For young people, entering college can be a challenging time. Many are away from home for the first time, and the security and familiarity of being with family and friends is no longer there. From a developmental perspective, the transition from childhood to adulthood during this period is marked by an increase in adult responsibility and decision-making. For students in general this can be a daunting time, but for students with disabilities this process can be even more challenging and frightening.

Before entering college, most of the responsibility for the academic success of these students was in the hands of educators, administrators, and their families. How and what they learned was clear-cut. Federal laws were in place (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, ADA Amendments of 2008) to ensure equal access and opportunity for learning, as well as providing legal oversight to “level the playing field” in educational arenas. In secondary education settings, under these laws, a student must be provided with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan which outlines specific educational strategies, services, and accommodations.

At the University, we recently enhanced the services provided to students requiring special accommodations in order to help them achieve academic success. The Office of Student Retention Student Accessibility Support Services (SASS) is now responsible for assisting students with disabilities accomplish their scholastic and career goals. The services provided by SASS are highlighted in this issue of Parents 411.

For Fall 2008, the enrollment of first-time freshman increased significantly. We welcomed the Class of 2012 with a new, one-week orientation, the ACCESS Orientation Program. The ACCESS Orientation is part of the University’s initiatives designed to improve students’ first year experience and ultimately improve the retention of students to graduation. A discussion of the Program and its objectives are also included in this issue.

Our staff, Dr. Tiffany Beth McMillan, Director, Ms. Sarah D. Adams, Retention Specialist, Dr. Denicia Fowler, Retention Specialist, Ms. Diane Wise, Administrative Assistant, and the retention specialists in each of the schools and colleges continue to strive to provide you with the information that you need to support and assist your student from matriculation to graduation. As always, we look forward to receiving your comments and suggestions!

Much has changed on Morgan State University’s campus since our last issue. And, so much has changed in America and the world. We would be remiss if we did not tell you how proud we are that Barack Obama will be the first black President of the United States. He has inspired and energized us all, especially our students.
dace with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and ADA Amendments of 2008, the University offers equal educational opportunities and reasonable accommodations for the needs of qualified students. Reasonable accommodations are defined as adjustments that allow qualified students with documentation to have equal access to University programs. Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to “self identify” in order to take advantage of the support services that are available. These services are administered through the Office of Student Retention which is located in the McKeldin Center, room 318. There, the Coordinator of Student Accessibility Support Services (SASS), Dr. Denicia Fowler (443-885-9466), will assist students with disabilities in securing required accommodations. Students who use SASS services are challenged by a wide range of physical, mental, emotional, and specific or non-specific learning disabilities. Many parents and students are unaware that such services are available for them at the post-secondary level. As a result, many students who received them in elementary, middle, and high school do not utilize them in college.

When individuals enter college, they often feel that they no longer need accommodations or, fearing a negative reaction from peers and teachers, they fail to “self disclose.” One important goal of SASS is to maintain student confidentiality. Therefore, unless an individual chooses to disclose it, the nature of the individual’s disability is never given to professors, advisors, or any other faculty or staff member; and, the information does not become a part of their permanent transcript or academic records. Parents and guardians should note that, if a student is over 18 years of age, they decide whether you can participate in SASS meetings and receive other information about their status. The Office of Student Retention strongly urges students requiring accommodations to take advantage of the available services.

Remember, we are here to serve your sons and daughters!

FAFSA should be filed by March 1 of each year, especially for Maryland students. Filing by that date enables Maryland residents to receive Educational Assistance Grants from the Maryland Higher Education Commission for up to $3000. Applicants filing after that date do not receive this award. So, for Maryland residents, your child’s financial aid award may be $3000 less than it could have been if it had been filed before January 1 and March 1. We recommend that students file their FAFSA no later than mid-February. Always remember if you have questions or need additional information……

HELP IS JUST A CLICK AWAY!

It would be impossible to tell you everything you need to know, but financing your child’s college education in this newsletter. In this electronic age, however, all you would probably want to know about the availability of financial aid at Morgan, scholarships, and funding from other sources is accessible on the Internet.

Listed below are a few sites that will provide you with useful information:

www.morgan.edu

Our site provides detailed information about the financial aid process. Click on Financial Aid on Morgan’s home page.

http://www.mhec.state.md.us/financialAid/index.asp

This site provides complete, detailed information about FAFSA. Students can also complete the application on this site. It is preferred for students to complete the FAFSA on-line since it only takes about 3-5 days to get to MSU. Hard copies of the FAFSA take 6-8 weeks to be processed and sent to MSU. Please be sure that Morgan’s school code (002083) is included on the form.

www.fafsa.ed.gov

IMPORTANT 2009 SPRING SEMESTER DATES!!!

January 26

Classes Begin

March 1

Free Application for Federal Student Aid. (FAFSA) forms may be filed online at www.mhec.state.md.us/financialAid/index.asp. Students who file FAFSA forms after March 1st may not be eligible to receive all types of financial aid.

March 30 - April 17

FAFSA must be filed by March 31st, 2009 to be considered for the next semester. FAFSA forms may be filed online at www.mhec.state.md.us/financialAid/index.asp.

April 8

Last Day to Drop Undergraduate Classes

April 27 - May 2

Final Exams for Spring 2009 Graduates

May 11 - June 30

Registration for Fall 2009 semester resumes

May 13-20

Final Exams for non-graduates

MAY 16

Commemoration

MAY 22

SPRING 2009 SEMESTER ENDS

There is an old folk tale about a poor old farmer who walks down the hill to the stream every day, carrying water jugs on a yoke across his neck. One of the jars is perfect. The water is filled to the brim when he returns to the one room cabin he shares with his wife. The other jug is cracked. Water seeps out all the way up the hill and is only half full when the farmer returns home. The cracked jug feels bad and asks the farmer for forgiveness. The farmer only smiles. He says to the jug, "Look down at the path. The jug sees beautiful flowers on his side of the path. On the other side is only dirt. The farmer tells the cracked jug, 'Your flaws are a gift. They create beauty where there was none.'"

My daughter, a graduate of UMBC and UMBC Academy for the Arts, wrote in her college essay that her learning disability is a blessing. She said, “Because I read slowly, I

savor every word.” My son, who is a senior at Morgan State University, struggled more with recognizing his gifts and understanding his needs. Both have experienced the benefits of supportive teachers and the challenges created by those who didn’t know or understand that accommodations for their needs were not “low-"vering standards” or letting them get away with something.

I remember my son’s health teacher in high school. He was failing my son. When I went to parent conferences, I asked why. He said he had never failed anyone who contributed so much to class. ‘I don’t understand,” I responded. He said the notebook was 50% of the grade and my son was failing the notebook. I asked if he had been informed that my son had a writing disability. His answer, “I can’t lower my standards.” I see, I said then I assume you make children struggle more with recognizing his gifts and understanding his needs. All of us have strengths and weaknesses. All of us learn differently. Our precious children deserve every opportunity to achieve success.

ATTENTION!! PARENTS MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

The 2009 ACCESS Orientation Program for first-time freshmen enrolling for the Fall 2009 semester will be conducted 4 times in July 2009. All first-time Freshmen are required to attend the one-week ACCESS Orientation Program. Look for Program dates and other specific information about the Orientation to be sent to Freshmen admitted for Fall 2009 beginning in May.

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We received many positive comments and some suggestions for improvements from students and parents. Some of the parents’ comments were:

“Please continue this program. I found it very helpful and valuable.” (The message was delivered passionately.)

“This is a good program and must be repeated. Helped parents with their anxiety. Outstanding!!!”

“Good program. Need more info upfront so that parents can plan better.”

“This program is very professional and well organized. I am very impressed. Thank you!!”

Overall, they considered the ACCESS Orientation Program a success.

Ultimately, the primary indicator of success is the impact that the orientation and the students’ first year experience will have on retaining the Class of 2012 to graduation. We already have anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of the ACCESS Orientation Program, which has made a difference. Faculty and staff are saying that the ACCESS Orientation Program has made a difference will have on retaining the Class of 2012. Students are saying that the ACCESS Orientation Program is a success as well as their classmates. Many of the students said that they were looking forward to the Fall semester and felt more confident than they did at the beginning of the week. They felt prepared and ready to begin their college life. The Morgan State freshmen completed the Closing Affirmation Ceremony. Each student had the opportunity to speak about their experiences during the week and to affirm their future success as well as their classmates. Many of the students said that they were looking forward to the Fall semester and felt more confident than they did at the beginning of the week. They felt prepared and ready to begin their college life.

We welcomed the class of 2012 with an exciting, informative, and motivational orientation week. The new ACCESS Orientation Program is required for all first-time freshmen and was conducted five times in July and August to accommodate all eligible students. Students stayed on campus, ate in the dining halls, and attended all activities at no cost. Parents were invited to attend the Opening Ceremony and the first day of the Program. They were able to stay overnight on campus (for a nominal fee) Sunday and Monday nights. A special workshop for parents only was conducted on Monday to provide them with information and tips for supporting their sons and daughters. The ACCESS Orientation Program was designed to assist first-time freshmen who have been admitted to Morgan State University with their transition from high school to college and much more. The Program began on Sunday with an Opening Ceremony where the President of the University, Dr. Earl S. Richardson, and his top leaders, upper classmen, and University administrators welcomed students and parents. They listened to the world-renowned Morgan choir, the “show stopping” marching band and the very “cool” jazz ensemble. They heard words of wisdom, encouragement, and inspiration from outstanding keynote speakers, including the Honorable Kweisi Mfume, Ms. Maria Broom, and Senator Nathaniel McFadden, all Morgan graduates. Students and their parents left the Ceremony looking forward to the rest of the week.

During the Program, students received financial aid assistance and felt more confident than they did at the beginning of the week. They felt prepared and ready to begin their college life.

We made the conscious decision to come to Morgan State University for their engineering program, despite the fact that I’ve always had a learning disability and struggled in school. It’s always been a personal goal to obtain a degree that would impact the lives of others. As an incoming freshman, I was very much unaware of the services that Morgan offered students with disabilities. The transition from high school to college didn’t prepare me for the obstacles ahead of me. I didn’t know that Morgan could supply the same accommodations that I received during high school therefore I suffered for two years of college.

However, one day I got in contact with the counseling center and by then my documentation I needed to receive accommodations was outdated. Also, there was a 6-month waiting period to be tested through the Disabilities Center at Loyola College. Unable to pay for new testing, I went without accommodations for another two semesters and struggled severely. Though there was hope, I felt that my dreams were unreachable because classes weren’t going well. As a result, I decided to change my major for an entire year.

This left me with a feeling of defeat and dissatisfaction. After my soul searching for that year, I realized that nobody holds the key to my future and that I can do anything I set my mind to. Therefore, I went back to my original plan of becoming an Electrical Engineering student with disabilities who was unashamed. Currently, I am working hard to graduate and maintain the good grades that I have. My motto is good, better, best, never let it rest until your good is better and your better is your best. I always remember the words of President-elect Barack Obama, “Yes we can!”

ACCESS ORIENTATION PROGRAM

Savannah Kirby, a second Prize Winner, performs at “Morgan’s Got Talent” including “Free Application for Federal Student Aid” (FAFSA) information, residence life information, placement testing results, and academic advisement. Students registered for their Fall classes and participated in workshops and seminars on topics such as college transition, study skills, test-taking strategies, and career development. They interacted with student leaders, upper classmen, and University administrators. They learned about all of the activities and opportunities open to them as Morgan students.

They also had some fun, especially during the talent show, “Morgan’s Got Talent.” Parents were impressed with the talent of their talents. (Wow! Do they have talent?) And, they had some somber moments that gave them insight into their history when they visited the Great Blacks in Wax Museum.

The final activity of the week was the Closing Affirmation Ceremony. Each student had the opportunity to speak about their experiences during the week and to affirm their future success as well as their classmates. Many of the students said that they were looking forward to the Fall semester and felt more confident than they did at the beginning of the week. They felt prepared and ready to begin their college life. The Morgan freshmen completed the Closing Affirmation Ceremony. Each student had the opportunity to speak about their experiences during the week and to affirm their future success as well as their classmates. Many of the students said that they were looking forward to the Fall semester and felt more confident than they did at the beginning of the week. They felt prepared and ready to begin their college life. The Morgan freshmen completed the Closing Affirmation Ceremony.
ACCESS ORIENTATION PROGRAM

ACCESS Orientation Parents’ 411 Workshop

Somber Moments at The Great Blacks and Wax Museum

Mr. Morgan, Keshawn Forbes, awards a Third Prize Winner at “Morgan’s Got Talent”

Freshmen Listen Intently at the Great Blacks in Wax Museum