

# SISTERMENTORS

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

Fall/Winter 2008 Newsletter

A Newsletter for Donors and Friends of SisterMentors

## Girls' Four-Day Visit to Duke University and UNC-Chapel Hill

"I learned the significance of going to college. It's not just fun and games and parties. It's work and hard work at that," said one of the 23 girls from SisterMentors who went on a four day college visit this past March to two of North Carolina's most prestigious schools, Duke University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Carolina). This visit was one of the most informative to date. It was also very special because girls met and talked with Duke University President, Richard H. Brodhead, spent time with Megan Tuck, the SisterMentors girl who began her undergraduate studies at Duke in fall 2007 and met with Ike Gardner, a 19 year old African American student who enrolled at Duke when she was 15 years old and graduated this past May with a double major in Economics and English.



This visit marked the sixth year that SisterMentors has been taking girls to visit colleges and the farthest girls have traveled to visit a campus. Before embarking on their journey, girls learned about the differences between Duke and Carolina and received a refresher course in social skills and etiquette from Ms. Fannie Allen of the Allen Etiquette Institute. Thanks to Whole Foods Market, P Street in Washington, D.C., girls were treated to a nutritious lunch on the bus.

Girls were excited to visit these universities which are in close proximity to each other, that rival each other in basketball, and are connected by Robert-

*continued on page 7*

### IN THIS ISSUE

Girls' Four-Day Visit to Duke University and UNC Chapel Hill .....	1
30 Women of Color Doctorates .....	1
From the Executive Director .....	2
SisterMentors Girls Are Now in Their Second Year of College.....	3
News From Our Girls in College.....	4
Social Skills and Etiquette Workshop .....	5
SisterMentors Woman Wins Award for Her Work .....	6
Our Twelfth Graders Prepare for College .....	10
Thank You Very Much! .....	10
Please Support SisterMentors .....	11
Who We Are .....	12
EduSeed's Board of Directors .....	12
Donate to Us Through CFC .....	12

## 30 Women of Color Doctorates

SisterMentors has helped 30 women of color to earn doctorates in just a little more than ten years. This past school year we helped 3 more women to get doctorates.

**Calandra R. Tate** received her doctorate in Applied Mathematics and Scientific Computation in November 2007 from the University of Maryland, College Park just as she was celebrating her thirtieth birthday. She is one of the few women of color in the U.S. to earn a doctorate in Mathematics. Her dissertation is titled, *An Investigation of the Relationship Between Automated Machine Translation Evaluation Metrics and User Performance on an Information Extraction Task*. She received a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from Xavier University, Louisiana where she started as pre-med and considered majoring in French before switching to Mathematics. Calandra currently teaches statistics and probability at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

*continued on page 10*

# From the Executive Director

Dear Donors and Friends:

As I write to you after the November elections, we at SisterMentors are filled with hope and optimism. Change is in the air. There is no better time than now to emphasize to the women and girls in SisterMentors that the sky is the limit. We believe that hard work and perseverance pays off.

We know that there is a difficult road ahead for all of us because of the current economic crisis. However, we are facing the challenge with a positive attitude knowing that our situation is temporary and that we will all pull through this together. One of the lessons from the recent elections is that when we all work together side by side we can bring about positive historic change.

Thanks to all of you who helped make our tenth anniversary celebration and fundraiser a success last November. You certainly rose to the occasion and helped us to meet our fundraising goal in honor of SisterMentors' ten years of existence. Thank you so much!

One of the most exciting developments for SisterMentors is that we now serve women and girls of color on every educational level: elementary, middle and high school, college and graduate school. We transitioned to the college level when we helped send our first group of girls to college in fall 2007 and transitioned to elementary school when our older girls brought their younger sisters to join our program.

One of the most rewarding and refreshing aspects of our program is our work with the younger girls, ages 10 to 12. These girls have lots of energy and enthusiasm for school and have great plans for their future. One of our 10-year old girls loves Math, is in a Talented and Gifted (TAG) Science class, and her goals for her future include a career as a paleontologist or a brain surgeon.

The majority of girls in SisterMentors are from low-income families and qualify for free or reduced price meals at school. Girls stay in our program for six to nine years.

We are seeing that as some of the girls get older, they begin to get jobs to help out their families financially. Last year, one of our eleventh graders worked after school every day except Friday and also worked on Saturdays and Sundays arriving to work at 6 a.m. for eight hours each day. Somehow, she still managed to earn a 3.4 GPA, took a SAT prep class, kept up her role as the president of a club, was a color guard in Marching Band, and volunteered with a facility for senior citizens and with the American Red Cross. She is currently one of our most ambitious and focused twelfth graders.



*Mentor and Mentee Reading Together*

In the 2008-2009 school year, we are helping six girls prepare college applications, seek financial aid and transition to college. All of the girls, except one, have been in SisterMentors since seventh grade. All our twelfth graders have taken the SAT Test, are currently working on their essay for college applications and will soon start completing college applications online.

SisterMentors women are making remarkable progress on their dissertations. We expect three more women to get their doctorates next year. One woman has completed her dissertation and will defend early in 2009 and another woman is revising a draft of her dissertation. SisterMentors women are doing research and writing that has a real impact on people's lives as is evident in the work of Tisha Lewis whose groundbreaking research we feature in this newsletter.

New women joined us at the start of 2008 and they are moving forward by leaps and bounds. Our six-day dissertation writing retreats twice a year have opened women's eyes to how much they can accomplish in a focused and supportive environment. It is also heartwarming to see the strong bonds the women are building with each other and with the girls. With their drive to succeed academically and their strong commitment to mentoring, SisterMentors women are indeed strong positive role models for girls.

As always, we are very grateful for your support. We raise most of our funds each year from you, our individual donors. The women and girls in our program expect us to continue to support them year after year so that they can fully realize their dreams and live up to their full potential. We want to continue to be there for them and can only do so with your support.

I know that it is prudent to assess priorities during this challenging financial time. However, I kindly re-

quest that you keep SisterMentors on your list of priorities and donate to us as the year draws to a close. It is in hard times like these that we need your support more than ever. We are all in this together.

Please continue to support us. You can send us a check in the mail, make a donation online at [www.sistermentors.org](http://www.sistermentors.org) by clicking on the "DONATE NOW" link, or donate to us through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), our number is 90398.

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](mailto:director@sistermentors.org) or at 202-778-6424. I look forward to speaking with you.

Thank you for your support of SisterMentors!



Shireen K. Lewis, Ph.D.



Girls at Our Tenth Anniversary Celebration

## SisterMentors Girls Are Now in their Second Year of College



Shannon Scott

The five girls we helped to send to college last fall completed their first year and just started their second year of college. Megan Tuck at Duke University took summer classes in Economics and French and had a GPA above 3.0 at the end of her first year. Megan plans to major in Sociology, minor in Visual Arts and earn a certificate in markets and management. Shannon Scott, who is at Virginia Commonwealth University, finished her first year with a GPA above 3.0 and loves being in college. Arsema Ghirmai finished her first year at Tidewater Community College and has transferred to a community college closer to home for her second year. Arsema will transfer later to a four-year university and major in photo-journalism. Roxie Jairrels spent two quarters at Savannah College of Art and Design and began Northern Virginia Community College this fall. Roxie returned home to continue college to better manage ongoing health issues. She is continuing her studies in Photography and will begin learning Japanese.

*"I see SisterMentors as a group that influences young minority girls to reach the highest level of education. I have made SisterMentors a permanent part of my life, taking what I learn in our Saturday mentoring sessions and applying it to my everyday life. I can only hope more young girls like me will get the benefit of being around someone like Dr. Lewis and the women in SisterMentors. SisterMentors broadens my knowledge of where I can further my studies after high school especially through the college visits where we hear about the admissions process and what is expected of us. I thank Dr. Lewis and all of the mentors for helping my mom and me look forward to a brighter and highly obtainable future. SisterMentors is truly making an impact on who I am and who I will be."*

Zoe Wohiren, 10th Grade

# News From Our Girls in College

## Megan Tuck, Second Year at Duke University

After being at Duke for about a year, I have decided to become a Sociology major, a Visual Arts minor, and also receive a certificate in Markets and Management. There are so many resources and opportunities here that have made it possible for me to do all three. Also, I am thinking about going abroad to Paris next summer through a Duke program.

After my first semester I earned a 3.6 GPA and currently have a 3.2 GPA after my first year and having taken summer classes at Duke.

I continue to be involved with the Academic Affairs Committee of the Black Student Alliance, and I am also involved with the Communications and Programming Committees. I still belong to the Dance Black troupe and am now also involved with another dance group known on campus as Reasonable Doubt. We perform during homecoming and during the Black Student Invitational each year.

I no longer volunteer with Project Child, but I have started to volunteer with the local Big Brothers, Big Sisters program. In addition, I work about 10 hours out of the week at the gym on campus. All in all, I am venturing out and using all the available resources here at Duke. I hope to come out a much more enlightened and well-rounded person.

*Megan Tuck started SisterMentors in eighth grade. She is the first in her immediate family to go to college and only the second in her extended family to do so.*

## Shannon Scott, Second Year at Virginia Commonwealth University

Having the opportunity to attend Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is producing positive and profound effects on my life. I was accepted into the School of Business with the goal of studying Business Management and Administration. I am now also considering a minor in Spanish and a minor in dance.

Halfway through the first semester of this my second and Sophomore year, time is going so fast just as it has since I began the SisterMentors program in 2002 when I was 13 years old. This November I reached two milestones: turning twenty and voting for the first time.

The journey from high school to college has been a great adventure. There was much anticipation and, yes, some trepidation. What was college life really going to be like? Would I have enough money to make it for at least two years? I would worry about year three and four when that time came. I had to live in the moment.

Armed with a plan for college life, realistic goals, objectives and an open mind, the transition turned out not to be so difficult after all. As a first year student entering



*Megan Tuck*

VCU last fall, the preparation for this journey began with setting the following goals: strive to do my personal best academically, be involved on campus, contribute positively to the diversity of the university and continue my civic responsibility in terms of community service.

My passion for community service continues. On campus, I have committed to work with Habitat for Humanity and the Cancer Awareness Team as well as offer a helping hand to other organizations when called upon. When home on weekends and campus breaks the work continues with community outreach programs. Recently, I did my small part in the "Get Out and Vote" Campaign.

I am growing and developing in a productive and independent manner as a young adult. I sincerely thank Dr. Lewis, EduSeed, the SisterMentors program, its donors and parents for their support and encouragement. The program is a rock solid foundation and I consider it to be one of the stepping stones on my path of academic achievement.

Without a doubt, SisterMentors played a big part in helping me define and achieve my educational goals. The mentoring time investment has paid off. The program's investment in my precollege education through mentoring sessions are yielding dividends beyond the classroom.

I continue to serve, inspire and encourage others to follow their academic dreams. In fact, my younger 15 year old sister, Shairya Scott (who has been a younger participant of SisterMentors) has told me she wants to follow in my footsteps. Dr. Lewis and Ms. Fannie Allen would be proud to know that Shariya used her etiquette skills while traveling in Japan this past summer as a Student Ambassador.

I am so very thankful for what SisterMentors is doing to further the academic preparation, social skills, and the encouragement of the hopes and desires of young girls as they prepare to make decisions about their future beyond high school.

*Shannon Scott started SisterMentors in eighth grade. She has won many awards for her volunteer work including the 2006 Youth to Leaders Youth Advocate Award from the Tavis Smiley Foundation.*

# Social Skills and Etiquette Workshop



"Thank you so much for everything. I would not have learned this anywhere else," said one of the 24 girls who participated in our Social Skills and Etiquette Workshop in May 2008. This workshop continues to be quite a hit with the girls in our program and as they do every year, girls raved about their experience on their evaluations. Thanks in large part to a donation by Christine Boehm, 24 girls of color from Washington, D.C.; Alexandria, Virginia; and Maryland, participated in this workshop at the Madison Hotel in downtown Washington, D.C., just blocks away from the White House. One of the girls described the Madison as "the best place ever" and said "the service is wonderful and nice." As in the past, Ms. Fannie Allen of the prestigious Allen Etiquette Institute taught the workshop. Many of the girls describe their experience as "fun" because they appreciate Ms. Allen's sense of humor and love to listen to her stories about inappropriate behavior and its consequences.

"I've learned so much in seconds, minutes and hours. Thank you so much," said one of the girls. In the social skills part of the workshop, girls were encouraged to get a library card, read novels and the daily newspaper. They were also cautioned against using slang and profanity, told that the word "Um" is not the proper way to begin sentences and advised to enunciate their words clearly. It is always surprising to see the immediate impact this workshop has on the girls. In the past, after being schooled in the etiquette of leaving voicemail messages, girls immediately started responding promptly to messages, leaving their cell phone numbers and requesting a return call. Right after this year's workshop, after they were advised to read the daily newspaper, the younger girls in our program stopped by a CVS store and bought a newspaper which they began reading on the metro on their way home.

"Smart, fun, a pleasure to be at," one of the girls said. Girls listened attentively as Ms. Allen informed them that they should always want to be respected and

that they have to teach people how they want to be treated. They were also told that the greatest compliment they can pay to someone is to be quiet and listen and that they should always be respectful of the person standing in front of the room making a presentation.

During the etiquette part of the workshop, Ms. Allen told girls that there is a link between food and behavior and that too much sugar or salt can affect one's attitude. One girl asked how to deal with being served food that she is allergic to and Ms. Allen advised that she mention her allergy to the host or wait staff. However, in general, Ms. Allen added, a guest should always inform the host about allergies or special diets beforehand. Another girl asked how to eat chicken with bone and Ms. Allen advised that it is best to cut around the bone and not to use her hands to pick up the bone unless at a picnic. Another girl asked what she should do if her knife or fork accidentally fell on the floor during a meal. Ms. Allen responded that dirty silverware should not be put back on the table and that it should be given to the wait staff.

"Wonderful, fun, exciting and perfect," declared one of the girls about the workshop and this reflects the reaction of all of the girls who participate in this annual workshop.

*"SisterMentors has been a GODsend for my daughter, Khadeja. She has been allowed to experience university life that has helped to prepare her to make better decisions regarding her future. Since participating in SisterMentors she has worked very hard to improve her grades and has begun to dress professionally and more "lady-like."*

*Having mentors from the similar social backgrounds has inspired Khadeja to follow their footsteps to achieve the highest education possible. She sees her goals as attainable and I am proud to see the progress of my daughter on a daily basis. Thank you for leading my daughter in the right direction. I am confident she will become a fine mentor and inspire others as SisterMentors has done for her."*

*Lisa Smith  
Mother of SisterMentors Girl*

# SisterMentors Woman Wins Award For Her Work

Tisha Y. Lewis, a current doctoral candidate in SisterMentors just won an award for her work. Tisha is the 2008 Recipient of the J. Michael Parker Award from the National Reading Conference. This highly-regarded award is given to graduate students and untenured professors for contributions to research in adult literacy.

SisterMentors women are doing meaningful research that has an impact on people's everyday lives. Tisha's research demonstrates that the interaction with new technology --- this new 21st Century way of learning --- has very positive implications for adult literacy, particularly among low-income people of color. Tisha's work has deeply touched the life of the woman featured in her research by helping her to give voice to her deeply troubled past and lending her hope for the future.

Below is an excerpt from the award-winning article derived from Tisha's larger dissertation titled, *Family Literacy and Adult Literacies: A Redefined Approach to Examining Social Practices in the Home*.

## **Title: "My Life is shaped around digital literacies:" An African American's Woman's Journey.**

"Digital literacy (DL)<sup>\*</sup> has always been there for me. From the time I learned how to talk and comprehend, DL has been there to help me learn how to read, kept me company when I was lonely, made me smile when I was sad, kept me alive when I was sick!"

This quote comes from Larnee Ali, a mid-30 year-old African-American single parent of four sons. This determined, resilient and caring woman lives in an urban neighborhood where visible and invisible representations of gentrification, poverty and stereotypes surrounding race, class and gender dominate her community every day. Her world is full of joys, pains and struggles of abuse, unemployment, reliance on government assistance and a painful rare skin disease called, Epidermolysis Bullosa, the same disease that took the life of her younger sister many years ago.

Larnee was one of fourteen siblings and, from the age of five, she was responsible for taking care of the physical needs of her entire family by washing clothes, cooking and cleaning. Larnee still feels the residue from her past when she remembers the emotional, physical and verbal abuse from her mother and from being banned from attending school until she was 12 years-old. She did not formally learn how to read except for what she acquired from watching educational television programs.

However, Larnee exhibits traits of self-determination, morality and independence that contribute to her everyday conversations and practices. On a daily basis, she shifts her attention to the digital world through gaming,

Instant Messaging, Texting and talking on her cell phone. These digital literacy practices guide and influence her decisions on a daily basis. She creates a virtual space where she is not judged by her appearance, race, education or social status, but is known and is acknowledged through her online social networks, as a mother, friend and counselor, each having a meaningful commonality: acceptance.

In this article, I explore how Larnee Ali's past history shapes her digital literacy practices in the home. More specifically, I examine how Larnee embodies digital literacies as an extension of herself in which the practices she engage in takes over parts of her internal and her external worlds. With this understanding, I refer to this context as "the cultural ecology of literacy" to explore how the relationship between individuals and digital literacies co-exist, and where all communication takes place.

It is my hope that this work will introduce the importance of examining how digital literacy practices not only change what we do on a daily basis, but how we think, how we make sense of literacy, and how we allow tools to shape us and our relationship with the world.

Emerging literacy research has explored the uses and the effects of individuals' multiple literacy practices for various purposes. For instance, researchers have documented how and why adolescent boys and girls engage in, are mediated and shaped by, multiple forms of digital technologies in their daily lives. These studies have raised awareness and attention to the proliferation of adolescents' multiple literacy practices involving digital technologies, but these studies have not focused on the ways in which the digital literacy practices of adults, particularly in African American families, and their involvement with digital technologies, include multimodal literacy practices.

In light of a digitally mediated world, today's literacy practices employ new technologies that are interwoven in individuals' lives on a daily basis so that a large amount of time is now mediated through the Internet. These new technologies include semiotic systems (signs and symbols) such as the Internet, music and written/oral languages that are significant in individuals' environments and cultural experiences. However, these areas do not only address technologies in broader terms, but point to specific changes and ways that social practices are related to digital literacies.

The following questions are considered: How might Larnee Ali's past history shape her digital literacy practices in the home? In what ways does Larnee Ali embody digital literacies as an extension of herself?

As part of a larger research study, I have conducted an ethnographic research case study on the digital literacy

practices among Larnee Ali (the mother) and her children. I examined the ways this family talk about, interact with, and negotiate digital literacies in individual and/or group settings in the home, in ways that most research do not acknowledge or identify. As a result, I found poignant and concrete examples of everyday digital literacy practices from the mother in this study who lives in an inner-city community in the eastern section of the United States.

*Tisha Y. Lewis is a doctoral candidate in Reading at the University at Albany, the State University of New York. A native Washingtonian, Tisha is a product of the District of Columbia Public School System. She is also the 2008-2010 recipient of a fellowship from Cultivating New Voices Among Scholars of Color.*

*\*In this article, the term digital literacy or digital literacies signifies multiple and interactive social practices, such as the Internet, cell phones, Instant Messaging and videogames, which involve reading, writing, language, exchanging information in online environments.*

*All persons and location names are pseudonyms.*



*Dr. Calandra Tate*

*"I remember that it wasn't until I went on my first SisterMentors retreat in the spring of 2007 that I really started to make progress. The serene atmosphere in the secluded woods, hearing nothing but intellectual discussions and positive thoughts, certainly gave my stalled (but, what seemed to be going dead) dissertation battery a much-needed jolt of energy. From then on, my work sessions became much more focused and productive. I actually started to see a change in what I was producing and saw a genuine sense of readiness as the dissertation submission and defense times got closer and closer."*

*Calandra Tate, Ph.D. in Applied Mathematics  
SisterMentors Graduate, 2007*

## **Girls' Four-Day Visit to Duke University and UNC-Chapel Hill**

*Continued from page 1*

son Scholars, undergraduates whose scholarship privileges enable them to take classes at both campuses. Girls experienced the differences between Duke's small private university setting in Durham with a few thousand undergraduate students and Carolina's large public university in Chapel Hill with over seventeen thousand undergraduates.

### **Visit to Duke University**

"The college visit was very inspirational to me. Now I want to go to Duke and UNC to get a good education. It was an experience I will never forget --- ever!" said one of the ten year old girls. Duke laid out the red carpet for the girls' visit particularly because EduSeed's executive director, Dr. Shireen Lewis, earned her doctorate there and thanks to the help of many people at Duke including Linda Orr, a strong supporter of SisterMentors and one of Duke's distinguished emeritus professors. Kemele Dawkins, Vice President for Campus Services, and Jim Wulforst, Director of Dining Services, were extremely kind and generous in extending resources to make the visit very special for the girls.

Upon arrival, girls were greeted by Linda Capers of the Multicultural Affairs Office and several undergraduate women of color, some of whom were immigrants and the first generation in their family to go to college. One of the women told the girls that her parents wanted her to go to a local community college because it was close to home. Based on her experience, she advised girls to think independently, and go out into the world, even if it meant going far from home. To succeed in college, they emphasized that the girls understand the hard work involved, not just parties and socializing. Securing a good adviser, visiting professors during their office hours, and joining study groups all help students achieve success. Duke, the women said, opens a lot of doors for them.

### **Visit with Duke President, Richard H. Brodhead**

"Kind and caring," "a person who loves students," "funny, cool and interesting," were some of the words that SisterMentors girls used to describe Duke's President Richard H. Brodhead. The highlight of girls' visit to Duke was their meeting with President Brodhead, who took time out of his very busy schedule to spend close to an hour with the girls. President Brodhead arrived at Duke in July 2004 after a 32-year career at Yale University, including 11 years as dean of Yale College.

*continued on page 8*

# Girls' Four-Day Visit to Duke University and UNC-Chapel Hill

Continued from page 7



Tenth Grader and President Brodhead

He welcomed girls into his office encouraging them to get comfortable as he sat on his desk. Girls spread out in the office with some sitting on the floor for an informal but inspirational conversation with the President. He greeted girls by telling them that he looks at their faces and sees so much promise and intelligence. When they look out in the world and see someone doing something great, he added, they should say "that's me." He told them that the way to all great things is through school. He asked the girls to promise that when they get admitted to Duke, they would come tug on his shirt and say: "I was in your office once with SisterMentors."

After his talk, the President opened up the floor for questions. Hands shot up eagerly since the girls had read the President's biography and were very excited to dialogue with him. Asked to describe Duke's unique attributes, the President responded that it is not what the school has to offer but how students use their time while there. Duke wants students to take initiative and Duke students are unpretentious but smart, he said.

Another girl asked what it is like being President of Duke. The President answered that he sees his job as trying to shape opportunities for students and that Duke gives about eighty-six billion dollars in financial aid to undergraduate students. One of the girls followed up and asked where Duke gets money for scholarships. The President explained that the money comes from gifts over the years and investments in endowments. When one of the girls asked if he stays overnight at the university, President Brodhead smiled and explained that he does not stay in the dormitory but has a house where he lives.

Girls listened eagerly to the President's response about time management, a much-talked about topic in SisterMentors this past year. In response to a question about job stress, the President confided that he has a stress ball to help him alleviate the stress that comes from the challenges and opportunities

presented every day at the university.

One of SisterMentors' ninth graders presented President Brodhead with a gift on behalf of all the girls and they ended their visit by taking pictures with the President. When asked if they would one day like to be president of a university, one of the girls responded: "Yes. I want to be the leader of a place where people go to discover their talents."

## Visit with 19-year-old, Ikee Gardner

"She's smart and brave," said one of the girls after meeting with Ikee Gardner, a 19 year old African American student from Chicago who began Duke when she was 15 years old and graduated this past May with a double major in Economics and English. Another girl said that she learned from Ikee that "anything is possible when you read books." Girls were captivated by this young woman who is a teenager like some of them and who is generous, unpretentious and humble.

Ikee chose Duke after considering other schools to which she had been admitted, including Harvard, Yale and Stanford. Until middle school, she had been home schooled (she prefers the phrase "privately tutored") by her parents. Ikee is a voracious reader and completed a first draft of a 300 page novel. She branched out into spoken-word poetry at Duke, performed at several venues on campus and won an award for her work.

Ikee told the girls that she was honored to meet them and that she was sure that they will all be in excellent places in the next few years. She advised girls to master all their classes in ninth grade, take leadership roles and to make a good plan for college. As for her own plans, Ikee revealed that although she is thinking of going to law school, she is saving up to first take some time off to travel and see the world. One of the girls later described Ikee as "inspiring" and that's exactly the impact SisterMentors hoped that this exceptional teenager would have on the girls in our program.

*"Dear Shireen, Your visit was the high point of my day. I have often had to coax kids that age to talk or show their thoughts --- but your young friends are confident, smart, in short just great. I am very proud of you and your efforts. And guess what: some of those kids WILL come here. Thanks for including me, Dick"*

*Richard H. Brodhead  
President, Duke University*

## Visit to Carolina

"We met with students and experienced the Carolina way. We saw how supportive the school was in dealing with a student's death. We saw how students wanted to stop the war," said one of the girls in describing what she liked when she visited Carolina. The girls were hosted by Dr. Herb Davis, Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions, who was gracious and attentive. In spite of his busy schedule, he generously shared his time with the girls, spending almost the entire day with them.

After a welcome by administrators in the admissions office, girls viewed a short video featuring students telling their stories about why they chose Carolina and their experiences there. Girls were immediately drawn into the images on the screen and captivated by the school spirit on display by students. Carolina spirit was also high on campus that day because the Tar Heels were doing well in basketball and students proudly wore their Carolina colors. After a tour of the campus, girls visited the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History (the Stone Center) and then had lunch in one of the dining halls.

"Carolina was really exciting. The campus was really lively. I liked all the presentations. They also had a lot of school spirit," said one of the girls. Girls also spent part of the afternoon with Dr. Davis, an African American student majoring in Journalism who is a Carolina Covenant Scholar, and Terri Houston of the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs. In response to one of the girls, the student said that Carolina has one of the best journalism schools in the country with award-winning professors and internships for students at places like ESPN. One of the girls asked what is the most rigorous journalism class and he replied that it is media law which tells students the *dos* and *don'ts* of journalism. When asked if college classes are difficult, the student replied that they were difficult at first because he did not heed the advice to sit in front of the classroom and meet with professors. Now he meets with a study group so he can do well on his exams.

Girls then had a very interactive and engaging session with Terri Houston. Ms. Houston explained that her office has been extremely successful in diversifying the campus and that they have one of the highest enrollment rates in the country of students from low-income families. Ms. Houston explained to the girls that society is judging them all the time and that they are going to be judged every moment of their lives, but that as young girls of color they should defy the stereotypes and tell themselves that they are smart and are going to be great. She encouraged girls to consider Carolina since the university offers opportunities that are priceless.

Later that evening girls returned to the Stone Center for a double feature documentary --- two short films, *American Red and Black* and *Unfinished*, which both dealt with race and identity. Girls sat with rapt attention as the films unfolded narratives of people of mixed races. *American Red and Black* revealed stories of people who were both African American and Native American and their struggle to claim their identity and culture. The film *Unfinished*



Girls 10 to 12 Years Old  
on Campus at Carolina

revolved around a young woman whose recently deceased mother was Indian and father was African American. The young woman explained that she grew up caught between two races --- not brown enough or black enough.

"No matter what your race, you should be proud of it." One of the girls said that is the lesson she learned. SisterMentors girls enjoyed the film so much that they could not wait to raise their hands and contribute to the post-film discussion. Girls took on topics such as why kids of the same race and ethnicity all sit together in the cafeteria and which box they check on forms when asked about their race or ethnicity. One girl recounted that her father does not take her seriously when she says that she is African American and responds that indeed she is African American because she is an African born in America.

After the girls' visit, the staff at the Stone Center wrote to us: "Dear Dr. Lewis, EduSeed Staff and Students: "We were sincerely honored and humbled that you took the time to travel to our facility and also share your insights and knowledge with all those in attendance. We were really moved by the honesty, sincerity, poise and intelligence showcased by all the young ladies in attendance and wish you continued success in all that you do."

*"I have determined that I cannot place a value on the gifts of SisterMentors. I have attended some of the best institutions money can buy in this country, but the without the benefits of SisterMentors --- provided to me for zero dollars --- I might well have stopped short of my most important accomplishment to date. When I joined SisterMentors I had already waited for almost a year to gain access to a school to conduct my dissertation research. I was discouraged and demoralized. I wanted to quit. Discovering SisterMentors through a former participant completely changed my course. Even after a month or more in the group, I was not certain of how I would finish, but I began to believe again that I could and would finish."*

Adriane Williams, Ph.D. in Educational Policy Studies  
SisterMentors Graduate, 2008

## 30 Women of Color Doctorates

*Continued from page 1*

She is the first in her family to go to college.

**Jessica Floyd** earned her doctorate in Psychology, at the age of 26, from the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University in New Jersey in May 2008. Jessica's dissertation is titled, *Former Foster Care Individuals' Experiences of Racial/Ethnic Socialization and Identity Development: An Exploratory Study*. Jessica is currently a Psychology Associate at the Reginald S. Lourie Center for Infants and Young Children where she provides play and family therapy, assessment, and consultation services to daycare centers, and supervises intern and practicum students on comprehensive mental health assessments. Jennifer is the youngest woman SisterMentors has helped to get the doctorate.

**Adriane Williams** received her doctorate in Educational Policy Studies from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in May 2008. Her dissertation is titled, *Genuine Invitations: Middle Schools, Parents, and Postsecondary Planning*. She is currently an assistant professor at West Virginia University where she teaches in the College of Human Resources and Education. In addition to teaching graduate students about U.S. educational policy, Adriane teaches courses and conducts research on how poverty affects educational trajectory in the U.S.

## Our Twelfth Graders Prepare for College

Our six twelfth graders are well on their way to preparing for the college application process. Thanks to the generosity of the Diversity Committee at the law firm of Schiff Hardin, they took a preparatory course for the SAT and took the test in March. The instructor was very knowledgeable and caring. Girls took the course seriously and did well on the exam. To challenge themselves even more and to improve their scores, girls took a refresher course in April and retook the SAT in May.

Girls were very enthusiastic about taking the SAT Prep course because they learned material that helps them better understand some of their classes in school. One evening during their SAT refresher class, their excitement for learning the material lead them to rally the instructor to continue beyond the designated end time for an additional round of vocabulary. Most of the girls have also taken the ACT and one of them prepared her college essay this past summer. The goal is for all girls to mail most of their college applications by Thanksgiving.

## Thank You Very Much!

Special thanks to Schiff Hardin, for sponsoring SisterMentors' tenth anniversary celebration and fundraiser, for funding our girls SAT prep class, and for its ongoing generous support. Thanks to Shirley Lukitsch for all of your help.

Thank you to all of our wonderful donors and supporters, including Tracy Gary, Laree Martin, Florrie J. Walker, Richard A. Weibl and Terri Louise Nally, Marcia V. Ellis, Michael Tajchman, Jeff Edwards, Sherry Quirk, Norma Scogin and Keelin Quirk, Kris Miller and Chris Shirley, Dr. Christopher T. Lyon and Arthur L. Coleman, Michael S. Bogdanow, Irving and Gail Stern, Nola B. Klamberg, David S. Eagle, Dr. Bonnie T. Dill, Rebecca J. Selove, Brian Cooley, Martha B. Coven, Dr. Laura G. Daugherty, Laurie Emrich and Gael Murphy, Kaye Bard Paletz, Dr. Sylvia Rimm, Sandra Lanman, Angelina Ifill, The Jerry Taylor and Nancy Bryant Foundation, the Crowell & Morning Foundation, the D.C. Women's Bar Association Foundation, the Stentzel Foundation, Reverend Sylvia Sumter of Unity of Washington, D.C., Episcopal Church Women of Christ Church in East Orange, New Jersey, the Madison Hotel; Fannie Allen, Christopher Anderson of Whole Foods Market, P Street in Washington, D.C.; DJ Kim of Java Green Organic Eco Cafe; the Princeton Review, Davis, Sita and Company P.A. and everyone who donates to us through the Combined Federal Campaign.

Many thanks to our wonderful volunteers: Dawn Nelson,

Sarah Posner, Margerie Sullivan, Megan Adair, Jenevieve Creary, Mary Helen Coleman, Renae Baird, LaShoun Christian, Cherry Powell, John Teschner, Wayne Richardson, Joey Johnson, Shannon Cobb, Reverend Kumari de Sachy, Sraddha Van Dyke, Norma Scogin and Anita Ragan.

Special thanks to everyone at Duke University for making the girls' visit such a wonderful success, including President Richard Brodhead, Linda Orr, Lisa Jordan, Professor Philip Stewart, Professor **Michele** Longino, Kemel Dawkins, Jim Wulforst, Andromeda Connor, Linda Capers, Dean Robert Thompson, Dr. Virginia Steinmetz, Amy Hendricks and Jamie Fleece. And at UNC-Chapel Hill, thanks to Dr. Herb Davis and staff at the admissions office and Brenna Dwyer.

Special thanks to Kimberley Hurley of the Alexandria Office on Women and Libby Delgado for their ongoing help at our annual college visits. Thanks to the Alexandria Office on Women for its ongoing partnership with SisterMentors.

And, as always, very special thanks to the girls in SisterMentors who help organize and run fundraisers, including, Diana Ayala, Cindy Ayala, Ruhama Yared, Alinah Mphofe, Kedest Firdaweke and Margie Obeng. And thanks to all of the SisterMentors women who help fundraise.

# PLEASE SUPPORT SISTERMENTORS

I would like to make a donation to SisterMentors. My donation will help SisterMentors to continue mentoring women and girls of color.

**Choose this:**

## DONATION BY CHECK

Please send your donation by December 20, 2008

Here is my donation of \$250 or more

I cannot give \$250 or more at this time but here is my donation of (please choose one):

\$200

\$175

\$150

\$100

\$50

Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_



Yes, my employer/company has a matching gift program and I have asked them to match my donation to SisterMentors.

**Or choose this:**

## ONLINE DONATION

Please make your donation today

I am making a donation online at [www.sistermentors.org](http://www.sistermentors.org) by clicking on the **DONATE NOW** link and following the instructions.

**Or choose this:**

## DONATION THROUGH CFC

My employer is a federal agency or otherwise participates in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) of the National Capital Area. I am making my donation through CFC by filling out my employer's pledge form and writing in EduSeed's CFC# 90398.

For donations by check, please use the enclosed envelope and make your check payable to EduSeed/SisterMentors and mail to:

**EduSeed/SisterMentors  
1666 K Street N.W., Suite 300  
Washington, D.C. 20006**

*Please remember your donation is tax deductible.*

## Who We Are

SisterMentors is a project of EduSeed, a nonprofit organization located in Washington, D.C. EduSeed's mission is to promote education among traditionally disadvantaged communities such as women and people of color. SisterMentors helps women of color to complete their dissertation and get the doctorate. The women in turn, while in our program, give back to their community by mentoring girls of color in elementary, middle and high schools primarily from low income families. The women and girls are African Americans, Latinas, Asian Americans, and immigrants.

Our goal is to help stop the high drop-out rate among girls of color and increase the number of women of color doctorates.

We believe that doctoral candidates and Ph.D.s of color are excellent role models — and a powerful yet untapped source of knowledge, motivation and inspiration — for children of color at risk of dropping out of school.

We exist because statistics show that more than 50 percent of doctoral candidates drop out of their programs. In 2006, out of 50.8 percent of all women doctorates, only 11.4 percent went to women of color (African American, Latina, Asian American and Native American combined). We also exist because girls of color are dropping out of school at an early age. Our message to girls is to stay in school, do well and go to college.

We have helped 30 women of color to complete their dissertations and get their doctorates since September 1997. We helped send our first group of girls to college in Fall 2007, including to Duke University.

## EduSeed's Board of Directors

We would like to thank Howard Bauleke, one of EduSeed's board members, for his service.

EduSeed's current board members are the following:

- Timothy Boller
- Claudia Cantarella
- Montina Cole
- Shireen Lewis
- Selena Mendy Singleton

## Donate to Us Through CFC

Our umbrella nonprofit organization, EduSeed, was selected to participate in the Combined Federal Campaign ("CFC") this year.

If you have friends who are federal employees in the Washington, D.C. area, please ask them to donate to us through CFC. We are listed in the CFC catalog under **EduSeed**, and our designation number is **90398**. Thanks for your support of our work!!!

## EDUSEED/SISTERMENTORS

1666 K Street N.W., Suite 300

Washington, D.C. 20006

202-778-6424

[www.sistermentors.org](http://www.sistermentors.org)

[www.eduseed.org](http://www.eduseed.org)

Promoting Education Among Women and Girls of Color

*Fall/Winter 2008 Newsletter*