A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

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Welcome to the 2016–2017 edition of Update, the annual newsletter of the Center for Academic Programs (CAP). Inside, you’ll find articles and news briefs about student accomplishments, new initiatives and highlights.

You will read about the first cohort of First Star Academy students accomplishing their goals of completing high school and enrolling in college; a study abroad experience in Cape Town, South Africa; a ConnCAP student athlete receiving all-academic designation; a McNair scholar’s research experience; an SSS senior speaking at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Observance; stories about CAP Alumni, plus many more. We hope you enjoy the articles that were selected to be included in this newsletter.

This year, the Center for Academic Programs at the University of Connecticut will celebrate 50 years of commitment to access and educational opportunity for low income, first generation and underrepresented populations. The 50th anniversary committee is working hard to plan an event to take place in fall 2017. We will gather to welcome back alumni, former colleagues, and friends. We also hope to bring together members of the university community and others who have supported these efforts for half a century. Please join us in celebrating this important milestone!

This publication offers only a sample of the numerous activities and programs planned and coordinated for our students throughout the year. We invite you to learn more about the Center by visiting our website. Thank you for your continued support.
MY SOUTH AFRICA EXPERIENCE
By Amberleigh Delgado

In May of 2016, I received a once in a lifetime opportunity to study abroad in Cape Town, South Africa through the SSS summer education abroad program. I was able to explore South Africa’s history and culture, and learn about their government structure, education systems, and immigration policies. I participated in an internship at Thandokhulu High School, where I was able to assist with teaching students and proctoring exams. With my new friends, both UConn students and African natives, I visited many historical and monumental sites. Some memorable places were Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned; District Six Museum, where many artifacts and stories of families were displaced during apartheid are presented; and Boulder’s Beach, where real African penguins live.

The program included a homestay in Ocean View, Cape Town, where the local residents stole my heart. I was given the opportunity to live with a host family who treated me as if I was a member of their family. Through them, I was able to try different food that I wasn’t exposed to in the United States, such as Ethiopian dishes, crocodile, ostrich, warthog, malva pudding, and mieliepap (a white cornmeal porridge).

I learned and experienced a great deal in South Africa and I am truly grateful for this new wisdom. I am especially thankful for my involvement in SSS, which made it all possible. In just one month this experience has enabled me to see life through a new lens and I will apply the lessons I learned as I continue my college career here at UConn. I would strongly suggest to any individual who has considered studying abroad to do so because it’s a wonderful opportunity to expand their horizons, as I did.
CAP alumna Luis Organista could be a walking testament to the success of TRIO programs. While many students may participate in one, sometimes two, of the federally funded programs aimed at providing educational opportunities for first-generation and low-income students, Luis has been involved with three.

As a middle schooler, Luis was recruited by UConn’s Educational Talent Search (ETS) program, which exposes students to higher education and prepares them for successful admission to college. His participation in ETS continued throughout his tenure at Windham High School. After graduation, Luis began his college career at UConn through the Student Support Services (SSS) program. SSS provides students with access to the university and services to support their retention and graduation. While at UConn, Luis was accepted into the McNair Scholars Program, another TRIO program that prepares students for doctoral studies in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) disciplines.

After graduating from UConn with a Bachelor of Science degree in Natural Resources, Luis decided to take a gap year before pursuing graduate studies. During the interim, he accepted a position with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. It was there, through his involvement teaching youth about fishing and conservation in the Connecticut Aquatic Resources Education program, that he developed a passion for teaching. Luis is now enrolled in UConn’s Teacher Certification Program for College Graduates, which will enable him to earn a master’s degree in education and secondary teacher certification simultaneously.

Luis completed his student teaching this year at his alma mater, Windham High School, where he was passionate about getting his students interested in biology and environmental science. “I enjoyed working with the students every day, constantly learning more about teaching, how students learn, and delivering scientific content. It was great being exposed to new ideas and perspectives and gaining a better understanding of education.”
FIRST STAR ACADEMY HONORS LAST OF THE FIRST

In 2013, 19 youth, all served by the state’s foster care system, joined UConn's newly established First Star Academy. The goal of the program was to provide the students, who ranged from rising eighth graders to high school sophomores, with academic and personal support to help them graduate from high school and attend college. The majority of those 19 students have already graduated high school and are enrolled in college. We are proud to recognize the last five students from the first cohort that participated in the 2016 summer program.

The five students were rising eighth graders when they joined First Star, enabling them to participate in the program during their high school years. The program provided them with sustained support and a stable community throughout the formative years before college. The students remain active in the program and are preparing to graduate from high school in spring 2017. Their perseverance is a testament to their commitment to creating a stable future for themselves through educational opportunity.

We are excited to announce that UConn's First Star Academy has a 93% college acceptance rate and an 89% college matriculation rate, which is nearly five times the national rate for foster care alumni. With four rigorous years of First Star under their belt, the longest participating students are now well-prepared to beat the odds. Each consecutive year of participation has resulted in improved SAT scores, higher GPAs, and big-time college aspirations for all of them.

MCNAIR SCHOLAR LEARNING THE ROPES OF RESEARCH

McNair Scholar Paris Pruitt has spent the past year immersed in research. In summer 2016, she conducted research focused on sensation and perception in stroke patients under Dr. Na Jin Seo, as part of the 10-week Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURF) at Medical University of South Carolina. There, Paris was exposed to the many logistics of leading a research lab. She presented her research experience at The National GEM Consortium GRAD Lab at Northeastern University on October 14, 2016.

Since fall 2016, Paris has been working under the guidance of UConn Assistant Professor of Chemistry Dr. Alfredo Angeles-Boza, who is researching the transmission of Lyme disease through ticks. In her role as an undergraduate researcher, Paris is synthesizing peptides involved in the tick-borne disease. She will continue to work with Dr. Angeles-Boza throughout the 2017 calendar year.

UConn’s McNair Scholars Program prepares talented, highly motivated undergraduate students for doctoral studies in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) disciplines. Participants are required to complete a 10-week, on campus research project the summer prior to their senior year. Many, like Paris, engage in research opportunities at UConn and elsewhere throughout their undergraduate careers.

Paris Pruitt participating in research experiment
To emphasize the importance of networking while in college, SSS held a Career and Alumni Networking Brunch last fall at the UConn Alumni Center in Storrs. The event gave participants an opportunity to connect with successful SSS alumni, and also served as a forum for developing their professional skills.

During brunch, alumni working in various professions were paired with students who are majoring and/or interested in similar career fields. Academic Achievement Center Director Leo Lachut facilitated a lively dining etiquette discussion to help students prepare for future interviews and/or business meals. Dr. Erik Hines, Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology in UConn’s Neag School of Education, spoke to students about utilizing academic resources as a network. Breakout sessions, led by SSS Counselor Tony Omega and Neag Advisor Mia Hines, addressed gender-specific networking and professionalism topics.

The alumni shared stories about their own journeys from college to career, and provided students with information, insight, and advice on breaking into and succeeding in their prospective career fields. SSS student Stephanie O’Neill said of the experience, “It opened my eyes to different perspectives on careers by allowing me to interact with people across various fields. It was great to gather with SSS alum, people who were once in my shoes as an SSS student.”

SSS holds Career and Alumni Networking Brunch
SSS NEWS BRIEFS

SSS Partners with UConn’s Pre-Law Center
SSS partnered with UConn’s Pre-Law Center and Maine School of Law’s PLUS (Pre-Law Undergraduate Scholars program) to hold a workshop for students interested in learning more about the law profession, applying to law school, and the PLUS program. The workshop was held last October at the Storrs campus. Close to 20 students, SSS and non-SSS, were in attendance to hear sophomore SSS student Leann McLaren discuss her experience as a PLUS program participant during summer 2016. The four-week program provides underserved students with opportunities to develop the oral, written, and leadership skills needed to succeed in law and other careers.

SSS Summer in Prague Launches in 2017
SSS is excited to add a third program to its growing repertoire of summer education abroad opportunities designed for UConn SSS students. SSS Summer in Prague is a three-week, four-credit program to be held mid-May through early June at Charles University, the oldest and largest higher education institution in the Czech Republic. While abroad, students will take a three-credit course, Contemporary Czech Culture, Art, Music and Literature: Urban Semiotics. A one-credit pre- and post-departure course will take place the spring prior to and the fall after the summer program. SSS also offers the SSS Summer in London, England program and, in partnership with First Year Programs and Learning Communities, SSS Summer in Cape Town, South Africa.
Senator Mae Flexer Speaks at SSS Summer Closing Ceremony

The 2016 Storrs SSS Summer Program Closing Ceremony held in J. Louis von der Mehden Hall last August was made extra special by the presence of State Senator Mae Flexer. A UConn alumna, Senator Flexer shared her personal journey as a first generation college student with 161 SSS Summer Program participants, their families, invited guests, and university faculty and staff. The Senator’s down-to-earth personality, willingness to share the challenges she faced during her transition from high school to college, and advice on making the most of their college years resonated with the students. Her remarks concluded with a call for them to enact positive change.

Stamford SSS Students AVID about Giving Back

SSS Stamford students continue to serve as enthusiastic tutors, mentors, and role models for students participating in Cloonan Middle School’s AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program. AVID provides in-school academic support for students and prepares them for college eligibility and success. In addition to tutoring students in mathematics and science, SSS students share their experience, advice, and tips on preparing for and succeeding in college. The collaboration between Cloonan and SSS has existed for several years and, given its success, will likely continue to grow.

Avery Point SSS Students Take to the Court with Youth

SSS Avery Point Men’s Basketball players spent the evening of December 7, 2016 teaching youth ages seven through nine proper basketball techniques and fundamentals, while encouraging good sportsmanship. Tyrel Martinez, Bobby Atkins, Josue Gonzalez, and Amadi White, along with other team members, had a great time shooting hoops with the students and their parents this past semester at Nathan Hale Magnet School in New London, CT. The event was coordinated by Avery Point’s Head Basketball Coach, James Childs.

Stamford SSS Men Share Their Experiences

Opportunity Fund, a collaboration between UConn Stamford and the Stamford YWCA, gave inner-city high school males the chance to connect with male college students and professionals. The students and professionals, which included UConn Stamford SSS students and alumni, shared their stories about how they came to be in their current majors and professions. Other topics discussed included proper etiquette and attire in a professional setting, common adversities young minority men face on the road to college and career, and leadership skills. Approximately 40 students, parents, and professionals were in attendance at the event, which took place at the UConn Stamford Campus.

SSS Alumni Connect at Graduate Student Luncheon

SSS alumni pursuing graduate education at UConn were honored at a special luncheon held at the West Hartford campus in December 2016. The event was an opportunity for alumni to reconnect with SSS staff and meet other SSS alumni who are furthering their education. Each alumnus shared their current endeavors and future goals, as well as their gratitude for the SSS program.
**CAP STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS**

**Avery Point SSS Freshman Succeeds On and Off Court**

Freshman Avery Point Basketball Guard Tatyana Lafrance-Boyce was named NJCAA Division III National Player of the Week for the third time, in November, December, and February. Better known as “Taty” amongst her friends, she leads the National Junior College Athletic Association in scoring, averaging 33.1 points per game. Tatyana, class of 2020, is a force to be reckoned with both on and off the court. Dedicated to and passionate about her education, she is an outstanding campus citizen and a committed member of the SSS program.

**SSS Student Brings Black Students Association to Waterbury Campus**

Looking to fill a need in both the campus and greater community, SSS Student Daylan “Kendall” Greer spearheaded a successful effort to bring the first Black Students Association to the Waterbury campus in fall 2016. For its first event, UConn Waterbury teamed up with students from Post University’s BSA to host a fashion show. The event brought together members of both campus communities for an evening of fashion, entertainment, and networking. Kudos to Kendall for turning his idea into a reality.

**ConnCAP Students Qualify for Day of Pride Scholarship**

ConnCAP students Eric Bueno and Tea-Ani Baez have among the highest SAT scores in the Hartford School District, and a grade point average of at least a 3.9, qualifying them both for the UConn Day of Pride Scholarship. The students will be the first in their families to graduate high school and pursue a college education. They are both exemplary role models for ConnCAP students and CAP is tremendously proud of them.

**ConnCAP Student All-Academic Recipient**

ConnCAP student Zinodene Stewart is currently a junior at Hartford Public High School Law and Government Academy. This past football season, he was chosen as a Central Connecticut Conference (CCC) All-Academic Recipient. Zinodene was able to maintain a 3.5 GPA while dedicating his weeknights and weekends at practices and games for his high school football team. Along with having a successful academic year, Zinodene managed to be ranked #87 out of all high school football players in the State of Connecticut.
SSS Senior Speaker at MLK Day of Observance Event

SSS senior Maman Cooper was selected to be the student speaker at UConn’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Observance celebration, held on January 16, 2017 in Jorgensen Center. In her speech she shared her experience growing up on the Ivory Coast of West Africa, where she was forced to work on her aunt’s farm instead of going to school. The opportunity to migrate to the United States in 2004 and attend school was a life changing event that she has never taken for granted. Maman joined the Center’s programs in April 2010, when she was accepted into the Upward Bound/ConnCAP Program as a high school student at Bulkeley High School. Later she applied to UConn, participating in the SSS summer program prior to her freshman year. In 2016 Maman was selected to participate in UConn’s highly competitive Leadership Legacy Experience. She has also served as a UConn Connects Facilitator, founded the Women’s Legacy club, and worked as a campus tour guide, to name a few of her accomplishments.

Waterbury SSS Student’s Internship Leads to Job Offer

Waterbury SSS student Daniel Bastos spent summer 2016 interning at Aetna. Daniel was selected as project leader of a team charged with developing ways for Medicaid providers to more actively engage with their clients. His team won first place. Daniel was also in charge of helping to coordinate the Aetna sponsored Pal Field Day Event, which was held on July 20 at Riverside Park in Hartford. The event provided inner city youth with the opportunity to engage in fun activities such as ultimate Frisbee, police boat rides, and a mountain bike stunt show. Aetna was so impressed with Daniel’s performance that they offered him a job upon graduation in May. Way to go, Daniel!
UConn Upward Bound/ConnCAP and Student Support Services (SSS) alumnus Kally Moquete Gonzalez was the 2016 recipient of the Connecticut Association of Educational Opportunity Programs (CAEOP) Alumni Achiever Award. Kally accepted the award at the 30th annual CAEOP Conference held in November at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain.

Kally participated in UConn's Upward Bound/ConnCAP program while attending Hartford Public High School as a Jacob L. Lewis Fox Foundation Scholar. Upon graduation, she was admitted to UConn through SSS and became an active participant, studying abroad with the program in Liverpool, England. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Human Development and Family Studies in 2012, Kally attended Fordham University’s Graduate School of Social Services, earning a master’s degree in social work in 2014. Currently, she is pursuing her Juris Doctor degree at Western New England University, where she serves on the Student Bar Association’s Charity and Social committees.

A former foster child, Kally is dedicated to helping to improve the lives of Connecticut’s disadvantaged children, especially those in the foster care system. In 2013 and 2014, she worked as a summer tutor/counselor for the ConnCAP program, while also serving as a study skills and college preparation instructor for the UConn First Star Academy, which provides educational opportunities for high school children in foster care. A full-time social worker for the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, Kally was featured in the Middletown Press for her work on developing the Connecticut Foster Care Alumni Association. In December 2016, she was the keynote speaker for the Connecticut Voices’ Annual Youth at the Capitol Day, whose theme focused on the needs of youth transitioning from foster care.
Senior Christian Caceres’s journey to publication started in summer 2013, when he entered UConn as a participant in the Student Support Services program. From the start, his goal was to become a cardiovascular surgeon, and he knew that research experience was critical to being a competitive candidate for medical school. He joined the LSAMP (Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation) program, and sought out opportunities to engage in research and build a network of faculty, staff, and peers to help him reach his goal.

Christian’s efforts led to an independent study in Dr. Ji-Young Lee’s lab during the fall semester of his sophomore year, and he continued to work with her through fall of 2016. He traveled with Dr. Lee to San Diego, California to present their research at the Experimental Biology Convention. Last December, their research was published in Science Direct, with Christian listed as a co-author.

Beyond his work in the laboratory, Christian has demonstrated a commitment to his UConn peers. He serves as a mentor to several students participating in LSAMP, and in fall of 2016 took on the role of coordinator for the LSAMP peer mentor program. In addition, he has been a highly sought-out science tutor for the SSS program and serves as a resident assistant.

Despite Christian’s vast network on and off campus, he remains grateful to SSS for giving him his start at UConn. “SSS is the reason I’ve been able to do all that I have done; the doors to UConn were opened for me through SSS. It was in the SSS Summer Program that I learned the importance of networking, through the various workshops and panels, and Armando Jimenez, the Assistant Residential Coordinator, particularly emphasized it. I never forgot his advice.”

Currently, Christian is studying abroad with the UConn PreMed/Allied Health Spanish Program. While abroad, he will take courses in Spanish, shadow Spanish medical students, and gain 240 hours of direct patient contact. It is an exciting culmination to Christian’s exceptional undergraduate career.
Student Support Services held its 11th annual Leadership Conference on August 24-26, 2016 at the Storrs campus. The theme was #GetConnected, which emphasized networking in its many forms.

Justis Lopez (SSS ’07, M.A. ’15) opened the conference with an inspiring keynote address, engaging the students in a conversation about taking chances, building relationships in all settings, and striving every day to make positive impacts and build a lasting network. A lineup of campus leaders followed, including Joelle Murchison, UConn Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. Joseph Cooper, Assistant Professor in the Neag School of Education, Eran Peterson, Center for Career Development, and Dominique Battle-Lawson and Mia Hines, Neag School of Education Academic Advisors. They addressed topics such as leading with authenticity, and living one’s brand, and offered practical advice on following up after networking events and creating a LinkedIn profile.

Published author and entrepreneur Johnnie Bird III (SSS ’05, B.A. ’09) spoke to the students about perseverance in the educational journey, his walk-on basketball experience, and his career. Bird motivated the students with his #DoMode campaign, welcoming them to connect with him on social media to continue their conversations and to link them to internship opportunities.

Approximately 70 students attended the conference, which provides rising sophomore, junior, and senior SSS participants, along with incoming campus change SSS students, with personal and professional development.
State Representative Douglas McCrory was the guest speaker at the ConnCAP summer program closing ceremony held at the Storrs campus. The deputy majority leader for Hartford’s 7th Assembly District, who is a strong advocate for education, congratulated the senior class for their accomplishments and for making their families and educators proud. He also praised ConnCAP, and programs like it, for providing educational opportunities to urban high school students.

McCrory emphasized how programs like ConnCAP play a key role in students’ lives, enabling them to make a name for themselves and their families. He also recognized ConnCAP Director Susana Ulloa and Program Advisor Christina Rivera for their longtime advocacy and service to first-generation, low-income students.
The 21st Annual CALAHE (Connecticut Association of Latinos in Higher Education) Student Conference was held last October at Manchester Community College. Attendees in grades 8 through 12 included UConn ConnCAP students from Windham, Harford Public, and Bulkeley High Schools.

The conference theme was “A Student’s Guide: Mapping the Road to College Success,” and focused on college access for immigrant and undocumented students, finding a sense of belonging and identity in college, and the principles of academic and social excellence.

After hearing Jose Diaz share his story about how he was able to attend college despite being an undocumented student, ConnCAP student Erdit Abedini said, “I knew immigrants could go to college, but I didn’t know there were scholarships or college funds for them to be able to afford it.” Diaz’s story prompted several other students to voice their fears about going to college because their parents are undocumented and/or cannot afford to help them pay for it.

At one workshop, students learned how to create a road map to help them be more engaged on campus once they get to college, as a way to help them find a greater sense of belonging and forge their identity as a college student.

“...college access for immigrant and undocumented students...”

The student guests sharing their experiences was a good way to figure out the advantages and disadvantages of being engaged on campus,” said one ConnCAP student.

UConn SSS student Jessica Jaramillo presented a session on College Academic Success, during which she presented students with note taking strategies, helped them identify their learning styles, and gave them tips on study skills and exam preparation. Justis Lopez, a UConn SSS alumnus who is currently a social studies teacher in Manchester, CT, presented a session on Social Excellence. Students learned the principles of being socially excellent and how they can be applied to success in school. “Justis is always lit! His presentation was my favorite,” said ConnCAP student Desiree Rivera. “But I also learned a lot from the workshop.”

The final component of the conference was a college fair, which allowed students to apply what they had learned about networking in the Social Excellence workshop. Participating institutions included Central CT State University, Gateway Community College, Manchester Community College, Monroe College, Naugatuck Community College, Southern CT State University, Three Rivers Community College, Trinity College and the University of Connecticut.
Nicole “Nikki” Wilson is determined to beat the odds. Having been in the state foster care system, she is aware of the grim statistic: Nationally, less than 3% of foster youth go on to attend and graduate from college. As a freshman at UConn, Nikki recognizes the challenges ahead of her, but she also knows that diligence and support have helped her to be successful.

In 2015, while in high school, Nikki took an important step toward her future when she joined the UConn First Star Academy. The goal of the program is to aid foster youth in successfully completing high school and attending college. Two years of participation in First Star helped Nikki build confidence and taught her the importance of taking advantage of the opportunities and resources available to her. As high school graduation approached, with 10 college acceptances in hand, she chose UConn, which already felt like home.

Nikki stood out during the 2016 UConn Student Support Services (SSS) summer program, where she received an award for academic excellence. That success continued into her freshman year at UConn, even as the pace and rigor of a college environment began to take its toll. Like every situation before, Nikki remained proactive and developed a plan to manage the stress. Nikki has had a lifelong connection to animals so she completed the necessary steps to obtain a service animal on campus. Her heart was set on a rescued Pitbull named Ella. The two are now inseparable. Ella is able to attend classes with Nikki and stay in the dorm with her.

Despite being a busy college student, Nikki has remained close to her First Star roots. This academic year, she was hired by the program to be a mentor for current participants. In this role, she has been able to develop strong connections with the students as she coaches them through some of the same struggles she faced in the not so distant past. Recently, Nikki was selected to speak in front of the Connecticut General Assembly to advocate for dedicated funding and available spots in college readiness programs in Connecticut for foster care youth. These experiences have ignited a calling in Nikki to help improve the lives and outcomes of foster care youth.

Looking ahead, Nikki hopes to be a tutor/counselor with the First Star Academy Summer Program, so that she can continue to gain valuable experience working with foster youth and share her experiences with her peers.
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CENTER FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS  
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