LUMINA FOUNDATION

FOCUS™

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Campus connections

'Near-peer' mentoring and other innovative efforts help widen the college track

On the cover: In her work advising Britteny Madine (left), former College Guide Kimberly Morris' own status as a recent college graduate helped her to gain Britteny's attention and trust. "No offense," Morris says, "but no 40-year-old guidance counselor in the world has that kind of pull with these kids."

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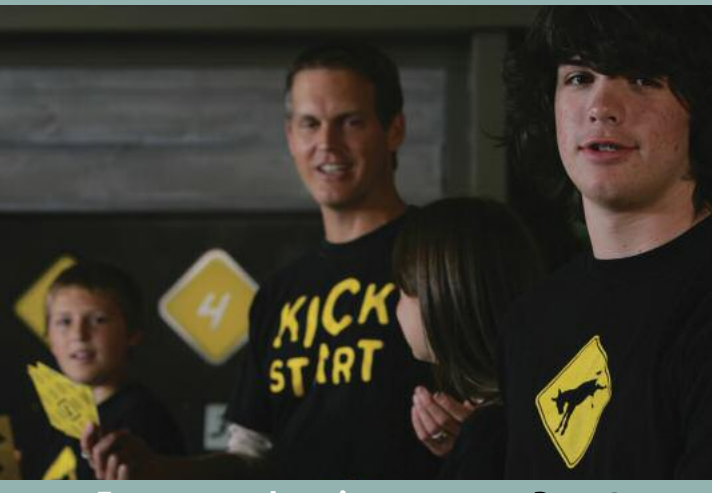

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Postsecondary education has always been enormously valuable. But now, in today's rapidly evolving global economy, it has become a near-necessity – a prerequisite for middle-class life and a key to the economic and social benefits that such a life affords. A college degree, once all but reserved for the elite members of society, is now recognized as a basic requirement for anyone who hopes to succeed in the modern workplace.

This increased emphasis on postsecondary education is a marvelous development – and not only for the individuals who are directly affected. As more Americans realize their full potential – as the skill and education levels of our citizens rise – so, too, rise our national standard of living, our collective level of civic involvement, our prospects for the future.

Of course, nothing that offers so many benefits can be achieved without effort. If we want more American students to enroll in postsecondary education – and to persist and succeed when they get there – we cannot ignore social and demographic realities. As the doors to college open wider, more of the people who walk through those doors will face challenges largely unknown to the elite students of yesterday – challenges posed by low income, or by their status as students of color or as students who are the first in their families to attend college.

Without doubt, we must work harder to overcome these challenges – for the sake of the students themselves, and for the nation as a whole. And working harder isn't enough. We also need to work smarter – to approach the task in new ways that will work for new students. Business as usual just won't cut it.

That's what this issue of *Lumina Foundation Focus* is all about: the new – and sometimes unusual – business of delivering the college message and nurturing the college-going mind-set.

In this issue, you'll find front-line stories from the battle to increase college access and success. For example:

- In Maine, you'll be introduced to the zany, teen-oriented Kick Start program.
- In Virginia and North Carolina, you'll meet young adults working as "near-peer" mentors in the National College Advising Corps.
- In Washington state, you'll learn about an intergenerational program called New Path that aids Native American students.
- Finally, you'll read about the KnowHow2GO college access campaign, a national public-awareness and student-assistance initiative.

In all of these efforts, dedicated individuals and organizations are working hard to improve college access and success among underserved students. We at Lumina are inspired by their example, and we're very proud to support their work.

Even more inspiring, though, are the efforts of the students themselves. To a large extent, it is their goals – their dreams, their collective potential – that will determine our future as a nation.

We hope this issue of *Lumina Foundation Focus* serves to demonstrate that potential, and we urge you to join us in the ongoing effort to turn potential into progress.

Martha D. Lamkin
President and CEO
Lumina Foundation for Education

New links are being forged to help underserved students

By Steve Giegerich

For most of us, school lunch period conjures memories of a noisy cafeteria, molded-plastic trays and half-pint cartons of chocolate milk. But Maggy Lewis has another memory, thanks to her relationship with Saleisa Lampkin during the 2006-07 school year.

"Pretty much the whole semester, I couldn't eat lunch until there was a question from Saleisa," Lewis quips. Saleisa's inquiries were as predictable as her presence in Lewis' temporary office at Gretna High School in south-central Virginia. Saleisa wanted to go to college. And as the first in her family to take that step, she admits she was clueless about what it took to make it to a university campus from her rural community some 30 miles north of Danville, Va.

"There was a lot I didn't know about college because my parents didn't go," Saleisa explains. "So, I had to teach them and learn at the same time."

Maggy Lewis had all of the answers for college-hungry students at Gretna High School in rural Virginia.

For this eager and determined high school senior, young Maggy Lewis represented the fount of college knowledge – and lunchtime was the best time to tap into her expertise. The noontime disruptions proved fruitful. Saleisa is now a freshman at Virginia State University in Petersburg. Not coincidentally, her mentor and guide is just an hour away, a first-year law student at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Va.

The connection between these two young women was a vital link in the chain leading to Saleisa's success – and it's one of thousands of similar links being forged throughout the nation to assist underserved students. Around the country, Lewis and other recent college graduates have joined marketing whizzes, veteran educators, advocates for Native Americans and even hip-hop artist Fonzworth Bentley in varying – and often unusual – efforts to get students like Saleisa Lampkin where they need to be. Programs are springing up that involve peer or "near-peer" mentors and other respected role models. Schools and communities that have traditionally lacked a college-going tradition are working hard to build a culture in which all students truly "know how to go" to postsecondary institutions.

To James Moeser, chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, these new efforts to pave the college path for low-income students come none too soon.

"One thing we are seeing in this country is a widening divergence between the fortunate, who have the

Saleisa Lampkin, now a freshman at Virginia State University, simply refused to be denied in her bid to become the first in her family to attend college.

advantage and benefit of understanding what it takes to go to college, and those who do not, for many reasons, have that understanding," says Moeser. "As a college education gains more and more importance, we're seeing that gap (grow). It is not something we can ignore anymore."

The gap, rooted in poverty and social inequity, is reflected in the complex web of problems facing low-income families. And narrowing that gap is imperative if millions of underserved young people are to gain a foothold in an increasingly competitive global job market, says Susan Pollack, director of advocacy for the College Success Foundation, an organization in Issaquah, Wash., that coordinates college access programs.

Pollack says the higher education establishment must more fully recognize the barriers that poverty, homelessness, hunger and parental neglect create for many college-qualified young people. Acknowledging this connection between social justice and college access, Pollack says, is a vital step in establishing the person-to-person connections between would-be students and "the people on the ground" who can help them plot a path to postsecondary success.

College access with a youthful kick

Despite the complexity of the problems facing underserved students, the solutions that are emerging to help those kids (and sometimes their parents) get to college – and succeed once they've arrived – can be as simple as the lunchtime talks between Maggy Lewis and Saleisa Lampkin. Or as absurd as a talking donkey.

The animated equine – star of a college-access ad campaign in Maine – can be traced to marketing executive John Coleman. Coleman, president and CEO of VIA Group LLC, admits that higher-education policy and college access weren't exactly his forte when state officials approached his Portland-based firm about developing a marketing campaign to convince more Maine students to consider college.

"We had no direct experience with education," says Coleman, whose firm's clients include *The New York Times*, Sun Microsystems and Victoria's Secret. "Some of us, in fact, barely got out of school." Undeterred, Coleman and his VIA team jumped at the opportunity presented by officials from the Maine Department of Education, the Maine Compact for Higher Education and the Senator George J. Mitchell Scholarship Research Institute.

The catalyst for the campaign – funded by a National Governors Association grant – was the data: Of 100 Maine students who begin the ninth grade, 78 will graduate from high school within six years. When students who subsequently obtain a GED are added to the mix, Maine's high school completion rate tops an

Host John Marshall poses quirky questions to young contestants (from left) Cameron Woodford, Kaytlyn Colter and Jed Quint on the set of the "Kick Start" game show in Maine.

acceptable 90 percent. From there, the decline begins. State education statistics show that only 39 of those 78 graduates will begin college during the same year they leave high school. Of those, only 25 will earn a college degree, the lowest completion rate in New England.

To Colleen Quint, executive director of the Mitchell Institute, numbers tell only half of the story: "Maine's economic engine is evolving. It used to be a high school graduate could walk into a mill with a diploma, get a job and keep it 40 years. That's not the case anymore. The mills aren't hiring as much, and the lobster industry is changing, too. We're also seeing a lot of kids who are keenly aware of how hard their parents had to work to scrape things together."

From the outset, Quint knew Maine needed a bold campaign to reach those kids – bold with a capital "B." VIA did its homework and concluded that most college access campaigns target high school seniors. In the process, they miss indecisive younger students who need most to hear the message.

Education consultant Norm Higgins says Maine's "Kick Start" college-access campaign is the happy result of "outside thinking."

"It was all about money, and it was all about seniors," Coleman recalls of the research. "But if you weren't on the (college) track by that point, then you probably weren't going." VIA returned to the development team and proposed a campaign targeting middle school students. (As it happened, officials at Indianapolis-based Lumina Foundation for Education, in discussions last year leading to what became the KnowHow2GO campaign, were almost simultaneously drawing the same conclusion.)

For the idea to work in Maine, Coleman suggested, a group of young adults and middle-aged professionals – many of them state officials – would have to do something they hadn't done for decades: Think like kids.

It was, just as Quint hoped, a bold concept – and it proved to be a tough sell for state bureaucrats and members of the education establishment. Many were more accustomed to the traditional recruiting methods involving brightly colored brochures, guidance counselors and senior-year visits by admissions officers.

"They didn't see it as a problem that could be solved by outside thinking," says Norm Higgins, a state education department consultant. Still, the team decided it needed a social marketing campaign that could pique the interest of middle school students and somehow hold their attention long enough to impart some serious information. With that, the buzzword went from "bold" to "fun."

VIA tested a handful of themes with target audiences. One demolished the notion that college is only for rich kids; another emphasized the social side of college (that one, suffice it to say, didn't play well with teachers); a third played off the idea that kids should "be afraid, be very afraid" (of the consequences of not attending college).

Billboards and placards with provocative messages such as this one set the tone for the KnowHow2GO campaign.

The marketing group's initial offerings were thoughtful, sophisticated and provocative… and they bombed. "The kids hated the first ideas," recalls Jason Wright, a VIA client specialist. "They told us (the ads) were stupid and that they didn't say anything to them."

The team went back to square one. Constrained by a budget that included no more margin for error, they forced themselves to adopt a middle school mind-set. Thoughtful, sophisticated and provocative went out the window. Goofy came in. The focus groups lapped it up, and "Kick Start – Getting Kids College Ready" was born.

> "We have to figure out ways to get the attention of kids with the new media, interact with them, grab their attention with bits and pieces."
>
> *– Lumina's David Cournoyer*

"Humor," says Quint, "completely worked." Not just any humor; middle school humor in the form of a deadpan donkey who welcomes visitors to ***www.kickstartmaine.com***. He's called "Norm," a name that won out over "Henry," the team's original choice. "The moral of the story," Higgins quips, "is never miss a meeting."

Norm (the donkey, not Higgins) shares the Web site's home page with a signpost that presents links to a "College Finder Quiz," "Norm's commercial" and an offer to obtain a free "Norm" T-shirt. The quiz determines interests through a personality profile that includes non-sequiturs (Nike or Puma?) along with more serious queries (Large school or small?) to point students toward the colleges and universities in Maine that might best fit them.

Much of it is downright silly – which is precisely why it works, Coleman says. "They may seem more sophisticated today, but deep down they're still scared, young kids," he says. "When you make something fun and entertaining, it is something they can get into. It's a lifestyle and entertainment campaign that makes them comfortable. And when they're comfortable, they're not threatened by the prospect of going to college."

The success of the campaign, of course, depended on the planning team's ability to deliver middle school students to the comfort zone. For that, Coleman used "old media" to steer the potential audience to the new: First, Kick Start bought a 30-second ad during the Super Bowl telecast seen this year in Maine; then the campaign followed up by acting as a prime sponsor of the state high school basketball tournament.

It's similar to the strategy that Lumina and its partners, the American Council on Education and the Advertising Council, are employing in the public service announcements that direct parents and students to the national KnowHow2GO campaign (see story on Page 9). Since its inauguration earlier this year, the effort has had nationwide television exposure on CNN as well as on local TV and radio stations in Seattle, Orlando and Washington, D.C. KnowHow2GO billboards are also popping up around the country in locales as diverse as Indiana, Alabama and Los Angeles.

As of August, the publicity has driven nearly a quarter million individual visitors to ***www.KnowHow2GO.org***. The Ad Council hopes the campaign will generate

Cameron Woodford, a 13-year-old freshman at Maine's Poland Regional High School, stands in the televised shadow of Norm, Kick Start's donkey mascot.

John Marshall cites a simple but effective formula for his TV show's success in getting kids to focus on college readiness: "Once we get their attention, we deliver the message."

$28 million in donated media time in each of the two years the ads are being distributed nationally.

In Maine and nationally, traditional media provide the avenue that directs the intended audience to the primary platform: the Internet. These days, the traditional method of poring over college brochures and then consulting a counselor (however briefly) is considered, well, 20th century. Twenty-first century students head straight for college Web sites – and the most effective sites link prospective students to everything from video tours of the campus to KnowHow2GO.org to the common application for admission.

For a student-oriented effort to succeed in 2007, cyberspace is the only way to go, says David Cournoyer, the Lumina program officer who oversees the Foundation's KnowHow2GO initiative.

"Let's be real; kids are text-messaging all day long," Cournoyer explains. "They're talking on their cell phones after school. And with the television on, they instant message, download data, listen to music and text-message and multi-task at night. We have to figure out ways to get the attention of kids with the new media, interact with them, grab their attention with bits and pieces. We need to give them tools for instantaneous feedback and response because that's what they're used to. And if we don't give it to them, we're going to lose them."

Not that the old way of doing things has been abandoned entirely. When VIA began casting for a vehicle to promote Kick Start, John Marshall, an executive producer at a Portland television station who'd long dreamed of hosting a game show for teens, answered the call.

The televised version of *Kick Start* made its debut last spring. Equal parts *Jeopardy!*, *Survivor* and *Slime Time Live*, the show merges pertinent questions about current events and college life with competitive games that cross the line into outright folly.

In the first broadcast, blindfolded eighth-grade contestants, guided by a sighted partner, navigated go-carts through a rubber-cone obstacle course. Contestants who failed to negotiate were punished with a raw egg broken on the noggin. In another show, teams of eighth-graders in Abraham Lincoln garb were asked to append the Gettysburg Address with bizarre terminology. Contestants who didn't meet the test demonstrated the use of a nettie pot – a sinus-irrigation device that facilitates the excretion of (there's no polite way to put this) snot – to the viewers across southern Maine.

Cameron Woodford, 13, had just finished eighth grade when he visited the set of the *Kick Start* game show. Now a freshman at Poland Regional High School, Cameron says that college, four years away, seems far in the future – that is, until he remembers details from fifth grade, four years in the past. "That seems like yesterday," he admits.

John Marshall is the brains behind the show's concept, its elaborate set, the substantive questions and the off-the-wall competitions. "My goal is to get their attention – and that's tricky to do at this age since they've already seen every trick there is on television," says Marshall. "But once we get their attention, we deliver the message." The eighth-grader who best grasped the message during *Kick Start's* inaugural television season received the grand prize: A $10,000 college scholarship.

The airwaves and cyberspace are two tools that Lumina, its partners and agents of change in programs across the country are using to get young people on the road to college. Just as often, the tools have been low-tech, and the agents have been – as Susan Pollack puts it – "on the ground" or in the trenches. Some have been there for years.

Nationwide effort urges teens to "KnowHow2GO" to college

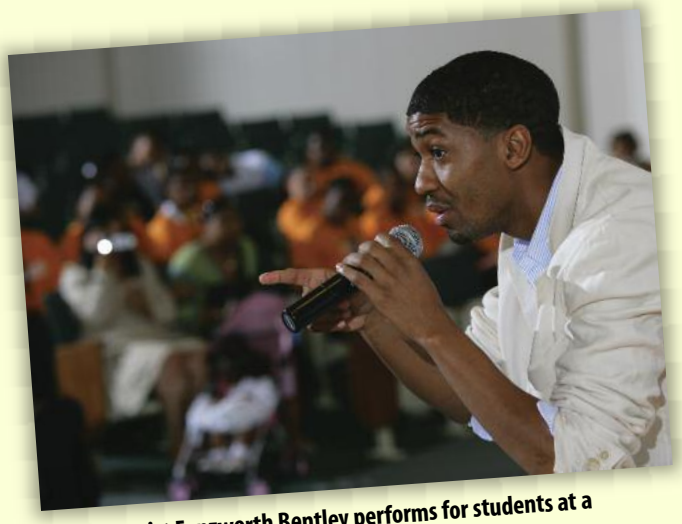
The words pulse from the radio speakers, accented by the hip-hop rhythms that seem to stream constantly into the ears of today's teens:

You wanna go?
All you who wanna go to college...
Wanna go?
You best listen to this knowledge...
Listen.

You gotta be a go-getter, 'cause it's hard to get there.
Get up in their face. Get up in their space.

Excuse me, missus, you say you're my teacher.
You say you're my preacher. Excuse me, mister.
You act like you're large, and you say you're in charge.

So show me. What is it that I need?
So tell me the books I should read.
Somebody hit me with the 411.
There are steps to take.
There's a job to be done.



Hip-hop artist Fonzworth Bentley performs for students at a KnowHow2GO rally this summer in Orlando, Fla.

This rap – *Wanna Go,* by noted hip-hop artist Fonzworth Bentley – has a familiar sound and feel, but it's not the latest hit on teen-oriented radio. It's a public-service advertisement (PSA) – one of many youth-oriented media messages being used in a new campaign to deliver the college-going message to those who need it most.

The effort, launched in January 2007 and called the KnowHow2GO campaign, is a national public service effort designed to inform young people about the actual steps they need to take to make their college dreams a reality. The campaign includes television, radio, print, outdoor and interactive advertising – all designed to grab the attention of media-savvy teens and inspire them to visit the KnowHow2GO.org Web site. That site serves as the hub of electronic and "new media" outreach to teens, and also links students to local resources that provide hands-on help as students prepare for, search for and apply to college.

"We developed the campaign based on research and feedback from teens themselves," said David Cournoyer of Lumina Foundation, which is sponsoring KnowHow2GO nationally, along with the American Council on Education and the Ad Council. "The research told us to make teens our primary target audience, so we're listening to them and trying to reach them where they are. We have bold messages on the radio and in shopping mall signs and elsewhere, but we also are using more electronic media venues."

The goal of the campaign is to help low-income, "first-generation" students in grades 8 to 10 take steps toward college. Ninety percent of low-income teens in this age group say they plan to attend college, but a much smaller percentage of them actually follow through.

KnowHow2GO promotes four concrete steps – 1) Be a pain (in a good way): find someone to help you get ready for college; 2) Push yourself: take rigorous classes that will prepare you; 3) Find the right fit (between your personal and career interests and the corresponding education beyond high school); and 4) Get your hands on some money: apply for financial aid.

To complement the media strategies, KnowHow2GO also features a grassroots effort designed to provide direct support to students through a network of adult mentors and college advisers. The Pathways to College Network has compiled an online library of resources that these mentors can use to advise students. To search the library, visit: ***www.pathwaystocollege.net/cpc/listtopics.aspx***.

KnowHow2GO is working in target states, where partners are asking media outlets to run localized PSAs and are mobilizing affiliated organizations to help link students with adults. (As of August, the states were California, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Ohio and Washington.)

The campaign also is working with national partners such as YMCA of the USA. This spring, KnowHow2GO and YMCA co-sponsored a national contest for teens to create their own radio ad about going to college. In the winning entry, titled "At the Mall," two Minneapolis girls encourage peers to try on educational "accessories." In June, the two young winners were honored at a rally in Orlando, Fla., which featured an appearance by Fonzworth Bentley, the performer in the KnowHow2GO *Wanna Go* radio spot.

The campaign's media outreach has grown steadily. More than 2,500 pieces of outdoor signage were distributed during the first four months of this year, and television and radio PSAs have now been distributed to 210 U.S. media markets. Meantime, use of the KnowHow2GO Web site has grown tenfold since March, with nearly 250,000 total visits through mid-August.

The power of personal interaction

It was in 1999 that the Ohio College Access Network (OCAN) first sent volunteer advisers into urban high schools in an initiative aimed at boosting college enrollment among low-income students in Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati and other cities. Today the advisers – backed by the Ohio Board of Regents, KnowledgeWorks Foundation, the Ohio Department of Education, Lumina and a host of community-based grants – have spread across the state. They help lower-income students in nearly 300 urban and rural districts with college applications, financial aid forms and other parts of the admissions process that seem second nature to students in middle- to upper-class homes.

As in Maine, a changing employment dynamic – the decline of agriculture as an economic engine – has driven the expansion of the program to the furthest corners of Ohio. Officials also recognize that, without a college education, young Ohioans will have difficulty coping in the expanding global marketplace. "Rural students don't feel as much a part of the flat world," says Kimberly Gormley, OCAN's director of development and marketing, invoking the title of author Thomas Friedman's bestseller on world economics.

Perhaps the most important lesson that has emerged from the OCAN program is the understanding that, in order to spread the word about college access, advisers and mentors need access themselves – to the middle school classrooms, corridors and guidance offices where students who most need the message are likely to hear it.

Nicole Hurd's epiphany in that regard occurred three years ago in a University of Virginia parking lot. Then an assistant dean at the university, Hurd had just left a meeting on how a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation grant might be used to put underprivileged students on the college track. As she searched for her car, Hurd's thoughts turned to the young people living in the hardscrabble counties south and west of Charlottesville. "They knew U-V-A was down the street," says Hurd. "But that was about it."

The concept of the National College Advising Corps, in which newly minted college graduates serve as college-access counselors in low-income high schools, was hatched right then. Hurd, the Corps' executive director, successfully designed the initiative as a means for highly motivated undergraduates to spend the year between commencement and graduate school performing community service in a program based loosely on the Peace Corps and Teach for America models.

"I became the gap-year dean," says Hurd. With additional funding from Lumina and the Cooke Foundation, Hurd extended the program's reach and then transferred its headquarters from Charlottesville to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Known as the College Guide Program during its start-up in Virginia, it has since been rechristened the National College Advising Corps. Now, in partnership with the National College Access Network, the Corps is poised to expand to 10 other colleges and universities across the country.

Former Guide Kimberly Morris – with freshly conferred degrees in psychology and pre-med from Virginia – landed in Danville, Va., in the summer of 2006. Two hours south of Charlottesville on the North Carolina border, Danville has watched its population slowly disintegrate along with the textile and tobacco industry jobs that were once its economic backbone.

An African-American woman, Morris good-naturedly notes that she "broke a lot of stereotypes" when she walked into Danville's George Washington High School, where 70 percent of the students are minority, and began preaching a gospel that everyone in the building was college material.

> The hard part was convincing kids with battered self-esteem and beaten-down hope that they had the tools to succeed in college.

"When a kid walks into my office and hears a 22-year-old who just finished college saying: 'You do it,' then it has a big impact," she says. "No offense, but no 40-year-old guidance counselor in the world has that kind of pull with these kids."

Friendly, but with no nonsense, Morris got right to work. Moving from classroom to classroom, she methodically indoctrinated GW students with the details of getting into – and staying in – college. That was the easy part. The hard part was convincing kids with battered self-esteem and beaten-down hope that they had the tools to succeed in college.

Midway through the first semester, Morris assembled the data from her first months in Danville. ("Spreadsheets are my friend," she says.) The outline that emerged was nearly identical to the trends that guided Hurd in developing the Advising Corps' national strategy: Students with 3.5 grade point averages and above had family support and a college plan. Students with a GPA of 2.0 or lower, if motivated at all, saw a two-year degree as their limit. The focus of her mission, Morris concluded, had to be the group in the 2.0-3.5 GPA range – "kids who can go to a four-year school but either don't know how to do it or don't know how to get there."

Senior Britteny Madine came to Morris with a 4.0 GPA and a plan. What she needed was the necessary boost to put that plan into action. During a trip to Orlando's Disney World as a sophomore, Britteny took

Nicole Hurd, founder of what is now known as the National College Advising Corps, called herself "the gap-year dean" when the program began three years ago.

one look at the design of the Epcot Center and knew she wanted to be an architect. Once back in Danville, she hit the Internet, identifying the colleges that could lead her there.

Morris assessed the situation. With both ambition and a career goal, Britteny possessed two traits that, though notable to an "outsider" such as Morris, may have been overlooked by others. For students who lack Britteny's stellar academic record, those "hidden" traits can make all the difference.

"The teachers and the counselors who have seen these kids for three or four years sometimes look at them differently," Morris explains. "They may look at a kid, and they know about his grades or how he behaves in class and say, 'This is a problem kid and he's going to have problems in college.' I saw them in a different light. I saw motivated kids who had made poor choices. I didn't see what was going on in class. I was in a unique situation; I was just there to listen. I couldn't fix their grades. I couldn't fix their transcripts. But I could help them with the *belief* piece – which is what the kids in Danville needed: someone to say: 'You can do this.' "

The message wasn't lost on the 400 seniors at George Washington High School. By year's end, after being praised, pushed and prodded by Morris, 270 GW students had received acceptance letters from two- and four-year colleges – a 2007 acceptance rate of 67 percent. In 2006, the four-year rate was 34 percent.

In Britteny's case, the notification letter came from an unexpected source. Using Britteny's transcript as a guide, Morris pointed the senior toward her own alma mater, the University of Virginia, and followed up with a phone call to an admissions counselor there.

The counselor knew Morris' name, knew her face and knew what Morris hoped to accomplish. A big part of the Advising Corps' formula is being part of a network mostly inaccessible to students in places like Danville, Va. The formula worked. In August, Britteny Madine moved into a residence hall at the University of Virginia, a school that has set aside an $8,600 annual academic achievement scholarship for each of the four years she is on campus. That same month, Morris and her new husband headed to Atlanta, where she'll attend the Morehouse School of Medicine and Emory University's School of Law.

Looking back on her efforts to help Britteny and other Danville students find their way to college, Morris cites a simple but profound explanation: "It's all about hooking up with the right people."

Saleisa Lampkin and Antonio Thomas can certainly attest to that. Their Advising Corps mentor was Maggy Lewis, the William & Mary law student who spent her

As a student at George Washington High School in Danville, Va., Britteny Madine (left) dreamed of being an architect. Thanks in part to her "near-peer" mentor, Kimberly Morris, she's pursuing that dream at Morris' alma mater, the University of Virginia.

Autumn Clark poses in front of the "college contact board" at Bassett High School in southern Virginia. Each card behind Autumn contains contact information for a Bassett graduate who went on to college this term. Thanks to the help she received from her Advising Corps guide, Paulin Cheatham, Autumn's new address is at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

gap year rotating between high schools in Gretna and nearby Chatham, Va.

At Gretna, Lewis shepherded the effusive Saleisa Lampkin to Virginia State. "I was like a train wreck," Saleisa recalls. "She (Lewis) never met anybody like me, I'm sure. I was in her office all the time, asking a thousand questions. She'd tell me, 'Just calm down and breathe.' She made it real comfortable and easy for me."

At Chatham High School, Antonio presented a different challenge. Quiet and determined, Antonio has long harbored high aspirations. "He wants to get into the medical field," says his father, Lloyd. "I told him a long time ago that if he wants to do that, then he has to go to college."

The quandary Lewis faced when she first met Antonio was identical to the dilemma her peers in the Advising Corps faced all over Virginia: Where could Antonio go and, more important, how would he pay for it? Lloyd Thomas is disabled, and Antonio's mother, Joyce, is a factory worker. Complicating the equation was Antonio's strong desire to attend a small, four-year college. His initial inquiries to guidance counselors were not promising. "The first thing they throw at you is community college," he says. "They won't discuss four-year schools with you."

Not Maggy Lewis. From almost their first meeting, she encouraged Antonio to pursue his education at a smaller school. Then she pushed him to apply to those that matched his academic and financial needs.

The impact of the financial aid process on first-generation, low-income students can be huge. Despite efforts to streamline the Free Application for Federal Student Aid

Advising Corps Executive Director Nicole Hurd (center) leads a discussion with a new group of advisers at Chapel Hill. They are (from left): Dexter Robinson, Ebonie Leonard, Meghan Bridges and Camille Cates.

(FAFSA) – and despite programs such as College Goal Sunday (which gives low-income families hands-on help with the paperwork) – the FAFSA process remains an intimidating procedure. In fact, it can push some families to abandon the dream of a college education for their children. "We, as a country, need to rethink the processes we put kids through" to get to college, says Advising Corps Executive Director Nicole Hurd. "Complexity is the barrier for far too many families."

Ask Kim Morris.

"It wasn't that people didn't want to do it, they didn't know how," she says of the FAFSA process. "I had people walk in my office and slap their tax forms on my desk and ask *me* to do it. I saw more tax forms than H&R Block."

In Antonio Thomas' case, Lewis knew that an appropriate financial aid package could add up to $20,000 or more – the difference between Antonio going away to college or remaining in a region where decaying tobacco-drying barns and abandoned factories dominate the landscape.

Ultimately, he narrowed his choices to two Virginia schools, Hampden-Sydney College and Roanoke College, and a third institution 440 miles away in Kentucky: Berea College. Antonio didn't know it, but it was the Advising Corps network – the same one that landed Britteny Madine in Charlottesville – that inspired him to apply for admission to Berea, a school he'd never heard of. The network sprang into action after a conversation between Lewis and a fellow Advising Corps guide about Antonio's preference for a small college. The friend suggested Berea and provided Lewis with a contact on the Kentucky campus. Lewis called the contact. She then persuaded Antonio to fill out an application.

Antonio hedged when Berea sent him an acceptance letter. Except for a brief trip to Florida, he had spent virtually his entire life in Virginia. "Ms. Lewis told me, 'Once you go there, you'll know,'" he says. So Antonio and his parents visited Berea. Ms. Lewis knew what she was talking about. Antonio felt immediately that the fit was right, and his gut feeling was reinforced when Berea sealed the deal by offering a full scholarship.

Nicole Hurd had an inkling that there would be many stories like Antonio's when a first-generation University of

> "We, as a country, need to rethink the processes we put kids through. Complexity is the barrier for far too many families."
>
> *– Nicole Hurd, executive director, National College Advising Corps*

Virginia student stopped by her office in 2004, just after the Advising Corps had been founded (as the College Guides).

"Thank you, Dean Hurd," he said. "You don't know how many people who sat next to me in high school should be here, but who aren't."

The data from the program's first full year demonstrate what can occur when a young adult, fresh out of college, starts opening doors for low-income students. In 2005, students attending the 14 Virginia high schools that eventually inaugurated the program sent a total of 1,363 applications to six of the state's public college and universities. Under the tutelage of the Guides, the Class of 2006 sent out 1,552 applications to those same six schools, an increase of nearly 14 percent.

When it finishes the next phase of its growth in 2008-09, the Advising Corps, through a Cooke Foundation grant, will send young mentors – graduates of the University of California-Berkeley, Tufts University, the University of Alabama, Loyola of Maryland, Franklin & Marshall College, Brown University, the University of Utah, the University of Missouri and Penn State University, in addition to Virginia and UNC – into high schools from coast to coast.

Before assignment to a high school, each adviser will participate in a six-week program similar to the one that prepared Ebonie Leonard, Meghan Bridges, Camille Cates and Dexter Robinson this summer in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Leonard's inspiration to work with the Corps during the year before she attends graduate school came in a conversation during a visit to a middle school special-education class taught by her sister. Some of the students could barely define college, Leonard recalled, let alone comprehend its function. A young Latino was among the students who did get it. His message to Leonard resonates to this day: College is for other kids, he told her – not for a Latino kid with a learning disorder.

"It really hurt my heart," she says, "because he had already set himself up in middle school not to take a college track. Middle school, maybe high school graduation was his ultimate goal." She says stories like his "really made me want to do this job."

Every adviser has a personal story that helps explain his or her choice to forego more lucrative opportunities in the private sector to spend a year at modest wages ($20,000 for 10 months' service, plus $5,000 to put toward their own education expenses) counseling students in low-income high schools.

For Leonard, it was that chance encounter in a special-ed class. For Kim Morris, it was her own mother, who had her first child at age 16 and went on to raise two others while putting herself through college. For Paulin Cheatham, who served as a Guide last year at Bassett High School, 30 miles west of Danville, it was his own experience as a first-generation college student.

"Most of the Guides are first-generation or low-income themselves, and that gives them the ability to say, 'Hey, I've been there myself,'" says Hurd.

In fact, the Advising Corps owes its existence in part to the kindness shown the son of an immigrant autoworker who grew up poor in Michigan. As a young man, the autoworker's son, Larry Farmer, was taken under wing by a near-peer volunteer coach who nurtured and encouraged him, pushed and prodded him and, ultimately, led him to the admissions office at the University of Notre Dame.

Antonio Thomas and his parents, Joyce and Lloyd Thomas, found the right fit for Antonio's postsecondary aspirations at Kentucky's Berea College.

Decades later, his daughter – Nicole Farmer Hurd, B.A., Notre Dame '92; M.A., Georgetown University, '96; Ph.D, University of Virginia, '02 – sees her father's experience being replayed in the work of the Guides. "Just as my father needed that guidance as a first-generation college student, that's one thing that doesn't change over time. Those social and cultural and financial barriers are real for generations of students. And so, just as someone looked out after my father, this program has college graduates looking out for others."

New ways to nurture Native intelligence

That fundamental idea – of looking out for others – is certainly nothing new to Austin Littlesun. Growing up on a Montana Indian reservation in the 1960s, he was steeped in the traditions of community and connection that still define his Northern Cheyenne heritage. Unfortunately, a college education wasn't among those traditions. And so, while Littlesun learned as a child to live off the land in the ancient ways, less was done to prepare him for success in the modern world. No one ever mentioned college. Even into his teens, Littlesun says, he didn't understand college or its purpose. And when it was finally defined for him, Littlesun put college into his own personal context: He was convinced it wasn't for "stupid" people like him. Everything he'd learned in school told Austin Littlesun that he wasn't meant for college.

Today, at age 51, Littlesun – a man just shy of earning the associate's degree he will use to launch a business career – finally knows that is untrue.

To understand why Littlesun and others on the campus of Olympic College in Shelton, Wash., are bursting with pride at his accomplishment, a history lesson is in order. The text is a short, tawdry story from America's past – one that stifles college participation among Native people to this day. It is Littlesun's story, as well as that of three generations of Dawn Stevens' family.

The saga begins with John Eliott, Stevens' grandfather, one of thousands of Native Americans who were taken to faraway boarding schools, often without the knowledge or permission of their parents. The intent of the government-run "residential schools" that existed from the 19th century to nearly the halfway point of the 20th century was to "help" American Indians assimilate into white culture. The idea was to purge tribal languages and other vestiges of Native culture from young Native Americans. The lessons were often harsh. John Eliott himself fled from his school three times to escape the abuse.

Although the boarding school era had all but ended by the time Stevens' father, Don Hardison, came of age in the 1950s, the suppression of Native students was far from over. Hardison's penchant for math, a talent his daughter believes could have led him to a career in engineering, screeched to a halt the day he asked a Shelton High School teacher about enrolling in calculus. Trigonometry and calculus, the teacher told him, weren't intended for students like him.

Even without the math classes, Hardison graduated from Shelton in 1957. There, his formal education stopped until – years later – he returned to school to earn an associate's degree. Hardison's eldest daughter at first achieved even less academically than he had. Bored and disillusioned with a high school that all but ignored her culture (even though more than 10 percent of its students lived on the Skokomish and Squaxin Island

Though they enjoy spending time at the family ranch outside Shelton, Wash., siblings James and Randee Runnels spent much of their summer honing their academic skills.

reservations), Dawn Stevens – herself a member of the Steilacoom tribe – left Shelton High before the start of her senior year. In doing so, she became part of an epidemic that continued long after her departure: a dropout rate that hovered near 65 percent among Native American students.

Stevens married, had two children and, at age 21, made the choice between education and welfare. She earned her GED and never looked back. The first in her family to attend college, she now holds an associate's degree from Olympic and a pair of bachelor's degrees as well as a master's degree from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash.

Stevens is now an information specialist with the Center for Native Education (CNE) at Antioch University in Seattle. But one of the first moves she made in her career as an educator was to go back home. In the early 1980s, she accepted a teaching position at Shelton High School. "I wanted to come back to Shelton because I had disliked it so much," she says. She returned because she wanted to help make the school more relevant to Native teens – a move she hoped would raise their graduation rates and their chances for college. "As a Native American, I wanted to bring Native culture and traditions back to the students."

Poking through a storeroom shortly after her return, Stevens found confirmation that her decision was the right one. She discovered several copies of the history textbook used during her days as a Shelton student; the fourth chapter in each book had been removed. Eventually, Stevens also came across an edition with the fourth chapter intact – the one that explored Native American history.

During Stevens' youth, culturally destructive or insensitive acts toward Native people certainly weren't limited to Shelton High School. In fact, the negative attitudes that drove such actions were commonplace, even pervasive, in some regions. Today, things have clearly changed at Shelton – and Dawn Stevens is one of many who helped institute those changes over the years by finding ways to incorporate Native culture and traditions into the school setting. For example, weights and measurements of arrowheads have been integrated into math lessons, and geometry is now taught using an ancient Native container known as the Bentwood Box.

Finally, and significantly, Stevens helped instill a critical component of Native education into the school's method of teaching literature and history. "The Native way of learning doesn't necessarily come from sitting at a desk, minding your own business, reading and writing, but from listening and learning from your elders," Stevens explains. Working with school officials and with initially reluctant tribal elders, Stevens helped bring the tribes' oral tradition into the school.

As Shelton High awakened to the value of using local Native culture to teach all of its students, other entities stepped up as well. The Center for Native Education used grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other philanthropic organizations to bring the Early College High School initiative, a national dual-enrollment program, to the school. And the evolution of Shelton High hasn't stopped there.

Austin Littlesun, 51, and fellow student Nolin Sadlier,16, work together in the New Path program's intergenerational learning effort at Olympic College in Shelton, Wash.

Kim McNamara (left) and Dawn Stevens are part of a broad partnership working to meld tribal tradition with the Early College High School concept.

"The district has embraced and improved the situation for Native students in ways that just did not exist before," says Linda Campbell, CNE's executive director.

Today, Shelton is immersed in a five-year strategic plan that actively integrates and promotes Skokomish and Squaxin Island culture in the school and the non-Native community at large. Late in 2006, for example, nearly 300 Shelton teachers, administrators and classroom aides attended a daylong seminar that introduced them to the Squaxin Island's heritage, values and world view. In short, a true partnership has emerged, one that includes CNE, the area tribes, the school system and the community.

That partnership effort has been supported by a Lumina Foundation grant, which CNE has used to start a companion program to Early College called New Path. While the Early College model enables students to graduate from high school with both a diploma and an associate's degree, New Path makes the degree accessible to students' adult family members – an innovation that was suggested by members of the Native community, and one that fits perfectly with the intergenerational learning style that is rooted in tribal tradition. Through small classes that give students lots of one-on-one time with instructors – and often with respected elders – New Path taps into the potential of low-income students who aspire to become the first in their families to attend college.

At Olympic College in Shelton, New Path's intergenerational learning model involves students ranging in age from 16 to Austin Littlesun's age – 51. The Shelton campus, one of three Olympic locations spread around Puget Sound, honors the area's Native heritage with "longhouse buildings" designed in the tradition of the Skokomish and Squaxin Island tribes. Providing quality education in basic math, English, computers and physical education is the primary objective of Shelton's New Path effort. But the program's on-campus director, Kim McNamara, also hopes it will foster the academic skills and habits that appeal to local employers. Such efforts are vital in a region where jobs are evolving from fishing and logging to service-oriented casino, governmental and high-tech positions requiring proficiency in math and English.

The students who trickled into Olympic classrooms this summer spanned the chronological and academic spectrums. There was 16-year-old Bailey Higgs, a shy Shelton junior who enrolled in college-level classes because her high school courses failed to challenge her. As a dual-enrollment student, Bailey turned to New Path/Early College to get a "running start" on college by earning course credits before enrolling as a full-time college student.

There were James Runnels and his sister Randee, who arrived with their family in Shelton six years ago after a roundabout journey that began on an Oglala Sioux reservation in South Dakota and ran through several states. For James, 21, the English and math courses were a way to prepare him for a return to education, hopefully at the University of Washington and, beyond that, a business career. For Randee, a home-schooled 18-year-old, New Path/Early College was a first step toward college and a career as a sports photographer.

Then there was Nolin Sadlier, a Shelton junior who came to Olympic for what can best be described as credit retrieval. In three years of high school, Nolin never passed an English class. On the verge of dropping out, thereby ending all hope of one day becoming a police officer, Nolin enrolled at Olympic – pushed there by his parents and school officials. To his surprise, the college turned out to be a perfect fit.

For 18-year-old Randee Runnels, shooting photos during her father's rodeo rides sparked a dream of becoming a sports photographer.

"I'm straightening out, and I'm working on school now," he says. "I like it.... I've never done this well in an English class. I'm actually getting my work done and not putting my head on the desk and falling asleep."

As campus director, Kim McNamara became the poster child for multi-tasking, simultaneously serving as an administrator, academic counselor, instructor, logistics coordinator (for the student in a family that could claim no one with a legal driver's license) and social worker (for the student who required a mentor to see to it that she arrived on time for class each day).

Austin Littlesun, the oldest of the program's 170 students and one of 98 Native Americans enrolled, was one person McNamara never had to shepherd. Littlesun's educational odyssey began at age 6, in an off-reservation Montana public school. Though fluent in the language of the Northern Cheyenne, he was able to understand just a few rudimentary words of English. "I was kind of treated bad," Littlesun says slowly, his eyes averted. "And I think that really damaged my opportunity for – what do you call it? – the American Dream. The school really set me back. I didn't want to learn. They told me the way I talked was the devil's language."

Humiliated, he left the public school after the sixth grade, barely able to read or write. The memory of the principal's paddle – the consequence of failure – haunts him to this day. With his family's blessing, Littlesun moved from Montana to Washington, where he lived with a Mormon family for three years. The experience gave him self-respect and, with it, enough confidence in his own intelligence that later – despite leaving school for good after the eighth grade – he found work as an ambulance attendant, a firefighter and in law enforcement.

The lack of education caught up with him 11 years ago when a divorce rocked his life. A single father with full custody of seven children and no job prospects at age 40, Littlesun went on public assistance. As the clock ticked toward the end of his eligibility, a local social service agency, the South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency, placed Littlesun in workfare. There, job training counselors encouraged him to climb the next rung. And that is how, two years ago – to his own amazement – Littlesun became a college student.

College-age intern Abigail Portugal (left) gives encouragement to New Path/Early College student Leah Evernden on the Olympic College campus.

It hasn't been easy. In those moments when he fails to immediately grasp a math problem or comprehend a sentence, he can feel himself slipping back to a place where failure and humiliation walked hand in hand.

Fortunately, when that occurs, Abigail Portugal is there for Littlesun and other New Path/Early College students. A student herself at St. Martin's University in Lacey, Wash., this diminutive summer intern officially held the title of "instructional support coordinator." On campus, she had a more unlikely and gender-inappropriate moniker: the "Whipman." Cracking the whip was barely half of it. More often, the personal relationship she forged with the students called on her to cajole, plead or, most often, simply listen. "It is constantly encouraging people to do the work," says Portugal.

Over the summer, an unexpected ally joined Portugal in the effort – though Littlesun modestly shrugs off the suggestion that he has become a role model for the younger students. "They look up to me, I look up to them," he says. "It's because I know life; they're still growing." One thing he's proud to claim, however, is the example he is setting for a select group of other young people, ages 13 to 26. "I'm doing this for my own kids," he says, "because I want them to realize that education is important. It's the only way we can all understand each other and get along."

James and Randee Runnels have a family role model, too – their grandmother, Helen Malagon. Thanks in part to her example, James and Randee decided to spend their summer afternoons brushing up on English and math instead of relaxing on the horse ranch shared with their parents, an older brother and various cousins on the edge of Shelton. Like Littlesun, Malagon resumed her education later in life, entering college at age 34, the first step toward gradually moving through the academic ranks. Today, as her grandchildren note proudly, she has a college degree and a title: She's a supervisor of bilingual education for the Washington State Department of Public Instruction.

Reserved, steely and determined, Randee and James aren't the types to talk about themselves. "I'm a quiet person," Randee explains, speaking for her brother as well. It's left to their proud grandmother to draw the portrait.

"Randee is actually my teacher," she says. "I always learn something from the conversations I share with her." Randee was always artistic, and the gift of a digital camera in her early teens proved to be a turning point. Taking pictures of her father during his rodeo days sparked her desire for a future in sports photography.

Watching James put a horse through its paces on a clear August morning, Malagon revealed that her grandson suffers from a kidney ailment that will eventually

Helen Malagon didn't begin college until she was 34. Today she has a degree, a profession and two grandchildren who view her as a role model.

require a transplant. "It hasn't stopped him," she hastens to add. "He still wants to go to college, and he still wants to major in business. I see him doing it."

In the long term, James has his eye on a career as a concert promoter. Short term, his focus is on a family-run foundation that helps at-risk and troubled youth find a better way through horsemanship. "Training a horse has a way of humbling kids," he explains.

On the New Path/Early College spectrum, James and Randee fell squarely in the middle. Neither troubled nor on the fast track, the siblings got a helpful nudge in the right direction from the program. Through years of classroom observation, Malagon says, she has mastered the shorthand of understanding student behavior. She says she can look in the eye of a student – any student – and quickly determine if that student is engaged and involved. When Malagon looks into the eyes of her grandchildren, she sees "a little fear, for sure. But there's also an 'I can do it' attitude. They know where they want to go. They know what they want to accomplish."

Malagon paused to watch James work the horse as Randee adjusted her camera. Gazing resolutely at her grandchildren, Malagon quietly added: "They're going to do it."

So, too, will Austin Littlesun.

He will never abandon his heritage. Each morning, he still burns cedar needles and sage in a shell, smudging the ashes on his face in a daily prayer ritual. If necessary, he boasts, he could still live off the land. And as a Northern Cheyenne, he says he will honor another tradition: the Sun Dance. Four times in his lifetime, each Cheyenne male is required to participate in a ritual of nonstop dancing, without food, for four days and four nights. Littlesun danced five years ago. In his remaining years, he vows to fulfill his tribal obligation by dancing three more times.

"But first," Littlesun says with a smile, "I'm going to finish my education."

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