



An AAP/SSS student takes advantage of the unique opportunities available in DC on **page 2**.



UM-EOC hosts the 3rd Annual College Goal Sunday; read more on **page 7**.



One AAP student's story of an "unforgettable experience" through the McNair Program on **page 8**.

Academic Achievement Programs



AAP Insider

Summer Transitional Program • Student Support Services • Intensive Educational Development • Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program • Educational Opportunity Center

Spring 2011

Executive Director's Message

Dr. Jerry L. Lewis

We are pleased to share this spring volume of the "AAP Insider" with you. This issue is devoted to the **voices** and experiences of AAP students, the many talented young women and men whom we serve. These voices speak to the true meaning and purpose of Academic Achievement Programs. I am delighted that our students were willing to let our readers hear what they have to say.

I'm excited to report that AAP students continue to demonstrate their excellence, commitment and determination to succeed and become University of Maryland alumni. According to data from the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment, AAP students' first year retention for the 2009 cohort was 95.7%, slightly higher than the University's at-large retention rate. The second year retention rate for that cohort was within six tenths of a percent variance of that of the University's at-large second year rate. These are remarkable achievements and AAP will continue all possible efforts to improve these indices of both the programs' and students' success.

Additionally, nine AAP students, the largest number ever, studied abroad this school



year. Two were away for the entire academic year; one studied in Russia, and another in Paris, France. Four students travelled abroad during winter term in Argentina, El Salvador, and Turkey. Three are presently completing study abroad experiences this semester, one in Ghana and two in Australia. Among them, an AAP-McNair Scholar studying in Ghana, received a Gillman Scholarship. The other McNair Scholar is studying and conducting research on the impact of Hip-Hop music on the culture in Paris. All nine were awarded an AAP Study Abroad Grant to support the cost of their experience.

It is critically important that students with limited economic means partici-

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Reflections on my Freshman Year



By Jessica Blizzard (SSS 2007)

Being a recipient of a full scholarship to the University

of Maryland through the Incentive Program, and as a student in AAP/SSS, I was happy but skeptical at first. I was not exactly thrilled at the idea of coming to a huge campus with thousands of people. After hearing all the good things that people had to say about UM, the Incentive Program and AAP/SSS, I decided to take the chance and attend.

My first day of classes in the Summer Transitional Program was a little confusing. The campus was so big that it felt like I had to walk an hour to get to each class. Most of my fall classes were normal size with maybe 20 people inside, but there were occasionally large lecture halls that held 200 students or more. At first I thought that I would never

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My Journey

By Obinna Onungwa (SSS 2004)



As a 17-year old freshman, I was naïve yet confident. I did not know what to expect socially, scholastically or emotionally pertaining to this collegiate voyage I was going to step into. High school had gone by so quickly! Frankly, I never gave too much thought to the next level of education. I originally viewed AAP as an insult to my intelligence (scores were not indicative of my academic potential). I set out to prove that summer to myself and whom ever it may concern that I belonged. After cruising through

some basic requirements, I soon contended with the decision of choosing my major. For my entire life, this experience had been promoted to me as the platform for my future. I initially wanted to be an engineer due to many external influences. Nigerian culture had imposed notions of success on me early in life. Engineering, medicine and law were considered the **only** means of success in this country. I realized within my first year that engineering would not be a fulfilling experience for me.

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Internships: An Interview with Jennifer Chen

by Marsha Turner Botts



"The internship experience also included a "Q and A" session with Vice President Cheney and President Bush, although not at the same time."

After only one semester as a UM freshman, Jennifer Chen (SSS, 2006) became a White House Intern. Advice from Jennifer: "It might not be the best idea to leave college for an entire semester during your freshman year. Upon your return, you have to resume disciplined study. But even with that challenge, I knew that the AAP advisors cared about us as people rather than just another undergraduate student...I felt like I had people to come back to if there were any problems [readjusting]." However, during the 2007 Spring semester, Jennifer was dressed in office attire and commuted Monday through Friday to downtown Washington.

The application process included an essay, transcript review, previous work experience and a screening, followed by a background clearance of the prospective intern and family. Thanks to her internship coordinator at Rockville High School, Jennifer became aware of the White House opportunity as well as the other internships that she experienced at The Gazette Newspaper, and the Montgomery County Board of Education.

Jennifer says that "representing a minority population" was her most positive experience during the White House internship. "Most of the interns were Republican, conservative, of a different culture, and older." But she is confident that, despite her youth, she performed well and quickly caught on to the

tasks and responsibilities that were assigned. Her position in the Vice President's office included receiving and sorting the hundreds of pieces of correspondence that citizens send to that office. The correspondence can be as ordinary as birthday greetings or get well wishes, or involve issues that a person has not been able to resolve at a local level.

The interns' orientation and security briefing warned against disclosing their position on a blog, Facebook, MySpace, or any other internet discussion medium; no bragging allowed. Even after a year, Jennifer was careful in sharing details of her experience. I learned that every piece of correspondence to the Vice President must be logged into a database, but the specifics surrounding any piece of correspondence are left to the imagination.

When you watch the news and notice people gathered on the White House lawn as the President arrives or departs, White House interns are there. Jennifer said "there was an area for the press, visitors, and us (the interns) to stand, clap, and cheer." On one of the best manicured lawns in the nation's capital, Jennifer was able to enjoy lunch every day in a patio set aside for staffers. The internship experience also included a "Q and A" session with Vice President Cheney and President Bush, although not at the same time. ♦

(Jennifer is scheduled to graduate from UMD in Summer 2011 with a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education.)

My Journey*Continued from Page 2*

Pressure mounted as I felt the need to make **the** life decision. It consumed me, day and night: what should I study and why? I attempted to define success for myself. A product of the MTV generation, my understanding of success centered on fame and fortune. Money seemed to be the most important measure of success. "Who makes the most money with the least amount of formal schooling?" I asked.

Then it happened. My circumstances changed completely when my mother lost her job and needed assistance financially. Failures not reflective of my academic capacity soiled my transcript. School was the last thing on my mind that year.

During my time away from College Park (I was still enrolled), I had rationalized within myself the illegitimacy of academia. I began to believe it was an unnecessary societal obstacle course designed to appease the American demand for labor with the brightest minds of the world. Frankly, I wanted to be on the other side of the equation as soon

as possible and did not see the need for an undergraduate degree (or any degree for that matter). I was down on universities all together; I believed it was a necessary element of society as we know it, but that it was unnecessary for me. I simply was above it all. Where did this kind of pride come from? I am not sure. The pursuit of monetary wealth had blinded me to true riches.

What if I could study on my own terms? What if I pursued knowledge on the basis of my personal passions rather than trying to be an economic forecaster? I was tired of trying to predict the job market and taking everyone else's "expert" opinion.

Now, school has never been so enlightening. I have a renewed sense of motivation in my pursuit of knowledge. I find myself trying to maximize all of my opportunities. The University of Maryland truly is a world of opportunity. Experience has taught me that life truly is what you make of it. Extending yourself to fellow human beings is a skill that separates you from the masses and opens you to an

endless road of opportunity. I have come into contact with students and faculty that are helping me go to the next level on my journey to success. They say one finds oneself in college, and I am definitely a proponent of this view. Once I determined the value of education in my life, my experience took on another form. ♦

(Obinna completed his bachelor's degree in History in December 2009. He lives in Washington, D.C.)

"...most professors have many scheduled meeting times..."

"Climbing Back Up": An Interview with Kelie Darbouze

by Marsha Turner Botts

Kelie Darbouze, (SSS 2005 and McNair Scholar 2007-2009) received her bachelor's degree and has now moved on to great new things. Regarding her atypical four-year matriculation, she said, "I graduated from Wilde Lake H.S. in Columbia and came to the University of Maryland to earn an undergraduate degree and go out into the world and find a job." No doubt there is a job waiting for her, but it will have to patiently wait for Kelie to earn her masters degree in social work from the University of Pittsburgh and a doctoral degree that further prepares her for work with incarcerated juveniles. Kelie leaves UM with a 3.41 GPA. In her freshman year she earned a 4.0 GPA both semesters. The academic cushion that she created as a freshman proved to her that "it is easier to climb back up the ladder when you have been at the top than it is to climb the ladder if you have never seen the top."

Kelie credits her AAP counselor, "Miss Tiffany" (Tiffany Cox) with advising her to apply to the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Program. During the annual UM McNair Conference, Kelie spoke to a University of Pittsburgh graduate school recruiter, Mr. Phillip Mack. She says that "it was a blessing to encounter Mr. Mack. He convinced me that my interests could be developed with a social work degree and visiting the University of Pittsburgh confirmed that it would be a perfect fit." Even with acceptance letters and financial assistance arriving from other east coast graduate programs, Pitt's national ranking and the accompanying aid package made it a very attractive offer.

In 2007, at the annual UM McNair Conference, Kelie had the opportunity

♦ *Continued on Page 5*

Please see pages 8-9 for more Ronald E. McNair Program news!

In Uncertain Times: An Interview with Joseph King

**Please see
page 7 for more
Educational
Opportunity
Center news!**



by UM-EOC Staff

Joseph King didn't see the turn of events coming that he would experience in the Spring of 2009. An entrepreneur and business owner for more than 12 years, King was stunned when the Washington Post cancelled his contract as an independent distributor citing declining subscribers. The sudden shift left his business in ruins and left him among the growing number of unemployed adults in Prince George's County. A former boxer and Olympic hopeful, King found himself in the fight of his life to reestablish the stability that his family had so long enjoyed. But answers didn't come quickly.

"I couldn't have predicted that this would happen. The stress that resulted was beyond what I can describe. I had never been unemployed in my adult life, and with a family to support, I had never fathomed that I would be in this position at 45 years old".

A graduate of Archbishop Carroll High School, King had started college nearly two decades earlier when he enrolled at the prestigious American University with plans to complete a degree in English. After attending on and off for nearly four years and building a respectable academic record, King left in 1995 before completing his degree to care for his young family. Work and family responsibilities wouldn't permit him to return as planned.

As fate would have it, King learned about the UM-EOC in early 2010 while talking to

a friend whose son was assisted by the center to apply for financial aid and college admissions. The friend recommended that he visit the Lanham-based office right away to see what assistance he could get. By this time, King had been unemployed for nearly nine months with few promising prospects and growing concern about the road ahead. He was unsure of what could be done other than continue his search for work.

"I'd never heard of the program and didn't know what to expect in terms of what they could do for me. I didn't go with any expectations, but what I left with was more than I could have asked for."

With the assistance of the UM-EOC and Associate Director Lisa Peyton-Caire, King was able to examine his career interests, which include culinary arts and business, and to identify a number of avenues to continue his education and start on a new path. Over the course of just a few months, King enrolled in Prince George's Community College's STEP HI Culinary Arts Associates Degree program, and began work in January 2011 on his BA in Business Management at the UMUC through the PGCC-UMUC Alliance.

"The UM-EOC was there when I needed answers and options, and I am forever grateful for the assistance I received. A resource like this one is a Godsend to the community". ♦

**"The UM-EOC was there when I needed answers
and options, and I am forever grateful for the
assistance I received."**

Reflections on my Freshman Year

Continued from Page 1

learn anything with all of these people, but soon I realized that as long as I got to class early and sat in the front, I would feel like I was in a small class after all. Since the campus is so large, I thought it would be hard to become acquainted with professors, but I was wrong. I found that most professors have many scheduled meeting times during which I could meet with them. I learned that if I talk to my professors, they will often pick a time that is more convenient for me.

Before I came to UMCP, I had never been part of such a diverse community. I have met people from countries I hadn't heard of before. Along the way I have met a lot of friends who tell me about places they've traveled and the places they are from, and it has been a good experience. Many cultural

"Attending the University of Maryland, College Park has opened my eyes to another world."

events and club activities are held on campus weekly. At UMCP, there are over 200 clubs! At the "First Look Fair," I signed up for over 23 clubs. Attending the University of Maryland, College Park has opened my eyes to another world. ♦

(Jessica plans to complete her bachelor's degree in Criminology in December 2011.)



Climbing Back Up

Continued from Page 3

to give an oral presentation on "African American Females Battling Juvenile Delinquency." The topic was developed with guidance from faculty mentor and former McNair Associate Director, Dr. Wallace Southerland III. Later in the year the program sponsored travel to the University of Tennessee-Knoxville McNair Conference where she was able to network with other scholars and present the research again.

Kelie says that in her four years the AAP motto "whatever the mind can believe and conceive, you can achieve," has been reinforced for her. She adds that "if you set the bar high, you can make it with the AAP support system. The tutoring, counseling, motivating, and pushing, the extra voice expressing confidence in me have all been a blessing in my life."

She continues, "The AAP/SSS/McNair Programs have opened my eyes to endless possibilities." She is presently completing her Master's in Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh, where she was awarded a \$20,000 merit scholarship. She remarks, "I plan to continue and pursue my doctorate after my MSW is complete." ♦

"If you set the bar high, you can make it with the AAP support system."



“The great thing about the college experience is that you meet so many people, and it is amazing to find how many share the same interests as you.”

Why Go to College?

By Brittney Silver (SSS 2007)

Why go to college? Sound familiar? Well, this is a major question shared among most freshmen. It is common for underclassmen as well as upperclassmen to feel the anxiety and confusion that college life can produce. After all, this is a point when students become more responsible and independent. During this time, most students experience life away from family for the first time. Several emotions and feelings occur that result in many students feeling alone, worried, scared, and even depressed. If you think that you are one of these students, you are not alone. If you have a friend that may be experiencing a college life crisis, then these suggestions are for you. In this article, you will read the advice of former college students who had the same question at one point in their lives. These people are the counselors in the Academic Achievement Programs. After reading this article, you will have answers to many of your questions.

College life is hard, and as stated before, almost every student experiences obstacles through the college experience. The solution to any problem starts with discussion. You should always talk with someone who you can trust and confide in. As long as you feel comfortable, just let out your troubles. College Park provides a center just for counseling, where you can discuss your problems one on one and get expert advice.

- “Don’t isolate yourself. Search people out. Be diverse and open in your surroundings.” (Ms. Danielle Foreman, AAP Counselor)
- “My friends and colleagues were my main support system. I could talk to them because they could relate, and they knew what I was going through.” (Ms. Yukako Tatsumi, AAP Tutoring Coordinator).

- “It is crucial to work hard, but do not work so hard that you drive yourself to torpor.” (Mr. Phillip Bonner, former AAP Study Skills coordinator)
- “The great thing about the college experience is that you meet so many people, and it is amazing to find how many share the same interests as you.” (Mr. Phillip Bonner)
- “The best part of my college experience was my sorority AKA [Alpha Kappa Alpha].” (Ms. Danielle Foreman)

Get involved and mingle with other people. A good way to relieve the stress of tedious assignments and monotonous lectures is to have fun. Find some time to enjoy yourself. There are so many clubs and organizations. And even if time doesn’t allow you to join any at a particular time, it is still good to research the organization and become familiar with members to get a better idea of what you may want to be a part of. Rather than questioning whether you should be in college, instead you should ask yourself how many degrees you need to work for. College experience prepares you for life. ♦



Thought Box

**“Prioritizing is essential to academic success.”
- Matthew (SSS 2006)**

UM-EOC's 3rd Annual College Goal Sunday a Great Success

by UM-EOC Staff

The University of Maryland Educational Opportunity Center (UM-EOC) successfully hosted its 3rd annual observance of College Goal Sunday on February 20th at the Prince George's Sports & Learning Complex. Over 75 residents from across the County attended to get hands-on help in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and to receive valuable information about federal and state financial aid programs. The event is just one of the ways the UM-EOC provides information, awareness, and hands-on help to residents to advance postsecondary education enrollment and completion in Prince George's County.

More than 26 volunteers representing a host of organizations including Johns Hopkins University, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Howard University, Bowie State University, PNC Bank, Mocha Moms of Northern Prince George's County, College and Career Pathways, and others, were on hand to lend their time and expertise. The UM-EOC relies on partnerships to advance awareness of its program and to reach eligible residents with services that bridge the knowledge and access gap that characterizes the experience of many adults and families in the County.

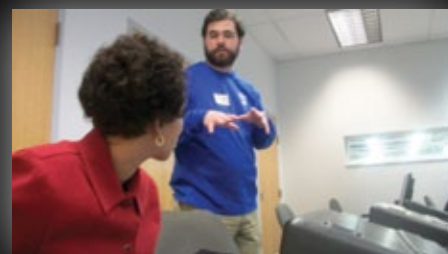
"Inadequate information and understanding of the financial aid process and programs is a leading cause of under-enrollment in college among low income and first generation individuals, but this needn't be the case", says UM-EOC Associate Director Lisa Peyton-Caire. We work diligently to close this gap by being purveyors of information and services that promote access and level the playing field. College Goal Sunday is one of many ways we do this".

The UM-EOC extends a special thank-you to the following partners who continue to support its efforts each and every year:

- Maryland Higher Education Commission
- Prince George's Public Schools Office of Professional School Counseling
- Prince George's Sports & Learning Complex
- University of Maryland Educational Talent Search Program
- Light of the City, Inc.

College Goal Sunday is a national event created in 2001 by the Indiana Student Financial Aid Association, and is now managed by the YMCA-USA with support from the Lumina Foundation. Activities in Maryland are coordinated through by the Mid-America Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (MAEOPP). ♦

Photo Gallery: College Goal Sunday



RONALD E. MCNAIR POST-BACCALAUREATE ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

AAP Spotlight: Kanokphan Rattanawatkul



BS 2011 – Community Health

As the first-born child of an immigrant family, Kanokphan Rattanawatkul exemplifies the target population of AAP and the McNair Scholars Program, which support eager students in achieving their academic goals despite their lack of access to knowledge or resources about the higher education process.

“Coming from an immigrant family as a first-born child, I could not turn to my family members for advice about U.S. schools. Not only does McNair serve as my guidance to pursue my goal of attending graduate school, but it also provides me with a support system of role models, distinguished professors, and friends who share similar interests.”

This semester, Kanokphan is working as an intern at the National Institutes of Health and has been offered a full time position with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)

starting this summer. She has also been accepted into the University of Maryland’s highly competitive Masters of Public Health (MPH) program and will be completing her MPH with a concentration in epidemiology while working at NIAID.

Kanokphan is committed to eliminating health disparities and improving the overall well being among racial and ethnic minority populations through her research. She attributes her drive and inspiration to the opportunities given to her by AAP/McNair.

“Through my experience with McNair, not only did I complete a 20 page published paper, but I also further enhanced my understanding and appreciation for epidemiological data and the tremendous impact it has on individuals’ lives. Furthermore, AAP/McNair has allowed me to communicate my research by presenting and winning first place for oral presentation at the Southeastern Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (SAEOPP) Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, which was a life-changing experience!” ♦

“Not only does McNair serve as my guidance to pursue my goal of attending graduate school, it also provides me with a support system of role models, distinguished professors, and friends who share similar interests.”

AAP Hosts National Research Conference for McNair Scholars and Undergraduates

by McNair Program Staff

Academic Achievement Programs (AAP) hosted the 12th Annual National McNair Scholars and Undergraduate Research Conference on March 17-20. The theme of this year's conference was ***Global Impact: Achieving Scholarship, Leadership, and Excellence in the 21st Century***. The forum provided an opportunity for more than 250 McNair Scholars from across the country to present original research among peers, academicians, and professionals. UM McNair Scholar Candace Ali opened the conference followed by remarks from Dr. Jerry L. Lewis, AAP Executive Director, and Dr. Terri D. Wright, Associate Director of McNair Scholars Program.

Participants represented majors in the arts, humanities, public health, the sciences, mathematics, engineering and other disciplines. They had time to network with peers, faculty and graduate school recruiters and to attend workshops to strengthen their knowledge and preparation for doctoral studies. Following their poster and oral presentations, many of the scholars toured the National Harbor or Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

A popular feature of the McNair Conference is the Graduate School panel, which this year included deans from the University of Michigan, University of Texas-San Antonio, University of Florida, Vanderbilt University and Hampton University. The "scholar-to-scholar"

session covered a number of compelling topics including ***Making McNair Work for You*** and ***Preparing for and Surviving the Graduate School Experience***. Emmy Award winning poet and writer Dr. Kwame Dawes gave the keynote address at the Friday evening banquet.

In response to this year's conference, one McNair Scholar from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign said, "The conference was excellent. It gave me a chance to network with my peers around the nation and gain feedback for my research." A McNair Director also wrote, "the students and I truly enjoyed the whole conference experience as always."

A final comment from a junior McNair Scholar from Bloomfield College best conveys the full impact of the McNair conference experience: "It was a pleasure attending the McNair conference. It was well organized, very professional, and a very delightful experience. Networking with other McNair scholars and viewing their research posters and presentations really encouraged me. Conversing with them, as well, made me realize that we all have the same goals, and they were all so motivated and focused. It was a very rewarding experience and I am thankful that I am a Junior because I will have the privilege to attend again next year." ♦



Executive Director's Message

Continued from Page 1

pate in trans-cultural and global transformational experiences as part of their educational preparation and future careers in a global society. AAP students serve as role models and Study Abroad Ambassadors to other AAP students, their families and communities. Experiences like these are often hindered, if not denied due to lack of economic resources. Thanks to Dr. Donna Hamilton, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, and AAP, we have financially supported this initiative and these students' dreams have become a reality.

This year has been an exciting year for AAP and its students. We recently moved into our newly renovated suite of offices on the

second floor of Marie Mount Hall. Students and staff are extremely pleased with the new space with bright colors, new furnishings and a home-like atmosphere while offering plenty of serious academic activity and support for students. The environment is welcoming for students and helps them feel at home. We encourage our campus friends and colleagues to come by and visit some time; AAP's doors are always open and you will find a friendly face.

While AAP enjoyed a very exciting and successful year, we also face serious challenges in the near future. The Federal TRIO programs, including the Student Support Services Program, the McNair Program and the Educational Opportunity Center program in

AAP, and the Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search Programs at the University of Maryland, suffered significant budget cuts at the national level. The federal Budget Reduction Bill recently signed by the President cut \$26.4 million of the national TRIO programs' funding. This means a reduction of over 60,000 students nationally. The specific impact on our programs at College Park will not be known until the new grant year in September, however, reductions in federal funding to individual programs are expected. Despite these challenges, AAP will continue to work diligently to ensure that the highest quality of service possible is provided to every AAP student. Go Terps! ♦

SSS/IED has a proven record of impressive performance and measurable improvement!

- SSS/IED's first-year retention rate was **95.7%** for the 2009 cohort, **slightly higher than UMD's first-year retention rate of 95.2%**, despite the additional challenges facing SSS students.
- SSS/IED's first-year retention rate was also higher than that of UMD for the 2005-2008 cohorts by an average of **2.7%**.
- For the 2008 cohort, SSS/IED's retention of second-year students was **89%**, **nearly matching UMD's second-year retention rate of 89.6%**.
- SSS/IED has a six-year graduation rate of **58%**, **25% higher than the nationwide SSS average.**

Based on data from UMD Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment and US Department of Education.

Experience:

An interview with Nicole Stevenson

by Marsha Turner Botts

Nicole Stevenson progressed from the challenges of the 2005 Summer Transitional Program to become a kinesiology student. Along the way, she figured out how to see America “on a dime” and lend a helping hand at the same time—the Alternative Spring Break (ASB). Throughout her travels and matriculation at UM, she maintained a steadfast attachment to AAP. Nicole utilized the offers of assistance from AAP/SSS for advising, financial assistance, and (during her junior year) enrollment in the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Program.

With assistance from AAP/SSS for the past two years, she met her fundraising goal to enroll in ASB. In 2007, she was a “laborer” with the ACORN project in New Orleans’ 9th Ward where she worked with a team of 45 UM students to “gut” Hurricane Katrina-damaged houses in preparation for rehabilitation or demolition. In 2008, she and 22 UM students worked in San Francisco with Connecting the Dots, an education-based program designed to help at-risk youth avoid criminal behavior and the juvenile justice system.

For spring break 2008, ASB offered other opportunities in Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta, South Dakota, and New Orleans. Meals and travel were covered by the program. The San Francisco hostel, a renovated hotel, accommodated four persons per room and included a kitchen and bathroom. Each student raised \$450.00 to cover expenses, in part, through working at UM basketball game concessions. San Francisco was Nicole’s first choice and even though the experience was not as she had envisioned, it turned out to be well worth her school-free time.

Whereas the New Orleans alternative spring break project was a more physical and “hands on” experience, the San Francisco project mostly involved verbal interaction. At a high school in Oakland, the UM students were the first college-enrolled students to explain that college attendance is a possibility regardless of your background. Nicole says that she and her fellow Terps were well received, but with wide-eyed questioning when they told the students “we are here in California, but we are college students, too, at the University of Maryland.” While she and the other UM students talked with the students, Connecting the Dots also offered a modeling group and a dance troupe of at-risk teens who are learning positive and productive alternatives to street life and criminal activity.

The San Francisco option for ASB offered exposure to various aspects of the criminal justice system. In addition to working with students in a high school, UM students viewed a video of the historic Alcatraz prison and toured the “safe” areas of San Quentin prison. Nicole observed that “there are areas of San Quentin that do not look like a typical prison.” She was able to interact with inmates who are part of the “Real Choices” program where 14 to 17-year-old students from nearby schools are mentored. During her visit, there was a radio broadcast of the mentees sharing their experiences with mental, physical, domestic abuse and the mentors’ sympathetic and heartfelt responses.

Nicole’s passion for working with others and giving back began while a student at Western Senior High School in Baltimore; she volunteered with the reading program in her younger brother’s elementary school. She has learned a lot through her various community service experiences and they have fueled her desire to helping others even more. Presently, Nicole is completing her Master’s degree in Child and Family Services from the Department of Human Development and Family Science at Oklahoma State University. ♦

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<http://www.aap.umd.edu/aapalumni.html>

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