

BRIDGES AT ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM AT THE DOWNTOWN SAILING CENTER



Bridges High School Program participants took part in an etiquette luncheon at M&T bank

Bridges at St. Paul's School helps prepare Baltimore City students for success in middle school, high school, college, and career.

Ever since graduating its first group of students from the six-year elementary and middle grades program in 2004, Bridges at St. Paul's School has been working to create programs during the high school years that continue to inspire students and help them develop skills for personal and professional success.

In summer 2007, a pilot program provided three students from the graduating class of 2004 with paid work experience, SAT preparation, and college guidance support. These students are now college freshmen attending McDaniel College, Marymount University, and St. Mary's College.

Looking to build off that success, Bridges at St. Paul's School partnered with the Downtown Sailing Center (DSC) in summer 2008 to provide eight graduates of the elementary and middle grades program with paid summer work and preparation for college.

Over two months, the eight Bridges graduates, now juniors and seniors in high school, learned to sail and engaged in academic classes focused on preparing them for college and career. The sailing component of the program prepared students to become sailing instructors. All have guaranteed jobs at the DSC for next summer.

The college and career preparation component had five elements:

- SAT Preparation provided by Capital Educators
- College essay writing provided by Cameron Baird, Upper School English Teacher at St. Paul's School
- College guidance provided by Jake Talmage, Director of College Counseling at St. Paul's School
- Financial Literacy provided by Citi
- Friday morning career speakers

It's hard to summarize the learning and personal growth that takes place from such a multi-faceted program. Below, teachers and students provide a glimpse into courses on college essay writing and college guidance. Hopefully it gives a taste of the richness of each student's academic experience.

COLLEGE ESSAY WRITING

Q&A WITH INSTRUCTOR, CAMERON BAIRD

Q: WHAT DID YOU SET OUT TO DO OVER THE COURSE OF THE SUMMER WITH YOUR STUDENTS?

CB: I wanted to teach the students the fundamentals of good college essay writing and give them the confidence to share their personal stories with the outside world even if they involved emotional trauma and or difficult experiences.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR BEST SESSION WITH THE STUDENTS?

CB: The best session was the second one when I had earned the trust and got students to let down their

guards and discuss some difficult experiences that we could turn into eye catching college essays.

Q: WHAT WERE THE FINAL PRODUCTS OF THE CLASS?

CB: By the end of the summer, each student had created two to three rough drafts of college essays in a variety of styles. They polished the strongest sample and turned it into a college essay. A few of the students emailed me drafts after the program ended and I continued to work with them.

STUDENT COMMENTS ON THE COLLEGE ESSAY WRITING COURSE

Q: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU LEARNED IN THIS COURSE?

STUDENTS: You want to make yourself seem good without coming across as arrogant... How to get to the point while still maintaining your story... Don't go over the top. Keep it personal.

Q: WHAT WAS THE HARDEST PART OF THE CLASS?

STUDENTS: I had trouble choosing a topic... I don't like writing. It's hard for me... Grabbing the audience's attention – having a lot of details while still keeping their interest... I can only really write when I have an inspiration. It's hard for me to just write.

Q: DID THE COURSE HELP YOU TO BECOME A BETTER WRITER?

STUDENTS: Normally I would not do well with writing. Now writing comes easier... It taught me what to put in an essay... It made it a lot easier to write essays period.

COLLEGE GUIDANCE

Q&A WITH INSTRUCTOR, JAKE TALMAGE

Q: WHAT DID YOU SET OUT TO DO IN YOUR EIGHT-WEEK COURSE?

JT: I had two goals with the college guidance course. In the beginning, I wanted to expose students to the idea of college and help them understand their options. By the end, I wanted each student to have tools that would make them comfortable going through the college application process.

Q: TELL US ABOUT YOUR BEST SESSION WITH THE STUDENTS.

JT: Two sessions in particular stick out to me. In the first session, we had Jameel Freeman from Johns Hopkins talk to the students. He was a first generation college student himself and the kids really seemed to identify with his stories.

The other session is the mock admissions committee, where we put students into the shoes of admissions officers. We debated a few mock applications and discussed who we would accept and who we would reject. Overall, I think it helped them understand the

admissions process and how schools will look at items like GPA, the SAT, course load, and extracurricular activities.

Q: IS THERE ONE EXPERIENCE FROM THE SUMMER THAT STICKS OUT MOST IN YOUR MIND?

JT: I noticed one day that a student had replaced his regular backpack with the George Mason bag he had won in the college internet scavenger hunt. To me, it was a sign that the course was making in-roads with the students.

STUDENT COMMENTS ON THE COLLEGE GUIDANCE COURSE

Q: DID THE COLLEGE GUIDANCE COURSE MAKE YOU FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE WITH THE COLLEGE SEARCH?

STUDENTS: I got a more in-depth understanding of how college can change your life and the type of person you will grow to be depending on what you put into it... Before the class, I knew I wanted to go, but didn't know which ones I would like or how to get there... It helped me understand what colleges expect out of me... It made the process less overwhelming... It removed the blindfold.

Q: WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS FROM THE COURSE?

STUDENTS: I don't have to go to a big college to get a better education. At a small school, teachers will focus on you... You should consider some of the colleges in your state so you can pay in-state tuition... When he talked about how to get teachers and people from the admissions office to recognize and remember you... To keep a balanced portfolio of grades, SAT scores, other activities, and work experience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bridges must thank many people for making this program possible. Tristan Colglazier, St. Paul's Class of 2003, played a key role as program mentor. We had wonderful career speakers from inside and outside the St. Paul's community, including St. Paul's parent, Jamie Brown, who spoke about his career as a heart surgeon; former St. Paul's teacher, Derek Stikeleather, who spoke about his career as a lawyer; and St. Paul's alumnus, Pete Schaeffer '57, who educated students on careers in finance. Baird and Talmage provided excellent preparation for the college admissions process, as did Phil Pine and Carrie Morris from Capital Educators, who developed a specialized SAT preparation curriculum for our students. Harry Bosk from Citi shared valuable lessons on personal finance. Dan Fulmer and M&T Bank put together a memorable etiquette luncheon for students and program staff. The University of Delaware provided students with a great college visit. Admissions officers from Johns Hopkins University and Loyola College visited and assisted with Talmage's course on college guidance. Twelve additional colleges provided in-kind donations that were used as awards for the online college scavenger hunt. The Federal Reserve and Baltimore Orioles provided wonderful field trips. The Baltimore Community Foundation provided an amazing internship opportunity to one of our students. Finally, we must also thank Peter Hegel and his instructors from the Downtown Sailing Center. Without them, none of this would have been possible.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON BRIDGES @ ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL, please contact Bridges Director, Rob Paymer at (410) 821-3058 or rpaymer@stpaulsschool.org.