

Parents' 411

THE OFFICE OF STUDENT RETENTION



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MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
THE OFFICE OF STUDENT RETENTION

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GREETINGS FROM THE RETENTION STAFF



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.

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!

STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (SASS)

"PROVIDING SERVICES TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES"

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.

Once an individual comes to college (whether a 2-year or 4-year institution), although the law still requires that an institution provide "reasonable

accommodations" in terms of physical accessibility, programs, and services, the student is now completely responsible for managing their college career and success. The support "safety net" of parents and others that was available in high school no longer exists. Not only is it expected that the student will be more independent in doing what has to be done, but the student will also be responsible and disciplined in handling the changes in social demands, and their new found autonomy.

Morgan State University is dedicated to helping students with disabilities to accomplish their scholastic and career goals by supporting academic and advocacy skills, and by helping to eliminate physical, technical, and attitudinal barriers that limit opportunities. In accor-

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dance 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 (443-885-3946), 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/or 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!

ALL OF OUR CHILDREN CAN LEARN, BUT NOT IN THE SAME WAY AND NOT ON THE SAME DAY

REFLECTIONS FROM A MOTHER OF TWO CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

There is an old folk tale about a poor old farmer who walks down the hill to the stream for water every day, carrying two 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 in her third year of graduate school, 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 was not “lowering 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 learning disability. His answer, “I can’t lower my standards.” I see,” I said “then I assume you make children who wear glasses take them off for the test?” He looked puzzled, so I added, **“accommodations for any disability is not lowering standards. It is just**

giving the student an alternative way to show you what he knows.”

I am so grateful that my children have learned to advocate for their needs. Parents can’t fight for them once they are in college. The most important lesson we can teach them is that they have a right to respectfully ask for and expect the accommodations they need. **I am so grateful for Dr. Fowler in the Student Retention Department at Morgan, who is there to support all students with disabilities.** However, she can’t help, if she doesn’t know who your child is. Encourage your child to seek her out.

My daughter bought a sweat-shirt that says, “Attitude is the Only Disability.” I urge all parents of children with disabilities to encourage them to ask for the help they need, and know that they have gifts that will beautify and grow our world. All of us have strengths and weaknesses. **All of us learn differently. Our precious children deserve every opportunity to achieve success.**

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 between 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 about financing your child’s college education in this newsletter. In this electronic age, however, all you would possibly 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.

www.fafsa.ed.gov

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.

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

This site provides information about financial aid from the state of Maryland.

MSU WebSIS

This site provides students access to check their financial award status and to register for courses.

Of course, you can always call the Financial Aid Office on (443) 885-3170.

IMPORTANT 2009 SPRING SEMESTER DATES!!!

January 26
Classes Begin

March 1

(Free Application for Federal Student Aid). FAFSA forms may be filed on-line at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Students who file FAFSA forms after March 1st may not be eligible to receive all types of financial aid.

March 16-21
Mid-Semester Exams

March 23-28
Spring Break

March 30 - April 17

ADVISEMENT DAYS (Students must meet with academic advisors to review progress and prepare FALL 2009 schedule)
EARLY REGISTRATION FOR FALL 2009 SEMESTER

April 8

Last Day to Drop Undergraduate Classes

April 27 - May 2

Final Exams for Prospective May 2009 Graduates

April 30

Application Deadline for Fall 2009 Admission

May 11 - June 30

Registration for FALL 2009 semester resumes

May 13-20

Final Exams for Non-graduates

MAY 16

Commencement

MAY 22

SPRING 2009 SEMESTER ENDS

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.

Parents' 411

MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
RETENTION STAFF – SPRING, 2009

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Ms. Stepheca Sawyer and Dr. Tiffany McMillan Listen to Students at the ACCESS Orientation Closing Affirmation Ceremony

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 that the ACCESS Orientation Program has made a difference. Faculty and staff are saying that there is a difference in the demeanor of these freshmen. They seem more prepared, more focused, and more involved in their learning experiences. We will be tracking the Class of 2012 to determine whether their retention rates and their persistence to graduation are higher than previous Classes.

We stressed throughout the orientation week that graduation in four years is their goal. **Always keep your eyes on the prize!** They are off to an excellent start.

FINANCIAL AID IS THE KEY!

Since financial aid is critical to the retention of approximately 95 % of students enrolled at Morgan State University, understanding the financial aid process is critical. Most Morgan students will have to understand how to obtain and maintain their financial resources from matriculation to graduation. Failure to follow directions and meet deadlines can result in students being denied funding for a semester or more. Consequently, we include up-to-date information about the process in each issue of the **Parents' 411** newsletter.

The keys to success can be summed up in three words, "EARLY! EARLY! EARLY!"

Many of the seemingly overwhelming problems and long lines at the Financial Aid Office are caused by students submitting their applications at the latest possible date for award, submitting incomplete information, or even submitting their application during the registration period or after.

What can you do? First, parents should be aware of the deadlines for submitting the "Free Application for Federal Student Aid" (FAFSA) and work with the student to ensure that the application and required documentation are submitted as early as possible. Most student financial aid is deter-

mined from FAFSA. Applying is a rather simple process that can be done on-line. **Secondly,** provide any documentation needed from you, such as copies of income tax returns, as quickly as possible. File your income taxes early. (Many students' applications are not processed in a timely manner, even though they were submitted early, because required documents are missing.) And, **foremost,** follow up with your student! Better yet, complete the FAFSA together. Much of the information students need to complete the process must be provided by you.

Your daughter or son bears the responsibility for keeping the aid once it is awarded. Regardless of filing deadlines and documentation, students must maintain **satisfactory academic progress (SAP)** to continue receiving aid and to persist to graduation. **They must pay attention to meeting financial aid deadlines and providing accurate documentation every year, not just the first year.**

You can file FAFSA as early as January 2, 2009. The FAFSA can be completed and submitted on-line by going to www.fafsa.ed.gov. Again, remember, if your child's application is filed early with the required, accurate documentation, it will be processed more quickly. And, the award letter indicating all of the aid for which the student qualifies will be received early. This affords time for the family to make arrangements to tap other resources because the aid awarded usually does not meet 100% of the student's need.

VIEWPOINT OF A STUDENT WITH A DISABILITY

I 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

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 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



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.

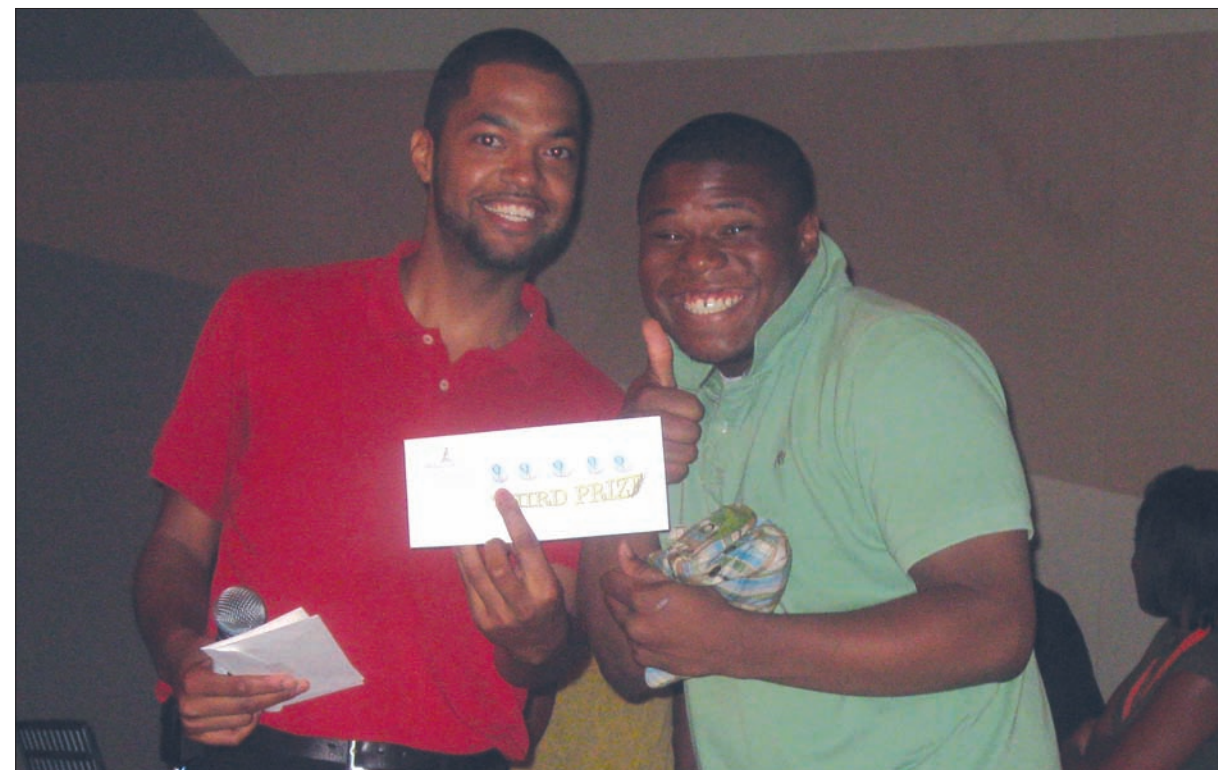
They also had some fun, especially during the talent show, "Morgan's Got Talent", where students showcased their talents. (WOW! Do they have talent!) And, they had some somber moments that gave them insight into their history when they visited the Great Blacks in Wax Museum.

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 first week of their college life with all of the necessary tools and resources required for their Fall enrollment and their first year of academic success.**

ACCESS ORIENTATION PROGRAM



ACCESS Orientation Parents' 411 Workshop



Mr. Morgan, Keshawn Forbes, awards a Third Prize Winner at "Morgan's Got Talent"

ACCESS ORIENTATION PROGRAM



Somber Moments at The Great Blacks and Wax Museum



Freshmen Listen Intently at the Great Blacks in Wax Museum