

## GETTING INTO COLLEGE 101:

### *Be Prepared*

by Peggy Magee

A push to make college a natural next step for more young adults is on in the St. Louis region and elsewhere around the country. That's because about 60 percent of jobs in the U.S. now require college degrees, not to mention that a college graduate today earns at least 75 percent more than a high school graduate.

There is a major obstacle to this push, however, for low income students whose families have little or no experience with college attendance. It is access to college.

**College costs** are rising while financial aid at the state and national levels is threatened. Additionally, many students are not equipped to navigate the multi-faceted college application process, including the complex financial aid component.

In the Kirkwood School District, as with all St. Louis County districts, college counselors are eager to work with voluntary transfer students and their parents on the process of college planning. At a fall meeting that the Kirkwood district hosted for its trans-

fer families, Abby Peterson and Emily Berty talked to families about preparing for college and referred them to the school's website for more detailed information and resources.

**In discussing** the application process for financial aid and scholarships, Peterson used words such as "overwhelming" and "competitive." Both counselors expressed to parents the importance of their involvement in the process, and encouraged families to avail the services of their office.

As a first-generation college student, Kirkwood High graduate Shyniece Ferguson (class of 2010) had few references upon which to draw when it came to the college search process. "I basically went to Ms. Berty and told her that I had no clue about where I wanted to go and no budget for college," she says with a chuckle, adding that Berty "was so accepting of my lack of knowledge and laid out a foundation of everything I needed to know."

**It was at** Berty's suggestion that Shyniece looked into The College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio. "I wanted her to look outside the box and she was certainly willing to do so," notes Berty, adding that she thought Wooster might be a good fit for her. "Based on what Shyniece brought to the table, I was confident the admissions staff would work with her to make Wooster a financial possibility."

**They did.** Shyniece is now in her third year there, the recipient of a generous merit scholarship named after the college's first African-American graduate. She is majoring in Communication with emphases in Africana and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. A strong applicant, she got accepted to all six colleges to which she applied.

From her early years in Kirkwood



Shyniece Ferguson, a 2010 Kirkwood High graduate and junior at The College of Wooster in Wooster, OH, is studying abroad this semester in Copenhagen, Denmark. Here, she gets some help packing from her grandma Bernice Thomas. Shyniece was a strong college candidate who took a proactive approach in working with her college counselor. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

when she struggled with reading, Shyniece resolved to put forth more effort and excel in other areas. "I had an interest in math and became strong in it. In high school, I took AP math and higher level calculus courses." She maintained good academic standing in both middle and high school and got involved in student government. In high school, she led a club called Empowering Women and was involved in the Black Achievement Cultural Club.

**Berty points out** that in addition to grades, college entrance exam scores, school involvement and community service, "colleges want to see students who are passionate, motivated and enthused." Shyniece had that too. "She was intrinsically motivated to make something of herself and be successful," the counselor reports.

Shyniece took a pro-active approach in seeking help from Berty, dropping by her office at least once a week. "This allowed me to get to know her better and help her more specifically," notes Berty. "We are there to help and it's always beneficial for students to let us."

Another factor, Shyniece believes, that led her to find a good-fit college was her "openness" in looking into colleges unfamiliar to her or not on the radar of every other senior. "Affordability was a big factor and so I applied to schools that offer great financial aid."

When it comes to college research, Shyniece recommends that students do their own investigation work and visit the campus. Being involved in the planning process and starting it early makes

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## Former VICC Student Advises

### *Young People on College Admission*

by Peggy Magee

As a youth development professional, Harlan Hodge, 39, offers guidance and direction to teenagers, many who mirror a younger version of himself. A standout at Parkway North High School (1992 grad), Harlan was a leader and role model. Smart, highly involved and well liked, he served as homecoming king, prom king and overall poster child for the VICC program.

"But I almost didn't go to college," he admits, noting that being from a low income family, he didn't think he could swing the cost. Determined to advance his education, he took on \$90,000 in student loans, having been awarded only \$1,000 in scholarship money.

Equipped with bachelor's and master's degrees in social work, Hodge now empowers younger generations. He helps them reach their dreams and avoid burdensome debt to do so. Contracted by organizations who serve young people, he assists the youths in developing a plan for being successful in life. That plan usually includes college and he advises them on how to stand out in the college application process. "With the right system in place, they can leverage amazing results," he reports.

Skilled in technology, he created that system – an online program that enables families to manage the many aspects of college and scholarship applications. It gives step by step instructions and calls for creating

a support system of family and friends, a team of sorts, to share some of the duties "because it's way too big a job for any one person to organize and manage on their own." His program allows the team members to see who is doing what and when. "The key is for the student to outshine the competition," notes Hodge, adding that having a plan and support team helps make this possible.

Hodge's wife, Pamela Westbrooks-Hodge, is also involved in advising high school students on college and runs a consulting business that focuses on securing scholarships. Occasionally, the pair collaborate in presenting free workshops for the public as they did at the University City Library last fall. The Hodges believe that a strong college candidate is a scholarship worthy candidate and that the same methodical, organized approach that goes into finding the right-fit college must be used to secure scholarship monies.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The next free workshop, hosted by the Hodges will be in the fall. To get specifics, go to the website of Pamela Westbrooks-Hodge, "www.thescholarshipsolution.com" in late summer, and click on "Workshops." At the workshop, participants will receive access to the online program for managing college applications/scholarships.

Harlan Hodge



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VICC/Transpar employees and their families are not eligible for prizes (but please do follow along to see what's new with VICC.) Anyone found to use multiple accounts to enter will be ineligible.

# ADVICE ON BULLYING

by Mary Schafer Meehan, VICC Counselor

“My child is having trouble with some of the children at school. *What should I do?*”

As seen on the news lately, children all over are experiencing difficulties with some of their classmates. Is this bullying, harassment or just teasing?

Good natured teasing is something we have all probably experienced, both as the teaser and the one being teased. The difference is when the teasing or criticism becomes hurtful, disruptive and threatening.

Many times when students feel threatened by a classmate, they may be hesitant to tell their parents. Even if your child tries to hide the bullying or harassment, there will be tell tale signs that something is going on.

If your children exhibit any of the following signs, it is time to act.

- Your older child closes his or her internet social media account or is not on the internet as much.
- They are not texting and ignoring incoming texts.
- Your child suddenly refuses to go to school or to ride the bus.
- There is a change in habits. For instance, if they were involved in after school activities, but now refuse to stay. Or if they never stayed after school before and now suddenly stay to catch the activity bus in order to avoid their regular route.
- If your child comes home from school not having gone to the bathroom all day, it may be a sign that there are problems in the bathroom. A perpetrator feels safe bullying in the bathroom away from cameras and teachers.
- Your child had seemed happy and easy going, but now appears fearful and may even cry in secret.

So you ask: “*What do I do? How can I help my child?*”

There are many steps that you can take, but the first and most important one is to get your child to talk to you. To do this, it is imperative that you stay calm, listen attentively, and be supportive yet neutral. If you react too quickly or get mad, your child may shut down. One of the worst questions you can ask is: What did you do to him to make him treat you this way? It is important to remember at this point that your child is the victim.

Next, ask what he or she would like you to do? Many times your child is going to beg you not to go to the school because that will just make it worse. That may be true, especially in the beginning. To start, help your child come up with ways to respond to the person who is giving him trouble. Gently ask questions: How long has this been happening? How many other students are involved? Who is the main person? Are there specific areas around school where these incidents happen more than other places? Is it at all possible for you to avoid those spots? Sometimes that will not be possible. Try to offer verbal responses that might be appropriate. Do not let your child get into a cursing match with the person.

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finding a college fun, she says. “And it should be fun!”

**The college planning** process is already in full gear for eighth grader Breahna Samuel whose mom, Otisha, attended Kirkwood’s fall meeting for VICC parents. The goal of this bright teen from Kirkwood’s North Middle School is to get as many college credits under her belt before she even officially lands on a college campus. Last summer she attended a three-week residential program at Truman University that gives gifted middle school students a taste of campus life. She took a university-level course in debate, though no college credit is given. She plans to attend again this summer for math. The hope is that by high school her competency in math will elevate her to higher level math classes, paving the way for her to take more college credit courses.

In addition, Breahna plans to continue to be involved in band in high school, so she knows she cannot take as many academics as she would like. She hopes to enroll in the high school summer class to make more room in her schedule next fall.

“**The more credits** Breahna can enter college with, the better,” notes her mother, who has become skilled at looking into opportunities for her daughter and seeking help from teachers and staff. “This is my first time at doing this, so I am feeling my way,” she admits. “But what I am finding is that when the schools see you are interested in helping your child succeed, they will go out of their way to help you.”

Encourage your child to ask for help from a favorite principal, teacher or counselor. Many times, it is possible to find a safe way to avoid this student or to be away from them during the vulnerable times.

Be sure to take your child’s side, letting him or her know that you understand what they are going through and will intercede when it is time. Never contact the other child or his family on your own. It is the school’s job to protect your child from other students. The school should contact the other child’s family.

Through all of this discussion with your child, keep a record of the situations your child has encountered with as much detail as you can, so that when you do go to the school, you have the details in front of you instead of just trying to remember everything.

Finally, when your child finds it impossible to handle it on his or her own, it will be time for you to contact the school. Begin with the teacher who is in charge during the times the incident is occurring. If it is all the time, then go to the home room teacher. Ask for a meeting with the

teacher and the counselor before or after school so that you don’t bring attention to your child by showing up at the door.

Bring your notes with you. Also, take notes on the teacher’s and counselor’s suggestions. Do not be surprised if the teacher and counselor know nothing about what is happening. Obviously, they cannot see and hear everything that is going on in the course of the day. Hopefully, the teacher and counselor will be able to observe the bullying and take care of things in their own way.

If that does not work, then ask the principal for help. Do not complain that the teacher and counselor were not able to handle the situation, but merely ask for more help. Schools take bullying seriously. They will be as anxious as you are to get the situation resolved.

Communication and problem solving are two of the most important skills your child can learn. Throughout this process, be sure to help your child express his or her feelings in appropriate words. And, finally, help your child establish good problem solving skills by talking to you or a favorite teacher about school problems. Through these conversations, he or she will learn how to come up with appropriate ways to deal with this and other situations that arise throughout life.

Additionally, if you have talked to all the school personnel about your child and you feel you need more assistance, do not hesitate to call your VICC counselor. Refer to your VICC handbook, or go to the VICC website, [www.choicecorp.org](http://www.choicecorp.org), and look under Contact VICC Staff to reach your child’s counselor.

## News from Your Transportation Department

**Summer school transportation cards should arrive in the mail approximately one week in advance of the start of your summer school.**

If you need any changes for summer school, such as a different daycare address, please let your school know by **April 19**.

Any transportation changes, such as route or time changes, made after the start of summer school will be communicated to you by your child’s school. **Please be sure that your child’s school has good phone numbers on file for you.**

Anytime temperatures are forecast to be above 95 degrees, your child will be permitted to bring a water bottle to be filled at school, only with water, for the afternoon ride home.



Message from the **CEO**  
David S. Glaser

Celebration! It is one of the many things that I truly enjoy doing. And, I imagine that you enjoy a good celebration as well. Certainly, children enjoy their birthdays and most adults do as well. As a nation, we take time off from work and school to celebrate a multitude of holidays and other special occasions. In the education world, we celebrate graduations - especially high school and college.

In the last several months, I have had the privilege of attending many awards ceremonies in which we celebrated the outstanding achievement of our students. From what I observed, it’s obvious that not only are the students thrilled about their successes, but probably even more so are the parents, grandparents and other family members.

Unfortunately, as I have gotten older, I have noticed that sometimes we lose our enthusiasm to celebrate. I do not know about you, but sometimes I get so involved in all of the day-to-day tasks and responsibilities related to my job or my role as a parent and husband that I forget to celebrate the smaller and larger successes that surround me. This is sad. After working hard on a project at work or at home I need to be reminded, when the task is successfully completed, to take a few extra moments to celebrate what all of us have collectively accomplished rather than hurrying on to the next task or project.

The articles in the current issue of the *Parent Link* serve as a good reminder to me of the importance of celebrating, whether it’s for the completion of high school, or being admitted into the college of your choice.

So that is my reminder to you. Work hard but, after completing a hard day, a hard week or hard years’ worth of work, take time out to celebrate your success!

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