community college students, often the first person in their families to go beyond high school, it can be even more daunting,” said Jennifer Benn, director of the Kaplan Educational Foundation.

“We help our students navigate the often complicated application process for these competitive programs, including arranging and taking the students on college tours and preparing them for admissions interviews.”

Once students are accepted, the foundation helps the students for the duration of their bachelor’s degree programs, working with them and their campus academic counselors to reach their academic and career goals.

Samari, a graduate of the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) in New York, now plans to pursue a career in international law. Carrington, a native of Barbados, is a science graduate of BMCC. James holds an associate degree from the New York City College of Technology. And Santos is an early childhood education graduate of BMCC and a native of Ecuador. This year, the program welcomed a second cohort. Guyana native Kwesi Blackman, a U.S. Army veteran of Iraq and a biology major at Kingsborough Community College (KCC) in New York, hopes to become a surgeon. Queensborough Community College (New York) student Veronica Nunez, who moved to the U.S. from the Dominican Republic two years ago, wants to become a child psychologist. BMCC student Sharrise Simmons hopes to do research on cures for sickle cell anemia and public health issues affecting underserved communities.

Brooklyn native Levald Thomas is a student at KCC and a member of the Phi Theta Kappa international honor society. And former U.S. Marine Aaron Hudson, a network systems administration major at LaGuardia Community College, would like to start his own computer-consulting firm.

For more information, visit www.KaplanEdFoundation.org.