



The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center

Getting community youth to, through, and beyond college

INTRO TO COLLEGE SUCCESS:

**WHY COMMUNICATION
& RELATIONSHIPS
MATTER IN COLLEGE**

**Scott Siegel-Ortiz,
Senior Associate Director of Student Life & Engagement
Columbia Business School**

In this June 2021 Issue:

1. Spotlight on:

- Dayana Dominguez, DDC '21, received a scholarship of \$1,500 from the College Access Consortium of New York (CACNY, Inc.) in recognition of her commitment to leadership, community service, and outstanding academic performance. Dayana will attend Hunter College this fall.
- Rackell Carrasco, DDC '21, will be a summer intern at the Manhattan District Attorney's office. This fall, she will attend Northeastern University.

Congratulations Dayana and Rackell!

2. Summer Programming is off to a great start!

From College Access to College Success:

- **Inaugural DDCamp for Middle Schoolers**
 - **DDC Seniors Set Themselves Up for College Success**
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Inaugural DDCamp for Middle Schoolers

Middle schoolers see college as an extension of high school but with a lot more freedom so no need to start preparing now, says Ciani Bonner, B.A. in Sociology with a Minor in Urban Teaching, Secondary/Adolescent Education, Barnard College, who will lead the DDCamp 2021 college prep class. They think they have plenty of time to learn about selecting their “best fit” institution and developing the academic and non-academic (e.g. communication, time management, and leadership) skills necessary for personal and professional success. DDCamp is designed to show our 7th and 8th graders that they should indeed start preparing now so they are familiar with the college process and they can master these skills by the time they apply to college. These are lifelong skills that play a vital role in building productive relationships, through school, college and beyond.

Our summer 2021 launch of DDCamp will help re-engage our middle schoolers after a year of interrupted schooling. The three-week program will include an academic component consisting of a class to help students prepare for the NYS exams in English Language Arts and Math as well as the NYC’s SHSAT –Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT). There also will be two academic-focused elective classes – both of which will reinforce critical thinking, and communication and analysis skills:

- *African Diaspora*, taught by Ciani Bonner, will engage students in an exploration of West African cultures. Students will analyze texts, assess facts, opinions and reasoned judgements, and evaluates sources.
- *Bio Bus*, led by Robert Frawley, Ph.D., will provide students with a compost starter kit and USB-powered microscope to explore composting and miniature ecosystems.

The College Prep course will teach students about the growth mindset – an understanding that talents and skills can be developed through dedication and hard work. *Children have a hard time seeing the future, says Ciani, so the lessons will focus on the progress that they make day by day, and I emphasize that they can do that and it will make a big improvement over time. They will be ready for college when they get to 11th and 12th grade because they will have started making progress in 7th and 8th grades.*

Ciani also will introduce students to the concept of self-awareness so they understand their strengths and weaknesses as well as think critically about how to best use their talents. They will learn tips for effective speaking, writing, and presenting, along with best practices for collaboration with peers.

The class will follow the M.A.R.S (Money, Academics, Resources and Student life) framework developed by DDC's Talent Search team. M.A.R.S. helps students with researching and evaluating colleges to build their "best fit" college lists based on these four key areas.

DDCamp is not just about acquiring knowledge and practicing new skills, says Marlin Santana, Assistant Director, Talent Search. We did not forget the "fun" part, which students need for their social-emotional wellbeing especially after this past year. Every day, we will have camp-like activities where students get to know each other and the staff as we paint, build volcanoes and make tie dye shirts!

DDC Seniors Set Themselves Up for College Success

College was a culture shock, says Marlin Santana, Assistant Director, Talent Search. I did not know how to ask for help to navigate resources and relationships. Worse, I felt I did not deserve help because I was low-income and first-generation and I did not want to put my community to shame by asking questions. I realize now I had it backwards, she explains. Low-income, first-generation students should get more support precisely because of their background. They have few role models or peers who share their college experience and can help prepare them for this new endeavor.

This summer, DDC engages again its graduating seniors in a transitional workshop series that runs from May to August. The program is broadly designed to teach participants how to build healthy supportive relationships, take advantage of all college resources and advocate for themselves. Specific workshop topics include: "Reviewing the college bill," "Relationship management and how to communicate," and "Getting involved and asking for help on campus."

We are partnering with colleagues across Columbia University and the community to bring this year's 12th *Grade Transitional Workshop Series* to our seniors. Scott Siegel, Senior Associate Director, Student Life and Engagement at Columbia University Business School, is a partner in this work and recognizes the need. *I share a similar background with DDC students, I understand their challenges says Scott. I grew up in the NYC public school system and I went to Stony Brook University. I know how valuable it is to have a network of people you can lean on when you need to advocate for yourself.*

For a successful transition, students must communicate effectively and build strong connections with different groups throughout the institution. Healthy supportive relationships make you feel like you belong, and belonging is one of the most important factors in a student's success. *In college, you have to set yourself up for the next level, says Scott. Unfortunately, many students do not know what to expect when they get on the college campus. You walk into your first class, you do not recognize anybody in the room, and many students do not even look like you or act like you. It can be very stressful and isolating, he adds.*

Effective communication and successful relationship building are connected. *How you communicate determines the success of the relationship*, says Scott. To communicate effectively, it is important to know what works best for the audience in front of you. *The way you talk with your friends is not the way you speak with your professors.*

The series emphasizes the idea that relationship building does not just happen but it is a deliberate process that requires stepping out of one's comfort zone. Students learn the importance of building friendships with their peers and a productive rapport with professors, tutors, and college administrators –including financial aid officers; and the need to use different communication skills to accomplish all of this.

To build effective relationships, it is important for young people to get involved with others who share their interests, says Scott. *Join out-of-the-classroom activities such as clubs or sports. I realize it is more difficult for low-income students because they often have jobs on- and off-campus, but they need to find a balance.* He advises students to make the conscious decision to actively spend their college years exploring, learning and building supportive relationships that likely will last a lifetime. *Be self-aware and develop an awareness of others – it will set you up for success!*

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