



CONNECTIONS

Growing in Strength, Leadership, and Vision



Unlocking Doors to a Brighter Future

Volume 3, Issue 1 Fall 2013

Lewis J. Robinson, Chair of Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education Delivers Keynote Speech at CONNTAC's 45th Annual Scholarship Meeting

By Grantley S. Adams

Last October, the Connecticut Talent Assistance Cooperative (CONNTAC), held its forty-fifth Annual Breakfast Scholarship Meeting in Southern Connecticut State University's Adanti Student Center Ballroom. The program slogan, "Education and the Role of Educational Access Programs" was the focus and highlighted throughout the very well executed program agenda.



Lewis J. Robinson, Jr. at the Podium

After CONNTAC Executive Director Cecilia Nugent provided a succinct and eloquent Educational Access Update, which covered the activities, achievements, successes and challenges faced by the organization over the past year, Board President Kenneth Armstrong then rose to introduce the guest speaker, Lewis J. Robinson Jr., Esq. Mr. Armstrong, in his welcome to the audience directed his remarks specifically to the scholarship recipients, by strongly stating, "You are not alone, you're with family, we need to share and encourage each other." He concluded, "It is important to share with and recognize our students – they are our future windows of opportunity, our strength."

Lewis J. Robinson, Jr. is a seasoned attorney with a comprehensive background in business, law, and government affairs, as well as charitable organizations. In 2012, he was appointed by Governor Dannel P. Malloy to serve as Chairman of the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education.

Mr. Robinson opened his remarks

by thanking Ken Armstrong and Cecilia Nugent for executing such a successful breakfast meeting; he then proceeded to provide a brief overview of the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR). The Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CONNSCU) was established in the summer of 2011 as the successor to the Board of Trustees of the Connecticut Community-Technical Colleges through legislative action that consolidated most of the state's public institutions of higher education under one governing Board of Regents. CONNCSU is comprised of the Connecticut State Universities, Charter Oak

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State College and the Connecticut Community Colleges. Mr. Robinson stated that in 7 out of 8 Counties in Connecticut, 35% of high school graduates attend a CONNSCU institution – 96,000 students wanting to better themselves. The attraction, according to the Board Chair is Price and Quality. "CONNSCU institutions offer the lowest sticker price and the lowest net price as compared to other University Systems, its reach is unparalleled in size and scope and for many students in Connecticut, CONNSCU is an efficient choice," he declared.

Mr. Robinson then went on to talk about the significant but thorny issue of remediation. The Connecticut General Assembly voted in PA 12-40 (SB 40) – an Act concerning College readiness and completion that allows all students open access to entry level courses in a college level program and prohibits public institutions of higher education from forcing any student to enroll in a remedial course. He said that PA 12-40 requires all CONNSCU institutions to offer remedial support to their students by 2014, and by 2016, these institutions must have in place multiple assessment tools. "The Board's goal is to have the best Higher Education System in the USA, where more students must graduate."

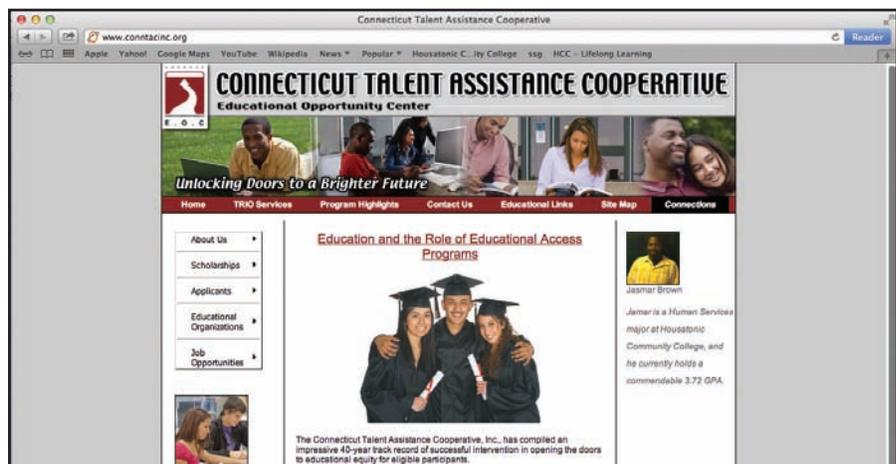
The bill, according to published reports, would require public col-

leges to limit the remedial education requirements they impose on students to one semester and instead, provide more help to students in entry-level, for-credit courses. SB 40 would also require colleges to expand their evaluation systems for determining who needs remedial courses, and not rely solely on standardized entrance exams.

Mr. Robinson said that a part of the Board of Regents plan is to work with and improve K-12 levels of education, community health, higher education and general education, areas which are now incorporated in the Board of Regents. He rhetorically asked, "How do we prepare a student who is unprepared?" He continued, "Remedial education reform must be done right. The key to effectuating remediation is that the institution must be a part of the solution, students must run to the

institution rather than run away from it when they feel stress." The Chairman stated that the Board of Regents will continue working on making CONNSCU a better system. "CONNTAC's functions help to prepare students for success. The support systems need to be in place before, during, and after the college experience is completed. We are in competition with other states, and globally on the higher education level and high school completions, college graduates and patents are the measure of success."

In conclusion, Mr. Lewis J. Robinson, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education assured the one hundred and seventy people gathered in the audience that the Board of Regents (BOR) will continue its ongoing partnership with the Connecticut Talent Assistance Cooperative (CONNTAC).



Visit our homepage! www.conntacinc.org

Pictures From the 2012 Annual Breakfast Meeting



Above Photo: 2012 Scholarship Winners with Chairman Louis J. Robinson, Cecilia Nugent and Ken Armstrong

Left Photo: Cecilia Nugent, Chairman Louis J. Robinson and Ken Armstrong.



Left: Photo Dr. Bidya Ranjeet, Recipient of the 2012 A Friend of CONNTAC Award, Director of Student Support Services (SSS), University of Connecticut.



Photo Above: Ken Armstrong



*Photo Above: Lewis J. Robinson, the former Chair of the Board of Regents for Higher Education. *On August 1, 2013, Lewis J. Robinson resigned as Chairman of the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR).*

2011-2012 Scholarship Recipients



Jamar Brown

Jamar Brown, Bridgeport, CT • Attending Housatonic Community College
Field of Interest: Human Services • **CONNTAC Representative:** Karen Touch

Jamar is a Human Services major at Housatonic Community College, and he currently holds a commendable 3.72 GPA. He made the decision to attend college after a less than friendly separation from his previous employment. He describes the mistreatment that he experienced as positively changing his life forever because it resulted in his decision to further his education. His short term goals include graduating from HCC with a 3.5 or above GPA, starting a NAACP Chapter on campus, and starting an athletic program at HCC. Upon graduating from Housatonic Community College, he plans to continue his education through earning a Master's degree and then to construct and operate a community center in Bridgeport. Jamar gives thanks to his CONNTAC Counselor, Karen Touch, for assisting him with the financial aid process and informing him about scholarship opportunities. "If there is a question that I have or a time that I may have become unclear of a situation, I know that my CONNTAC Counselor can direct me in the right direction."



Gladimy Dorval

Gladimy Dorval, Bridgeport, CT • Attending Housatonic Community College
Field of Interest: Computer Information Systems • **CONNTAC Representative:** Karen Touch

Growing up in a low-income family, Gladimy describes going to college as "The only way out." From a very young age, he always knew that he wanted to become a Dentist or a Computer Scientist. After withdrawing from the University of Bridgeport due to financial hardships, Gladimy made the decision to enroll at Housatonic Community College majoring in Computer Information Systems. He plans to transfer back to a four-year university after graduating with his Associate degree. He appreciates CONNTAC-EOC for helping him throughout his journey at Housatonic Community College. Gladimy says that the scholarship will help him pay for tuition, books, and other materials needed for school.



Latoya Haywood

Latoya Haywood, New Haven, CT • Attending Gateway Community College
Field of Interest: Nursing • **CONNTAC Representative:** Shontisha Kinchen

Latoya is currently a dislocated worker raising two teenage girls as a single mother. One child is her biological daughter, and the other one is her niece who she has raised since she was 5 years of age. She made the decision to further her education at Gateway Community College for a better future for herself and her family. She is one of two people in her immediate family to earn a high school diploma, and she plans to be the first to graduate from college. Latoya has already worked in the nursing field as a nurse's assistant, a certified nursing assistant, and a home health aide. With her experience, degree, and compassion, she is sure to be an asset to the nursing community. She expresses sincere gratitude for her CONNTAC Counselor, Shontisha Kinchen, for assisting her with financial aid and scholarships, directing her to appropriate departments within Gateway, and for just being there when she needed to talk. Latoya explains that the scholarship will help her purchase books for the upcoming semester.



Faith Mendoza

Faith Mendoza, Meriden, CT • Attending Middlesex Community College
Field of Interest: Business Administration • **CONNTAC Representative:** Widelyne Moise

Faith currently holds a 3.65 GPA at Middlesex Community College, and has set a goal of maintaining this GPA throughout her college career. Since all of her classes have required internet use for assignments, she has demonstrated determination because she has relied on Middlesex computers, going to the library, or using her neighbor's computer in order to complete her homework and maintain good grades. In addition, she is a single mother raising 5 children, she participates in work-study at Middlesex, and she holds part-time employment. Faith thanks her CONNTAC Counselor, Widelyne Moise, for assisting her with financial aid. "Widelyne answered all of my questions, and she went above and beyond to assist me while doing it all with a smile."

2011-2012 Scholarship Recipients

Florida Oathout, Plainville, CT • Attending Tunxis Community College
Field of Interest: Dental Hygiene • **CONNTAC Representative:** Erica Coleman

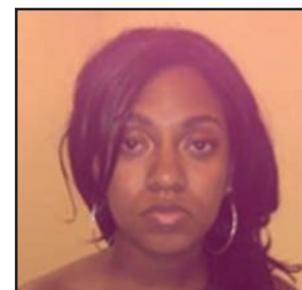
Florida migrated to the United States from Guatemala about 12 years ago in pursuit of a better life for her and her family. Once she arrived to the U.S., she worked at two jobs up to 80 hours a week, in order to sustain herself and support her parents and three young brothers back in Guatemala. She followed this rhythm for over 10 years until one day she decided that she wanted a career instead of just a "job." She enrolled in a GED program, and improved her writing skills and English simultaneously, since English is her second language. Immediately after receiving her diploma, she enrolled at Tunxis Community College majoring in Dental Hygiene with dreams of giving back to the community and one day opening her own dental practice in New Britain. She is grateful for her CONNTAC Counselor, Erica Coleman, who helped her with the entire college process including enrollment, financial aid, and registering for classes. "Erica is so helpful, friendly, and very patient. I appreciate that she is always there to answer my many questions."



Florida Oathout

Vanessa Parker, Norwich, CT • Attending Three Rivers Community College
Field of Interest: Nursing • **CONNTAC Representative:** Gloria Dover

Vanessa is a single mother to an 8 year old son; she works part-time at a hospital while attending college part-time. She realizes that graduating from college, as a nurse, would allow her to be a strong, positive role model for her son as he is her motivation. She credits her CONNTAC Counselor, Gloria Dover, for giving her the tools to better understand the process of applying for scholarships and for helping her realize that she can push through any obstacles in order to pursue her dream. Vanessa shares that she plans to use the scholarship to help pay for a new laptop so that she can efficiently complete her schoolwork.



Vanessa Parker

Sasha Rosario, Bridgeport, CT • Attending Norwalk Community College
Field of Interest: Nursing • **CONNTAC Representative:** Karen Touch

Sasha is pursuing her dreams to become a Registered Nurse specializing in neonatal care. She always knew that she wanted to become a nurse and help people in need. She plans to be the first person in her family to graduate high school, graduate college, and have a successful career. Sasha explains that balancing school, maintaining a 3.30 GPA, and being involved in extra-curricular activities, while working part-time trying to save money for college has not been easy. She thanks her CONNTAC Counselor, Karen Touch, for helping her complete her FAFSA and apply for scholarships. "Karen helped my mother and I overcome the fear of me not being able to further my education and realize my dream career." The scholarship will assist Sasha with paying for books, transportation, and a laptop for college.



Sasha Rosario

Mark Sebastian, North Stonington, CT
Attending Three Rivers Community College / University of Connecticut
Field of Interest: Liberal Arts and Sciences/ Social Work • **CONNTAC Representative:** Gloria Dover

Sebastian is currently in a consortium agreement with Three Rivers Community College and the University of Connecticut, which means that he is simultaneously enrolled in both institutions. He plans to earn his BGS degree from the University of Connecticut by the end of 2013, and ultimately complete his Master's degree in Social Work. The slump in the labor market has made it difficult for Sebastian to find full-time employment, and this has created numerous financial barriers for him. He appreciates his CONNTAC Counselor, Gloria Dover, for being available to find answers to obstacles and for pushing him to "finish what he started." "Ms. Gloria Dover provided professional and developmental services that have helped to guide me through areas of the unknown and the seemingly financially unachievable." Sebastian looks forward to his future of becoming an advocate for Native Americans, the homeless, disabled individuals, veterans, and victims of abuse.



Mark Sebastian

The 2013 National Educational Opportunity Centers Association Annual Conference

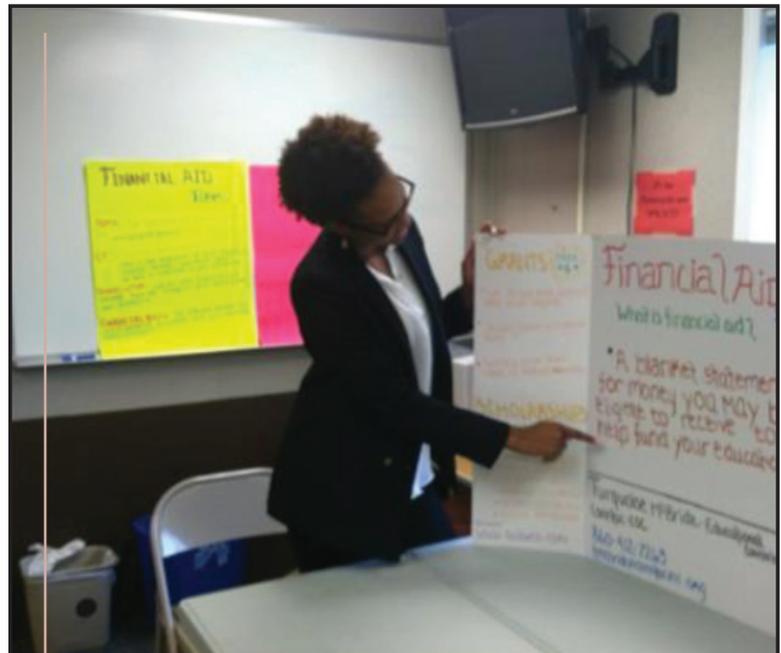


(From left to right: Cecilia Nugent, Dr. Brenda Dann-Messier, and Karen Touch)

The National Educational Opportunity Centers Association (NEOCA) held its 2013 annual conference this year in Chicago, Illinois on September 7, 2013. CONNTAC-EOC staff members attending the conference had the honor of meeting guest speaker Dr. Brenda Dann-Messier, Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education. As a former Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) associate in Rhode Island, Dr. Dann-Messier expressed the importance of how EOC should be natural connectors for adult learners by increasing resources through collaborative partnerships with private and public sectors whose goals and missions are similar to Educational Opportunity Centers.

As CONNTAC, Inc. – Educational Opportunity Center began its new fiscal year on September 1, 2013 counselors have been busy with following up and introducing new clients to CONNTAC services to kick start another successful year for the students and program.

Ms. Turquoise McBride (photo to the right), provides an orientation on CONNTAC services with a brief overview of financial aid to about 20 incoming senior students at Quinebaug Middle College. Ms. McBride expresses that her goal is to bring awareness to the students by exposing them to workshops related to higher education, to better prepare them for graduation and the real world.



The Council for Opportunity in Education's 32nd Annual Conference

By Karen Touch

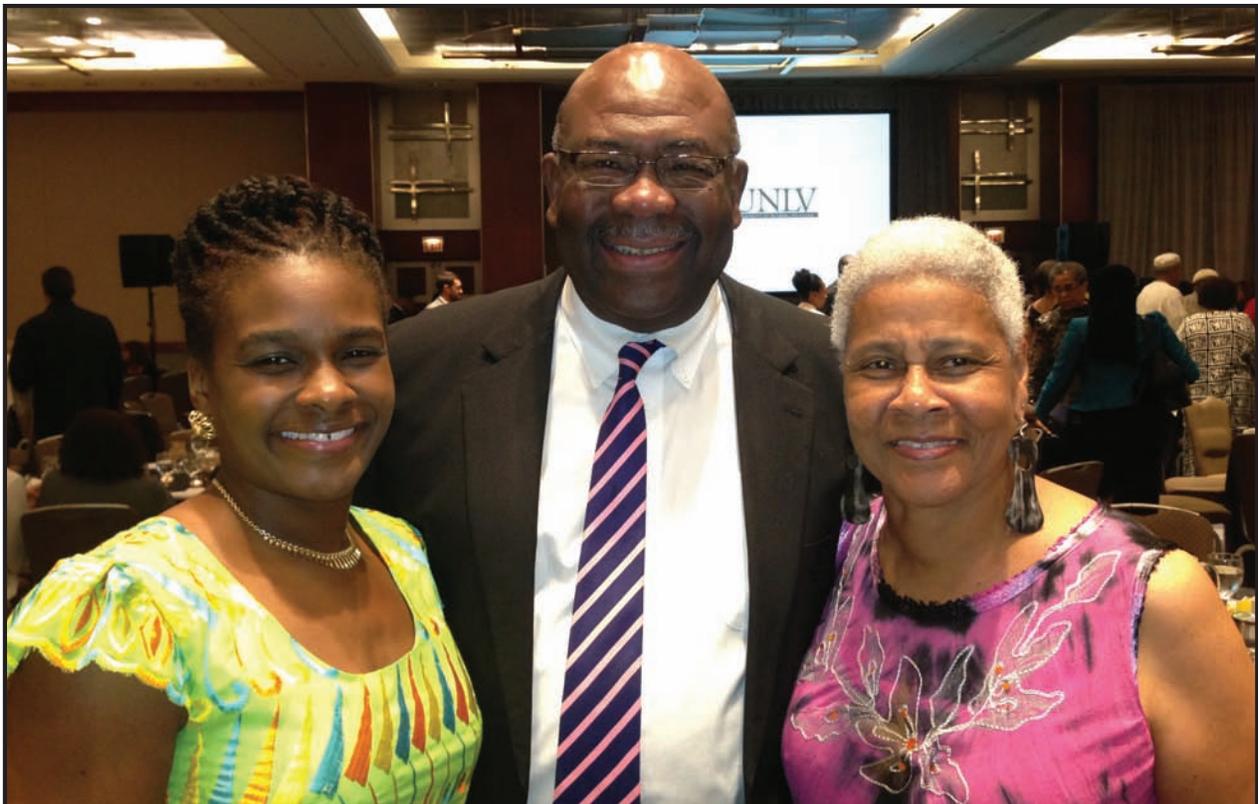
The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) held its 32nd Annual Conference in the windy city of Chicago, Illinois on September 8-11, 2013. This year's theme was, "Looking Back and Moving Forward: Reinvesting in Access and Success." With that being said, the conference followed its theme fluently as speeches were made in recognition of Dr. Arnold Mitchem's life works and achievements in the educational community and plans and initiatives to follow in continuing his mission.

The Annual Conference was not only a learning experience for TRiO professionals, but also an inspiring celebration of Dr. Arnold Mitchem's retirement after his 30 years of fighting and advocating for the TRiO community.

The conference's plenary sessions provided professionals with congressional updates and reminders that TRiO is embedded in discretionary spending. Thus, there was a heavy focus on the importance of keeping our programs alive and

moving forward despite the fiscal threats that face us.

Overall, the Annual Conference was refreshing and empowering as TRiO Achievers reiterated the credo that "TRiO Works" and guest speakers encouraged their audience to heed the significance of learning from the past, realizing where we are today as a community, and understanding how we all need to work together to move the TRiO movement forward.



CONNTAC Board at 2013 COE conference, Chicago, IL. Above: Cecilia Nugent, Grantley Adams, Anita Schmidt

Attention Military Connected Students: It's not too early to research financial aid for college

By Karen Jowers

Email: kjowers@militarytimes.com

As military children and spouses begin to work on college applications for next year, why not start researching college scholarships and other financial assistance at the same time? Many scholarship applications are available starting in November and December. It's not too early to come up with a game plan. There are many opportunities specifically for military spouses and children. Some are widely known; others not so much. For example:

- The **Corvias Foundation** has awarded more than \$4.6 million in scholarships and grants to 92 children and 163 spouses of active-duty members since 2006. The foundation is part of Corvias Group, which operates military housing at Fort Rucker, Ala.; Fort Riley, Kan.; Fort Polk, La.; Fort Meade and Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md.; Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Sill, Okla; McConnell Air Force Base, Kan.; Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.; Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field, Fla.; Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska; and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C. Children and spouses of active-duty troops from any branch of service stationed at one of these installations are eligible. Up to 10 military children a year receive awards of \$50,000 per student, payable at up to \$12,500 per year for four years. Also this

year, a total of \$100,000 was awarded to spouses of active-duty members with \$5,000 each to 20 spouses pursuing degrees. www.corviasfoundation.org



- The **ThanksUSA** scholarship program for children and spouses recently awarded 300 scholarships totaling nearly \$1 million. Since its founding in 2005 by sisters Rachel and Kelsi Okun – then ages 10 and 8 – ThanksUSA has awarded more than \$9 million to military spouses and children. www.thanksusa.org

- More widely known are the education assistance programs offered by Army Emergen-

cy Relief, Air Force Aid Society, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society and Coast Guard Mutual Assistance. Check online for application dates, forms and deadlines.

- The commissary scholarship program for military children, administered by the Fisher House Foundation, has awarded more than \$11 million in scholarships in the past 13 years. The 2014 program will open Dec. 3. www.militaryscholar.org

- The My Career Advancement Accounts program helps spouses of certain junior-ranking members with financial assistance toward pursuing licenses, certifications or associate degrees needed for employment in high-demand, high-growth portable career fields and occupations. <https://aiportal.acc.af.mil/mycaa>

- Also check Military One Source, www.militaryonesource.mil; the National Military Family Association, www.militaryfamily.org; the Military Child Education Coalition, www.militarychild.org; and local chapters of veterans service organizations and spouse clubs. ## Karen Jowers is the wife of a military retiree.

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Changes In 2014-2015 Free Application For Federal Student Aid

By Karen Touch

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has to be completed by students every year in order for them to be considered for financial aid at the desired institution. As a result of completion rates being low in the past, tuition increases, and a rising need for financial assistance; there are often changes made on the application itself every school year, to better identify where financial need is most apparent and to ideally simplify the application process.

However, with the anticipated changes for the 2014-2015 FAFSA, there are questions that will be flooding professional financial aid offices everywhere. For the first time ever, the federal student aid system will now require the income and assets information of all would-be borrowers' legal parents to be used for calculation of the student's need (Field, 2013). In past applications, students seeking federal financial aid were only required to provide one parent's income information if the parent was unmarried or in a same-sex marriage. With that being said, the U.S. Department of Education now believes that "all students should be able to apply for federal student aid within a system that incorporates their unique family dynamics," (Education Department Announces Changes to FAFSA Form to More Accurately and Fairly Assess Students' Need for Aid, 2013).

There will also be minor provisions made to gender specific questions. The Department of Education believes these revisions will provide

a more accurate calculation with special family circumstances that are now evolving.

With the budget resolutions along with changes on the FAFSA application, it is inevitable that obtaining financial aid for higher education will become a more controversial, sensitive, nerve-racking and time-consuming process for students and post-secondary administrators. As a result, there may be the risk of FAFSA completion rates remaining low because students will only become more intimidated and flustered with the evolved complexity of the FAFSA application.

There have been no reports as of yet on how many students will be affected by this, in any case it may seem that access to financial aid is getting beyond the reach of individuals as budget cuts/freezes continue and complex provisions are executed without consistency. Consequently, post-secondary education professionals may be under added pressure to disseminate complex information and sustain the enthusiasm of stressed individuals during the all-important financial aid process.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Federal Student Aid website. At the top, it says "Home - FAFSA on the Web - Federal Student Aid" and "www.fafsa.ed.gov". Below the navigation bar, there are icons for Home, About Us, PIN Site, StudentAid.gov, and Help. A search bar is located on the right. The main heading is "Get help paying for college" with a sub-heading "Submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)". Below this, there are two columns: "New to the FAFSA?" with a "Start A New FAFSA" button, and "Returning User?" with a "Login" button and a list of actions: "Make a correction", "Add a school", and "View your Student Aid Report (SAR), and more...". At the bottom, there are sections for "Deadlines" and "Announcements".

2011 Annual Breakfast Meeting

At CONNTAC's 44th Annual Breakfast Meeting, held in December 2011, our Guest Speaker was Dr. Charles F. Desmond, Chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. He began by affirming his appreciation of the work that CONNTAC and other agencies do in the community. Dr. Desmond recognized the importance of community colleges, "America's battle for education and equality is happening in the community colleges across the country." He also acknowledged that education in the state of Connecticut needed to be improved, "We need a revolution," he asserted.

Chairman Desmond then reflected on his own life, stating that in his younger years his wonderful story was very different, he had endured a very difficult childhood and it was "Hell to go to school." Then, as a soldier fighting in the Viet Nam War, he was wounded and left for dead during The Tet Offensive. He recalls praying, "If I get out of here alive God, I promise that I would do everything in



Connecticut National Guard Family Program staff attends CONNTAC, Inc.'s 2011 Annual Meeting Program. CONNTAC, Inc.'s Educational Opportunity Center project strives to expand outreach service to military connected students. Left to right: Kimberly Hoffman (Director Connecticut National Guard Family Program), Cecilia Nugent (Executive Director CONNTAC, Inc.), Melissa Adams (Assistant Director Connecticut National Guard Family Program)

my life to help everyone.

Dr. Desmond observed that it is a special blessing to be in the business of educating others. He admitted that it is an ongoing fight to keep the needed funds flowing from Washington, DC but the battles which were born out of the struggles for Civil Rights must continue to be fought for education. He referred to it as a "Battle for Dollars."

Dr. Desmond stressed that there is still a lot of work to be done, in closing he declared, "Ninety-nine percent of the people in this room have degrees, only one percent of the people in the street have degrees, let's get up it is not about getting knocked down."



*2010-2011 CONNTAC Scholarship Award Recipients
Top Left to Right: Benjamin White, Brenda Lajara, Osama Hassan.
Bottom Left to Right: Dineille Villaroel, Sarah Taylor, Darien Thomas.*

2011 Annual Breakfast Meeting

Photo Below: Wendy Claxton receives 2011 CONNTAC, Inc. Board of Directors Chairman's Award in recognition for her service and commitment as a staff member of CONNTAC, Inc.'s Educational Opportunity Center project.



Above Photo: Higher Education Leadership in attendance at 2011 CONNTAC Annual Meeting. Left to right: Ross Tomlin, President Quinebaug Valley Community College; Wilfredo Nieves, President Capital Community College; Lewis J. Robinson, Jr., Chairman Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education; Anna Wasescha, President Middlesex Community College; Cathryn Addy, President Tunxis Community College

Dr. Cathryn Addy, Friend Of CONNTAC 2011

Dr. Cathryn Addy said that working in Connecticut Community Colleges has been an honor and a privilege – missionary work. She said that the stories she heard from the 2011 Scholarship Recipients are common, heartwarming and scary. She recalled, from earlier in her career, when she was a teacher at the Manson Youth Facility, the students were intelligent, bright and interested in learning, but they had no structure and no mentors but some of them did move on successfully with their lives, "I wished that they all had access to an organization like CONNTAC."



Above Photo: Past Friends of CONNTAC Award Recipients join 2011 awardee Dr. Cathryn Addy (center). left to right: Doris Arrington (2008 Recipient), Lewis J. Robinson, Jr. (guest and Former Chairman, Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education), Cathryn Addy (2011 Recipient), Mary Anne Cox (2010 Recipient), Charles Desmond (Guest Speaker and Chairman, Massachusetts Board of Regents for Higher Education), John Norman (2007 Recipient)

CONNTAC, Inc. Staff Retreat



(Top row from top left to right: Laura Blackwell, Wendy Claxton, Arlette Taylor, Karen Touch, Ahsia Cogdell, Widelyne Moise, Erica Coleman, Jay Holley)
(Bottom row from left to right: Turquoise McBride, Gloria Dover, Shontisha Kinchen-Askew, Cecilia Nugent)

CONNTAC, Inc.'s 2013 Staff Retreat was held on June 27-28th with a focus on "How We Will Work Together: Creating Wholeness" facilitated by Michelle Porchia from Inner Dimensions, LLC.

"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision, the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

– Andrew Carnegie