

SISTERMENTORS

Promoting Education Among Women and Girls of Color
A Project of EduSeed

10th Anniversary Issue

Fall/Winter 2007 Newsletter

A Newsletter for Donors and Friends of SisterMentors

Our Girls Start College this Fall

Five SisterMentors girls started college this fall. They are the first girls in the program to go to college. This is an exciting time for all of us here at SisterMentors. Our girls received offers from Duke, Hampton, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Howard University, Savannah College of Art and Design, Radford and Virginia Commonwealth Universities, and Tidewater Community College, among others. These new undergraduates have been in SisterMentors since eighth grade and have set a high standard for the younger girls to follow.

Megan Tuck started her undergraduate studies at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Duke is ranked as one of the top academic and research institutions in the U.S. Megan is the first in her



Megan Tuck, Duke University

immediate family to go to college and the second in her extended family to do so. Based on her outstanding academic achievement, Megan received a scholarship and grants from Duke to cover almost all of her expenses. She also was accepted to Hampton with a full scholarship and to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. At Duke, Megan is on the academic affairs committee of the Black Student Alliance and volunteers with Project Child where she tutors children in kindergarten.

Roxie Jairrels is off to Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Savannah, Georgia to pursue a bachelor of fine arts in photography. SCAD boasts of its small classes and its faculty with distinguished backgrounds in

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27 Women of Color Doctorates

As we celebrate SisterMentors' tenth anniversary, two more SisterMentors women received their doctorates, bringing the number of women we have helped to 27.

Vivian Jackson defended her dissertation and received her doctorate on September 28, 2007. She earned her Ph.D. in Social Welfare from the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, where she was a Mandel Leadership Fellow. Vivian's dissertation is titled "The Meaning of Culture in Family Preservation and Kinship Care Services: An Afrocentric Translation."

Vivian is currently a Senior Policy Associate at the National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human

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From the Executive Director

Dear Donors and Friends:

What an exciting time for us here at SisterMentors. This is it ---The BIG 10. I cannot begin to tell you how joyous we are on the occasion of our tenth anniversary. When I started SisterMentors ten years ago, I did not imagine that it would still be in existence ten years later. I am so excited that I don't even know where to begin. I want to thank all of you for your continuing generous support. Each year, we raise most of our funds from you, our individual donors. You are the reason that we can now celebrate the success of the women and girls who are in our program.

Our first group of girls started college this fall. Almost all of these girls have been in SisterMentors since eighth grade. We are extremely proud of them and very excited for their families. In addition to our girls going off to college, we also helped two more women to get their doctorates, bringing the number of women we have helped to 27.

The biggest endorsement of our program this year was from some of our girls who brought their younger sisters to join SisterMentors. Five girls, who have been in SisterMentors since seventh and eighth grade, brought their younger sisters to join our program. Cindy brought her nine year-old sister, Diana, who is in fourth grade, to our social skills and etiquette workshop and our mentoring sessions. This endorsement from our girls is indeed the highest honor that our program can receive.

Our program opens girls' eyes to a whole new world beyond their neighborhoods. This is certainly what happened when our girls visited New York City during their spring break. Their reaction was so palpable that my view of the city was changed as I began to see it through their eyes. Thanks to some of our donors, the girls were treated to tickets to The Color Purple on Broadway. The Broadway musical brought to life Alice Walker's novel, which the girls had been reading during their mentoring sessions with SisterMentors women. We surprised the girls with tickets for the show a few hours before we got on the subway to go to Broadway --- one of them literally began jumping up and down on hearing the news. For almost all of the girls, it was their first time seeing a Broadway show, and they loved it.

Ten years after founding SisterMentors, the women in our program continue to astound and move me. Carol Hedgspeth and Vivian Jackson, both of whom received their Ph.D.s this year, are such wonderful examples of determination and perseverance. When Carol came to SisterMentors, she had already spent almost twelve years pursuing her doctorate. She faced many challenges, including from her university, but she did not give up. Carol successfully defended



First Women in SisterMentors, Late 1990's

her dissertation in April after having her third daughter in January. Vivian is fifty-something and has been in SisterMentors for about five years. While working on her dissertation she had to take time off to help one of her sons prepare for college, at the same time following the progress of her other son who was in high school. Vivian was also challenged by a demanding job that required a lot of out-of-town travel. Nevertheless, Vivian and Carol persevered and realized their dream of getting their Ph.D.

As you turn the pages of this newsletter, you will see that our graduates have been doing exceptional things since getting their doctorates. Not surprisingly, many of them are in careers that help women and girls to succeed. In large part, they are continuing to use their education to serve others, just like they did while they were in SisterMentors. We are so very proud of them!

The girls in our program are learning how to better position themselves for acceptance to good colleges because they are listening closely to college admissions officers during our college visits, as well as to our girls who have just gone off to college. Our ninth graders are taking Honors classes and our eleventh graders are taking Advanced Placement classes. SisterMentors women are also continuing to make great strides and we expect one more woman to get her doctorate before the end of 2007.

I am just as excited and passionate about the work we are doing as when I founded SisterMentors ten years ago. Over the years people have asked me why I continue to do the work I do. I always reach deep down inside of me for memories of my educational experiences as a child, almost all of which were positive and affirming. I attended the first school in my village in Trinidad and Tobago, my family had little money, and resources in our village were scarce. Yet, starting in elementary school, I had teachers who cared and pushed me to excel academically. And that gave me a strong sense of who I am and of my abilities. At every stage of my education --- from elementary to graduate school --- I had a teacher or a mentor who encouraged

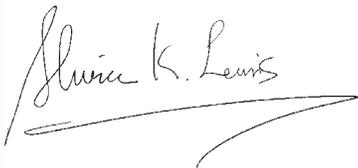
me to pursue my dreams. And that is what we are trying to give back to the women and girls in SisterMentors: a strong sense of themselves, hope in their dreams, the ambition to pursue their education so that they can make a better life for themselves and their families, and the courage to make a difference in this world.

I am humbled by your generosity and grateful for your support during these past years. I feel strongly that we are all part of a community working together to make a better life for those who are less privileged. I know for sure that we are all connected to each other in this life no matter where on the planet we may live. Thank you for your commitment to the women and girls in our program. Please continue to support us. We would love to continue to have you by our side for the next ten years.

We continue our campaign to raise much needed funds in honor of SisterMentors' tenth anniversary. So far, we have raised over \$75,000. We have about \$45,000 more to raise to meet our campaign goal of \$120,000 by December 2007. We would like to invite you to make a one-time donation of \$500 or more in honor of SisterMentors' tenth anniversary. Or you can make a pledge of \$100 a month for the next twelve months. Of course, we are thankful for whatever amount you can give.

As always, I encourage you to contact me at any time. I am always delighted to hear from you. I can be reached at director@sistermentors.org or 202-778-6424. I look forward to speaking with you.

Thank you for your support of SisterMentors! Let's celebrate the beginning of ten more successful years!



Shireen K. Lewis, Ph.D.



First Girls Mentoring Session, 2001

Our Girls Start College this Fall

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their fields. Roxie chose SCAD over the Art Institute of Pittsburgh where she was also accepted. She received two merit scholarships based on portfolios she submitted with her application. Roxie, who has won awards for her photography and sold some of her work, plans to become a commercial photographer.

Shannon Scott is enrolled at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, a preeminent research university known for several of its degree programs, including art, social work and medicine. She was also admitted to Fordham, Radford and Howard Universities, among others. Shannon, who received an award last year from the Tavis Smiley Foundation for community service, plans to continue her strong commitment to volunteerism.

Sara Estefanos and **Arsema Ghirmai** both started Tidewater Community College (TCC) in Norfolk, Virginia. TCC is one of the fastest growing two-year colleges in the U.S. and touts the achievement of its graduates. Sara and Arsema plan to go to university in two years after they receive their Associate degree. Sara plans to major in history or psychology and is interested in writing for her college newspaper and playing extramural soccer.

We are very pleased with our girls' achievements and intend to stay in touch with them during their college years. In May, Megan and Roxie came to talk to the younger girls about their experiences preparing for and applying to college. The girls had lots of questions and said that although they felt "overwhelmed" they were also encouraged and inspired.

Dear Dr. Lewis:

How are you? I just thought I'd give you a little update on my college experience so far. Well, I love my roommates. They are great. I'm still undecided about a major but I am leaning towards psychology now. I volunteer at a local elementary school and I work at the gym located here on campus. I am homesick! But I am liking Durham more and more as time goes on.

Give me a call,

Megan

From Megan Tuck at Duke University

Our Graduates and Where They Are Today...

SisterMentors has helped 27 women of color to get their doctorates since its founding in September 1997. Most of our graduates are pursuing careers or do other work that advances the interests of women and girls. Here are profiles on some of our graduates and an update on where they are today.

Paula Quick-Hall, Ph.D., 1998

Paula Quick-Hall was a divorced mother when she earned her Ph.D. in 1998, more than ten years after she enrolled in her program. Today, she is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at North Carolina Central University, a historically Black university in Durham, North Carolina. She had previously taught as an adjunct professor at two historically Black universities.

After receiving her Ph.D., Paula received an offer from Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina, one of only two Black women's colleges in the U.S. Bennett was creating a new Political Science Department and Paula was asked to chair the department. Paula eagerly accepted the offer because Bennett had a special place in her heart since both of her grandmothers, her mother, three aunts and several cousins are Bennett alumnae.

In 1999, while at Bennett, Paula founded a nonprofit organization—the African American Education and Research Organization. This was the beginning of a new phase of her continuing effort to do work that empowers African American parents, children, and young adults to make well-informed choices about schooling, informal education, and learning at home.

Paula then left Bennett and began working for Research and Evaluation Associates --- a small company in Chapel Hill, North Carolina --- doing evaluation research and consulting for government agencies.

Judi Moore Latta, Ph.D., 1999

Judi Moore Latta has always been a woman on the move. She is one of about four women who came together to create the first group of SisterMentors women in 1997. Today, she is a full professor at Howard University in Washington, D.C. in the Radio, TV and Film Department and she is also on the graduate faculty of the Department of Mass Communications and Media Studies.

For two years, Judi served as interim general manager of WHUT --- the public television station licensed to Howard.



Genevieve Yirenkyi, Ph.D., 2004

WHUT was the first African American owned and operated public television station in the U.S.

These days Judi's plate is kept full as she co-chairs the Women's Studies graduate certificate program at Howard and is on loan from her department to WHUR-WORLD (96.3 HD-2), a digital radio channel that is accessible on the Internet.

With all that she does, Judi still has time for writing book chapters and has published on such topics as "spirituals as lived experience" and call stories of African American women ordained ministers.

Judi volunteers her time to work with young women ages 13 to 17 in a girls' rites of passage program. The program consists of workshops and field trips and deals with issues of self-image and awareness of body, mind and spirit. She also chairs the Deaconess Board at her church.

Avis Jones-DeWeever, Ph.D., 2000

Avis Jones-DeWeever received her Ph.D. in Government and Politics from the University of Maryland, College Park. Today, she is Director of the National Council of Negro Women's new research institute called the Research, Public Policy and Information Center. The center gathers and disseminates information that empowers African American women and stimulates advocacy to improve the quality of life for women, their families and their communities.

After earning her Ph.D., Avis was an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Richmond in Virginia. More recently she was director of the Poverty, Education and Social Justice Programs at the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) in Washington, D.C. At IWPR, Avis' work examined the causes and consequences of poverty on the well-being of low-income women and their families, and strategies for reducing poverty.

Avis has authored and co-authored numerous publications. Her policy perspectives have been distributed through the media, including the New York Times, CNN, National Public Radio and BBC Radio International. Avis is the mother of two boys.

Adrienne Smith, Ph.D., 2001

Adrienne Smith received her doctorate in Public Health with an emphasis on Women's Health from the University of Maryland, College Park. Today, she is a Public Health Advisor in the division of policy and program development in the Office on Women's Health at the U.S. Department of Human Health and Services in Washington, D.C. Adrienne facilitates the minority women's health and women's mental health initiatives and the minority women's health panel of experts. Her office seeks to redress inequities in research, education and health care services that have historically placed women's health at risk.

Adrienne has a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology Pre-Med from Norfolk State University and a Master of Science in Nutritional Science from Hampton University. As a nutritionist, she has promoted breast feeding and prenatal nutrition among minority and underserved women.

Kangbai Konaté, Ph.D., 2002

Born and raised in France to parents from Mali and Guinea, West Africa, Kangbai Konaté received her doctorate with highest honors in Sociology in 2002 from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. Today, she is a consultant for a U.S. nonprofit where she works to improve the lives of women in Equatorial Guinea, West Africa.

Kangbai has been working in the area of education for thirteen years, first as an educational supervisor and advisor in Paris and then as an international consultant in human development, specializing in women's and girls' education.

Kangbai earned a post-Master's degree in African History from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, a Master's degree in Economics from Grenoble University in Grenoble, France, and an undergraduate degree in Economics from the Sorbonne University in Paris.

Codou Diaw, Ph.D., 2003

Born and raised in Senegal, Codou Diaw lived in the U.S. for almost 16 years. She received her doctorate from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County in the Education Department's interdisciplinary program where her research focused on gender and education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Today, she lives in Nairobi, Kenya where she is Executive Director of the Regional Secretariat for the Forum of African Women Educationalist (FAWE), the leading continent-wide African non-governmental organization that promotes girls' education and advocates for gender equity in African education systems. Headquartered in Nairobi, FAWE advocates for mainstreaming gender at the policy-making level and intervenes in schools and communities to increase awareness about girls' access to school and to improve girls' retention and performance.

After earning her Ph.D., Codou moved back home to Senegal to work as Deputy Director for Education at the Japan International Cooperation Agency. She then immigrated to Geneva, Switzerland where she worked as a Consultant for Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), a non-governmental organization run by women working to engender the peace process in Africa. FAS promotes the leading role of women in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts on the African continent. She concurrently worked as a Translator and Interpreter for the World YWCA, Handicap International, and International Conference Volunteers. Codou moved to Nairobi in August 2007 to become Executive Director of FAWE which has national chapters in thirty-two African countries. With this new position at FAWE, she returns to her passion of promoting girls' education in Africa.

Genevieve Yirenkyi, Ph.D., 2004

Genevieve Yirenkyi has always been a woman on a mission. Born in Ghana, West Africa, Genevieve migrated to the U.S. at the age of five and obtained her Ph.D. when she was 27, becoming the youngest Ph.D. in SisterMentors' history. Today, she is a Clinical Psychologist in private practice focusing on children, adolescents and their families, and she is also a staff psychologist at Baltimore Medical System-Community Health Clinics where she provides mental health services to underserved residents.

Genevieve earned her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the Pacific Graduate School of Psychology in Palo Alto, California. She successfully defended her dissertation in 2003 and officially received her doctorate in 2004 after completing a hospital internship. Since obtaining her Ph.D., Genevieve completed a prestigious post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Maryland at Baltimore's School of Medicine-School Mental Health Program.

Carolyn Peoples Veiga, Ph.D., 2004

Carolyn Peoples Veiga received her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, College Park, College of Education, Department of Human Development. Her scholarship focused on adult development and achievement motivation. Today, Carolyn is in private practice as an Educational Consultant. In this capacity, she serves as a dissertation editor, evaluates and analyzes college-level curricula, and presents seminars to college faculty on alternative strategies for educating adult learners returning to college. Carolyn is also an adjunct professor and the mother of two children.

Shona Jackson, Ph.D., 2005

Shona Jackson received her Ph.D. in Modern Thought & Literature from Stanford University. Born in Guyana, South America, today Shona is a tenure-track, Assistant Professor at Texas A&M University in College Station where she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on the Caribbean, postcolonial theory, and Africana literature and culture. Shona has published book chapters and journal articles including in the Caribbean Quarterly, and Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism. More recently she edited a 30th anniversary issue of the scholarly journal Callaloo.

Koritha Mitchell, Ph.D., 2005

Koritha Mitchell was the first in her family to go to college. Today, she is a tenure track Assistant Professor of English at Ohio State University (OSU). Koritha earned her Ph.D. in English from the University of Maryland, College Park.

Recently, Koritha was selected for a prestigious Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Ford Foundation which allows her time off from teaching so that she can write her first book, and better position herself to get tenure. At OSU, she teaches courses on African American identities, 20th century African American literature, and a seminar on critical approaches to Black literatures.

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Girls' Four-Day Visit to New York City

In our most ambitious college visit to date, SisterMentors took 22 girls to visit New York City and three of its most prestigious schools: Barnard College, Columbia University, and New York University. Unlike previous trips, this visit was not just about getting a taste of college. It was also about experiencing one of the most exciting cities in the world.

"It was a great learning experience. It opened my eyes to a lot of new things," said one of the 22 girls. For most of the girls, this was their first visit to New York City. Excitement was high as our bus rolled into the city during mid-afternoon on a cool spring day. One of the youngest girls in our program, an eleven year old fifth grader, gasped and pointed at the skyscrapers as we made our way down a busy Manhattan street.

The girls spent four days in New York City, staying at a hostel in Harlem. The location provided proximity to Barnard and Columbia and the convenience of the city, including its world-famous public transportation. The girls were fascinated by the subway and the musicians that make its tunnels far more colorful than the Metro stations in Washington, D.C. They stopped and danced to the music of a banjo-playing duo called "the Ebony Hillbillies" and stood around curiously watching a musician playing a Trinidadian steel pan --- a musical instrument they had never seen before.

Dean Vivian Taylor, Associate Dean of Students, and Saul Davis, Director of the Science and Technology Program and the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program at Barnard, arranged the girls' two-day visit to the liberal arts college for women. During their stay, the girls were able to see how women undergraduates at Barnard benefit from its small classes and personal attention while having access to the larger research resources at Columbia, its partner school across the street.

On arrival on campus, girls were greeted with a dinner with undergraduate women of color, which gave them a window into college life. The women advised the girls to learn time management, which will be one of their biggest challenges in college. One of the women said that she likes Barnard because of its location which allows her to explore the city. She told girls that the city offers many free concerts and that Central Park is a nearby attraction. Other women explained that they chose Barnard because it is an intimate community where everyone knows each other by name and because it focuses on undergraduates.

In addition to their helpful dialogue with the undergraduates, the girls got a taste of academic life by attending classes and received a guided tour of the campus. And to help with how to pay for college, Susan Lee, a senior financial aid officer, gave a presentation on financial aid.



Girls at The Color Purple on Broadway

Girls Actively Participate in Class Discussion

"This was one of the most exciting and the greatest experiences I have ever had," said one of the girls. On the morning of their second day at Barnard girls sat in on classes and participated in the class discussion. Some of the girls sat in on a first year English seminar, "The Americas: Romanticism and Postmodernism." There were only nine students in attendance and the professor very enthusiastically welcomed SisterMentors girls and made extra copies of the reading material so that girls could be integrated into the class.

The girls stayed interested and focused throughout the class. Although this class was for first year students it was taught at a much higher level. The discussion centered on T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. When the professor asked for a volunteer to read part of the poem, one of SisterMentors' eighth graders raised her hand and then read a few lines. Another girl asked if Eliot had written any books for children and the professor responded that Eliot wrote the book on which the Broadway musical *CATS* is based. As the class moved to that part of the poem written in German, another eighth grader raised her hand and volunteered to read that section aloud, demonstrating the language proficiency she had learned in school. The professor was impressed with her good pronunciation.

The girls learned a lot from the class. The professor gave a brief biography of Eliot, including his life in Paris and England. The class discussed the structure and tone of Eliot's poem, including his use of Chaucer to begin the poem and the shifting multiplicity of voices.

This seminar energized the girls. Some of them talked more with the professor after the class and then talked among themselves about the classes they would like to take in middle and high school next school year. Some of the older girls advised the younger ones about classes they should take in each grade and talked about mistakes they had made in choosing classes in middle and high school.

