

“UPWARD BOUND”^{PA}

TO A UNIVERSITY DEGREE



KSU's Paulding Site celebrates first year of success

By Joëlle Walls

In fall 2017, Kennesaw State made institutional history in external research funding. It was the first time KSU was awarded not only an Upward Bound (UB) grant, but three of them from the U.S. Department of Education, thanks to the work of KSU Paulding Site Director Anita VanBrackle and Associate Director Dalton Lemelle, Jr.

Totaling more than \$3.9 million over a five-year period, the grants provide academic and cultural enrichment opportunities and mentoring support to participating high school students from Polk and Paulding counties so they can successfully pursue and earn college degrees. Students in the program include those who meet the economic requirements set forth by the U.S. Department of Education or who would be first in their families to attend college.

The UB grants are part of the TRIO programs, federal outreach and student services programs in the U.S. designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

“What a delight to see college dreams begin to develop for students who had never thought

of going to college,” said VanBrackle, who also is professor of elementary and early childhood education. “These three Upward Bound grants promise to help KSU have a lasting and permanent impact with many generations of families, now and in the distant future.”

In the first year, the two Upward Bound programs had a total of 116 students who attend Hiram, Rockmart and Cedartown high schools. Fifty-six students from East Paulding High School were enrolled in the Upward Bound Math-Science program. This grant has the same purpose as the other two, but focuses specifically on strengthening the students’ math and science skills with the aim of them ultimately pursuing degrees in these subjects.

“My son had the fortunate opportunity to be a part of two TRIO programs, one in middle school and one in high school. Both programs prepared my son for college opportunities that I did not know he was capable of accomplishing,” said Lemelle, who is also retired from the U.S. Air Force. “I am so proud of him, and I credit the TRIO programs in his success as he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in aerospace engineering from Tuskegee University.”

Lemelle said that he and VanBrackle handle many of the administrative and reporting tasks associated with managing federal grants, so the directors of the programs can focus their efforts on the high school students along with the academic advisors. In this way, the UB staff has been able to be in the schools, interacting directly with the students during school hours five days a week.



Photos courtesy of KSU's Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math-Science programs





East Paulding High School students attended the Atlanta Science Fair Expo at Piedmont Park.



Upward Bound students participated in a summer academy at KSU to simulate a college experience.

“Being a part of the high schools’ cultures has tremendously impacted our overall success thus far and helped us quickly develop relationships with not only the students, but also the faculty and staff,” Lemelle explained. “Students seeing the UB teams every day gives them a piece of mind that these are people they can count on for guidance. These visits also allow the schools to observe our staff in action so that they know we are all on the same team with one goal – student success.”

“Both the directors and advisors work closely with the students, keep accurate records of each student’s progress and stay in continuous contact with the parents,” added VanBrackle. “Since each Upward Bound program will continue to track the students from college entrance to graduation, we must know each student’s wishes, dreams, problems, and mountains they have to climb. We are a family.”

While the three programs have similar objectives to guide the students on the path to post-secondary education, each director and academic advisor tailors the programs according to the needs identified during their interactions with the students.

“There are no two days alike. We have what’s on our schedule for the day and what is really happening with

students that day,” said Stephen Burns, UB director at Hiram High School. “We work hard to find a balance to give each member the support they may need.”

Christine Smith, the UB academic advisor at Hiram High School, has rearranged her schedule to campaign for students running for student club officer positions, or reviewing and editing student essays on a deadline.

“Upward Bound is more than just a program that meets after school and on weekends,” she said. “It is a personal development tool that guides students to the path of self-discipline, self-worth and an investment in their academic future.”

During the 2017-2018 school year, students participated in workshops on test preparation and career readiness. For example, the Georgia State Finance Commission held a Saturday workshop on financial aid and scholarships. The University of Georgia Testing Services provided a free SAT preparation workshop, which included students taking a mock exam, and learning how to effectively use graphic calculators.

Individual and group advising sessions comprise the heart of the programs. These sessions, lasting between 20 minutes to an hour, provide critical student feedback from grade reviews, goal-setting activities, and career interest surveys.

“I had no one to guide me during my high school and college career and had to financially support myself through that period in my life,” said Christine Murphy, UB director for Rockmart and Cedartown high schools. “This program is a perfect fit! It truly allows for life-changing opportunities for underrepresented students and their families that will open up many doors and ensure success.”

Mary Turner, who serves as the UB academic advisor for the two schools, has seen between six to 20 students in a given day. The conversations have varied from helping students complete college and scholarship applications to candid conversations about academic challenges they faced.

“I try to show my students daily that your history does not define your future,” she said. “No matter who your family is, everyone can achieve their goals if they have the right drive and motivation. There is nothing I want more than for every student I have in my program to achieve their dreams.”

Each program also implemented tutoring, either in-person or online, for the students to help them not only improve grades, but also learn valuable study habits. East Paulding High School, which is the site for the UB

Math-Science program, received additional tutors as a result of the grant to supplement their already existing program taught by the high school teachers.

"The most important thing about Upward Bound to me is meeting the needs of the students. The student always comes first," said Krystina Leverett, who serves as academic advisor for the UB Math-Science program. "Even if I have to bend over backwards to make sure they are safe and have what they need to be successful, I will make sure it gets done."

Each program also provided field trips such as East Paulding students attending the National Collegiate Fair in Atlanta, which was sponsored by the National Association for College Admission Counseling. The students conducted preliminary research on their college choices before speaking to representatives from more than 200 colleges and universities.

"It's only been one year, and we already see positive changes happening with our students," said Cheryl Thomas Hill, UB Math-Science director. "They are moving out of their comfort zones and showing more confidence in and outside of the classroom. They are on their way to becoming our next generation of leaders in STEM fields and other disciplines."

Other trips included Hiram students visiting the National Center for Human and Civil Rights and Rockmart and Cedartown students attending the University of West Georgia's Preview Day.

The students also participated in a six-week summer academy held on KSU's Marietta Campus to simulate a college experience. The students received academic instruction in math, science and English to help them prepare for the next grade level. They also were exposed to electives such as photography, robotics

and independent research, and had the opportunity to tour sites in Washington, D.C. at the end.

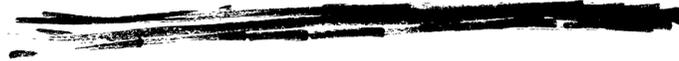
"The summer academy instructors did an exceptional job in preparing the students for their upcoming school year," said Lemelle. "Ending the academy with the Washington, D.C. trip was phenomenal. It was wonderful to see the enthusiasm and excitement of the students, some of whom have never traveled overnight across several states without their families."

As the initiative is halfway through its second year, VanBrackle and Lemelle received additional funding for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs for all four high schools. Each program was awarded \$40,000 to spearhead activities such as computer repair and computer science training and a curriculum-based introduction to robotics and coding.

Juniors and seniors from each program also have the opportunity to be involved with a STEM or STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics) internship program during the summer. Part of the program includes workshops

that will help prepare them for competing in internships/research opportunities with federal agencies and/or universities from across the U.S.

"We must say a special thanks to KSU for providing support to our three TRIO programs, and to the many unsung heroes who have so graciously helped as we have worked our way through the process, including Dr. Ken Harmon who gave us the approval to seek grant funding, and Tonja Lark from the U.S. Department of Education," said VanBrackle. "This support was essential in allowing us to offer so many resources to our students so they can reach for the stars."



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