



# The Adviser

Summer 2009

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Debra Simpson-Buchanan,  
Director

I would like to welcome you to the first edition of our newsletter titled *The Adviser*. In fall of 2007, The Pennsylvania State University launched the Pennsylvania College Advising Corps —Penn State (PACAC) program. Funded by grants from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, Wells Foundation, PHEAA, and the Foundation for Enhancing Communities, PACAC's goal is to increase the number of low-income, first-generation, and

underrepresented students entering and completing higher education.

The Pennsylvania College Advising Corps—Penn State recruits and trains recent college graduates to work full-time as college advisers for one to two years following graduation. The advisers provide support by helping students enroll in postsecondary institutions that fit their individual academic profiles, career goals, and personal circumstances. Currently, there are six advisers working alongside school counselors and other access programs to motivate and assist high schools in the Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Reading, and Steelton-Highspire school districts.

While only in our second year, preliminary data from the first year are impressive. In the first year, 255 seniors were accepted to a variety of postsecondary institutions. A total of 638 students (383 seniors and 255 juniors) received one-on-one personalized advising services. The advisers helped high school seniors complete 808 postsecondary applications (91 private, 27 proprietary, 686 public, 4 military) to 122 institutions in eighteen states including the District of Columbia. In addition to helping the students register for the SAT/ACT test, the adviser helped to complete more than 162 financial aid applications

Given their idealism and fresh perspective on the college experience, the advisers serve as perfect advocates to motivate and assist students through the college application process. As a peer, the adviser offers the high school student a "can do" attitude and practical advice on what to expect from the college experience.

In this edition, you will read success stories on how the advisers are helping students achieve their dream of becoming a success. The biggest success is when the adviser sees the excitement in a student's face when they receive their first acceptance letter. What the student thought was impossible has now become possible. At Penn State, we are . . . making a postsecondary education possible for Pennsylvania students.

PACAC is one of thirteen constituent programs in the National College Advising Corps, a consortium of colleges and universities whose aim is to increase the number of first-generation college-going students. For more information visit [www.advisingcorps.org](http://www.advisingcorps.org).

## “Be a Penn Stater for a Day” program a hit!

Students from Reading High School (RHS) visited Penn State Berks for the first annual “Be a Penn Stater for a Day” program on Tuesday, April 7, 2009, from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The program was designed to encourage high school students to pursue higher education.



Approximately thirty tenth- and eleventh-grade students participated in the program. Each high school student was individually matched with a college student mentor for the day. From 10:40 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., the RHS students attended classes with their mentor, ate lunch in the campus cafeteria, talked with faculty and staff, and visited various locations on campus.

In addition to the shadowing experience, the RHS students experienced a full day of activities including a continental breakfast, an ice breaker session, an admissions and financial aid workshop, a campus tour given by student Lion Ambassadors, an informal dinner, presentations about Pennsylvania College Advising Corps —Penn State (PACAC), Penn State Educational Partnership Program (PEPP), and ASPIRE, an Educational Opportunity Program at Penn State Berks that supports students as they navigate their college career. In addition, the Office of Residence Life offered a presentation titled “To Start Your Journey,” and the day ended with a fun group activity sponsored by the Student Government Association and Residence Life.

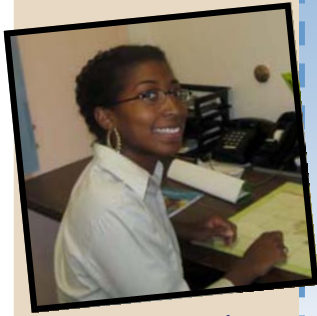
The RHS students received a backpack upon arrival at the event filled with Penn State Berks items, information, snacks, and a “Be a Penn Stater for a Day” tee shirt, provided by the Student Government Association.

Half of the students were selected by the PACAC, an organization that employs Penn State graduates as college advisers at high schools throughout southeastern Pennsylvania, including Reading High School, to help juniors and seniors with the college search and application process.

The other students were selected by the Penn State Educational Partnership Program (PEPP), an educational partnership, under the auspice of the Penn State College of Education. PEPP encourages academically underrepresented youth to pursue their full academic potential. Offered at no cost to participants, PEPP plans, develops, and implements education-related programs and activities for middle school and high school students.

This program was a collaborative effort of the Pennsylvania College Advising Corps —Penn State (PACAC), Penn State Educational Partnership Program (PEPP), and the following Penn State Berks Offices: ASPIRE, Admissions, Housing and Food Services, Residence Life, and the Student Government Association.

# Germantown High School



**Jazmyn Curry, Adviser  
Germantown High School**

Jazmyn Curry is the college adviser at Germantown High School. She graduated from Penn State's University Park campus with a degree in Human Development and Family Studies. She will be returning to the high school for a second year.

Darryl is a very funny and charismatic student who always has a smile on his face. If colleges and universities could see and get to know Darryl, they would know that he could be successful. However, on paper, he does not appear to be the "ideal student" because of his low grade-point average and SAT scores. I told Darryl that he could still attend college. I did not want him to be discouraged from receiving a postsecondary education.

At first, he wanted to apply to Millersville University, which is a highly competitive state school in Pennsylvania. I mentioned to Darryl that we should have a

backup plan just in case Millersville does not accept him. Darryl said that he wanted to work with his hands and become a computer technician. I told Darryl about Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, a state funded school. If Darryl's expected family contribution (EFC) is low enough, he would be able to attend Thaddeus Stevens for free.

Several weeks passed before Darryl heard from Thaddeus Stevens. In the meantime, he thought about attending a proprietary trade school. I mentioned to Darryl that these types of schools charge too much money for a

certificate and two-year program, so we sat down and discussed his options. I suggested the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP) since it has a program where he can earn an associate degree in computer science. He said that attending CCP would be like going to the thirteenth grade. I helped to dispel the myths that he had about attending a community college and I reminded Darryl that his education is what he makes it. Darryl decided that CCP would be the best fit for him and he hopes to transfer to a four-year university after he earns his associate degree.

## Pennsylvania Education Facts

According to U.S. Census estimates, Pennsylvania is the sixth most populous state in the U.S., with more than 12.4 million residents. In 2004, more than 1.8 million children were enrolled in the 3,197 public K-12 schools within Pennsylvania's 501 school districts. Almost 80 percent of ninth graders in the state graduate from high school, yet only 47 percent actually enroll in college (although 72 percent plan to enroll), and only 27 percent of residents 25- to 44- years-old have bachelor's degrees or higher.

# Harrisburg High School



**Je'Nyce Gilmore, Adviser  
Harrisburg High School**

Je'nyce Gilmore is the college adviser at Harrisburg High School, and she plans to return for a second year. Je'nyce graduated in 2007 from Penn State Harrisburg with a degree in Criminal Justice.

As a high school student and a teenage mother, I wanted to attend college, but I didn't know where to begin my college search. My current grade-point average is a 3.37. I had heard about Ms. Gilmore and that she was the college adviser here at Harrisburg High School so I made my way to her office.

When I told her I wanted to stay in Harrisburg because of my son, she gave me some different school options to look at such as Shippensburg University, Penn State Harrisburg, and Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC). Ms. Gilmore also mentioned that Penn State Harrisburg has a day care center on campus, which would be a big help for me.

I applied to the schools and was accepted to all three. I knew then that I had a chance to make a life for my son and me. I enrolled in the dual enrollment

program at HACC for nursing. Then I had to make the choice: was I going to attend HACC or Penn State Harrisburg.

I talked to Ms. Gilmore and she gave me some information that helped me with my decision. Since I was already attending the nursing program at HACC, I decided to enroll there in the fall to complete the nursing program and then transfer to Penn State Harrisburg to finish my degree.

In the beginning I was very hesitant about my college search, but with the help that I received from Ms. Gilmore I knew that I could do it. If it wasn't for her help, I don't know what decision I would have made. I

just want to say --Thank You.

Natasha Doran is a 2009 graduate of Harrisburg High School. She will be attending Harrisburg Area Community College in the fall.

"In the beginning I was very hesitant about my college search, but with the help that I received from Ms. Gilmore I knew that I could do it."

# Olney West High School

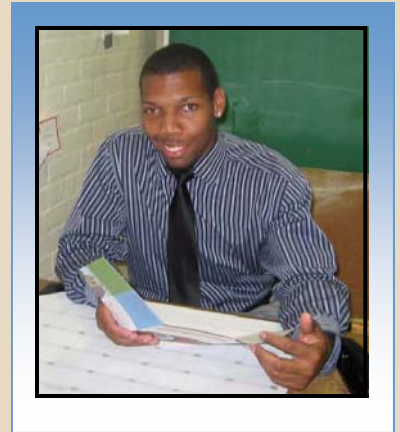
Omar Abdelhafez was born in Ram Allah-Palestine and lived in a small village called Burqa. In the summer of 2004 Omar came to the United States for the first time and stayed for three months. Because he didn't speak English very well, communicating with others proved to be very difficult. In addition, it was a different world from what Omar had lived in for most of his life. After three discouraging months, Omar went back to Palestine to finish the eighth and ninth grade.

Determined and eager to learn, Omar returned to the U.S. in 2006 to complete his education. In September, he enrolled in Olney High School in Philadelphia, and worked part-time at a local supermarket after school. Omar finished the tenth grade successfully. During the summer, he enrolled in a six-week intensive English program at Holy Family University to improve his reading and verbal skills.

When I met Omar, I noticed that he was a focused and reliable young man who wanted to succeed. He was committed to making sure that he was accepted to a postsecondary

institution. After much practice, Omar is now more proficient in speaking and understanding English.

In addition, Omar is sixth in his senior class and maintains a 3.5 grade-point average. In fall 2009, Omar will attend Penn State Mont Alto. His goal is to become a dentist specializing in orthodontics. He represents what the "American Dream" really means!



**Nolan Fontaine, Adviser  
Olney West High School**

Nolan Fontaine is the college adviser at Olney West High School. He graduated from Penn State's University Park campus with a degree in International Politics. In the fall, Nolan will be attending Neumann College in Aston, Pennsylvania, where he will major in strategic leadership.

"The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to."

*Marian Wright Edelman  
Children's Defense Fund*

## Steelton-Highspire High School

For many of my students the thought of attending college sounds exciting, fun, and respectable yet unattainable, especially for Luis, a student from the Dominican Republic who lives with his grandmother in Steelton, Pennsylvania. Luis wants to someday be a meteorologist. Even though he had a poor understanding of the college process, Luis managed to succeed academically as an average student. When I first met Luis, he was unaware of what applying to college really involved. He wanted to attend all the big name schools because of their popularity. After reviewing his grades and taking into consideration his love for meteorology, I began searching online at [www.educationplanner.org](http://www.educationplanner.org) for schools that offered this major and related majors. From the list we found we were able to get ideas about the colleges that matched Luis' academic

record and what he was looking to get from his college experience.

Luis applied to Western Kentucky University's dual program with Bowling Green Community College, Western Illinois University, Millersville University, Youngstown State University, and Lackawanna College. He was accepted to three of the schools. He now waits to make his final decision as he reviews possible funding options.

As his college adviser, I feared that he would not get into colleges that were of his liking and that it would discourage him. Out of frustration Luis would say he did not want to attend college anymore, but seeing the radiance in his face after receiving his first acceptance letter inspired me. I am looking forward to seeing what Luis is capable of achieving in the next four or five years.



**Aja Reynolds, Adviser  
Steelton-Highspire High School**

Aja Reynolds is the college adviser at Steelton-Highspire High School, and plans to return for a second year. In 2007 she graduated from Penn State's University Park campus with a double major in Sociology and African American Studies. Aja serves as an ambassador for the National Advising office, and is a 2003 graduate of Steelton-Highspire High School.

# Reading Senior High School

During the school year I impact so many students in different ways. Most of my students know they want to go to college, but don't know where and what to study. There is one female student I won't forget. Her name is Stephanie Santiago. Stephanie began the school as a junior to graduate. A junior to graduate is a student that hasn't passed all the necessary credits to become a senior.

At the beginning of the school year, Stephanie came to my office in the career center seeking help with the college application process. She wanted to attend college in New York City where she has family. We met many times to discuss her future.

She decided to apply to two schools: Berkeley College and John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Her first choice was John Jay; however, she changed her mind once she visited Berkeley. After touring the campus and exchanging information with the admissions counselor, she became very excited about the possibility of attending this school.

We began working on her essay for the application and gathering the necessary documents to send to the admissions office. Stephanie wanted to rush through writing the essay, which caused her to make many

mistakes, and me extra editing time. I have to admit that those two weeks were challenging, but we both learned so much about each other. I was very pleased once the essay was completed. This showed me her persistence and willingness to do everything she needed to make sure her dream becomes a reality. I praised her for all her hard work.

Stephanie visited Berkeley a few more times to meet with the admissions counselor before she was finally admitted. Since the school doesn't have on-campus housing, she was able to secure housing in the local community. She also got some of her college fees waived. It appeared that Stephanie was doing great. Her mother was even excited, and she paid Stephanie's school deposits.

Stephanie began to slowly improve in her school work. She started making up some of the credits she didn't pass during her junior year. In January, she was declared a SENIOR! She immediately came to me once she found out the good news.

As things began to get better for her at school, personal issues began to take a toll on her. For some unknown reason, Stephanie's mother decided that Berkeley wasn't the school for her daughter. This was very unfortunate because

we had worked so hard at completing the application process. Stephanie knew that without my persistence she would not have made the necessary deadline dates, and that she probably would not have been admitted to Berkeley. Although I was very disappointed, I had to accept her mother's decision.

In the fall, Stephanie will be attending Reading Area Community College with the hopes of transferring the following year. I am happy that she still wants to go to college even if it means starting out at a local community college. I hope everything goes well for Stephanie during her first year. I am still encouraging her to go after her dream!



**Morgan Mercer, Adviser**  
Reading Senior High School

Morgan received her kinesiology degree from Penn State's University Park campus. In the fall, Morgan will be attending graduate school at Baylor University in Texas where she will major in sports management.

## Participating High Schools

### Harrisburg Area

Harrisburg High School  
Steelton-Highspire High School

### Philadelphia Area

Edison High School  
Furness High School  
Germantown High School  
Olney East High School  
Olney West High School

### Reading Area

Reading Senior High School

### PACAC GOALS:

- *To help Pennsylvania students and their families see a postsecondary education as an attainable goal*
- *To provide information about the college application and financial aid process to students and their families*
- *To encourage students to enroll in advance placement and college prep courses*
- *To increase college enrollment and graduation among high ability, low-income high school students*

### EDUCATION RESOURCES

*Penn State's Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity*  
[www.equity.psu.edu](http://www.equity.psu.edu)

*National College Advising Corps*  
[www.advisingcorps.org](http://www.advisingcorps.org)

*Education Planner*  
[www.educationplanner.org](http://www.educationplanner.org)

*Free Application for Federal Student Aid*  
[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)