

# KSU ALUMS WORKING WITH

## UPWARD BOUND

By Heather Hankins

### Coming back home

**C**hristine Smith is a Kennesaw State University alumna and currently serves as the academic advisor for Hiram High School in the University's Upward Bound (UB) program. Smith's job includes recruiting UB participants who meet the program requirements; providing academic and personal counseling; planning, implementing, and chaperoning workshops and trips; advising on college admission and financial aid; recruiting and training summer staff; and completing written student evaluations.

Smith is originally from Paulding County and is a 2012 graduate of Hiram High School. When Smith was younger, she did not think she would return to her high school. Things changed during her attendance at KSU.

"Being a Hiram graduate and now working in the school, for me, feels like I am helping make a difference in the school but also stepping into a time capsule full of memories," said Smith. "Having been a first generation student at Hiram helps when talking to the students because I can relate and sympathize with them in regard to the culture of the school and community in which we live."

Smith started her college experience at Georgia Highlands College (GHC) and graduated with an Associate of Science degree in General Studies in 2016. She then enrolled in the KSU Paulding Site's 2+2 program, which is a partnership between the two institutions in which students complete their first two years at GHC and then transfer to KSU to finish a four-year bachelor's degree. Smith describes this program as "the turning point in my life."

During her time at KSU, Smith worked as a student assistant at the Paulding Site as well as with the UB program at her high school. Smith graduated with



a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology in 2018. After graduation, Smith joined UB as the academic advisor for the program at Hiram High School. She advocates for her less-than-traditional path.

"Choosing to go to a community college first and then transition to a four-year university, for me, is the reason for my success," said Smith. "It's what I encourage students who aren't 100 percent certain where they want to go to school, how they will be able to afford it or plan to work while in school."

Smith also attributes a strong support team, including Bentley L. Gibson of Georgia Highlands, and Dalton Lemelle and Anita VanBrackle of KSU for her success.

Smith loves research and working with students. She credits KSU for developing her interest in both. When she chose a major in psychology, Smith was initially told that she would never get a job. This attitude lasted until her courses with Teresa Neal and Kimberly Watkins at the KSU Paulding Site. She still refers to notes from those courses during her current role.

"Dr. Neal's courses began my newfound love for research, choosing to finish pursuing my bachelor's in psychology, and seeing that there are endless job opportunities with that degree," Smith said. "Aside from the research, seeing the students' progress and desire to pursue degrees in a field they are passionate about is what I love most about my job."

*“I think that my ability to connect with students owes a lot to my degree from KSU...”*

## Using your past to help the future

**M**ary Turner, a 2017 alumna of Kennesaw State University's 2+2 program, now works as a project advisor for KSU's Upward Bound (UB) program at Rockmart and Cedartown high schools. Turner's role with UB addresses many aspects of student life leading up to college – career interest clarification, school applications, SAT preparation, college evaluation and admissions interview preparation.

UB works to give every student an equal opportunity to succeed. Turner believes her students are exceptional, and that their generation will one day change the world.

Turner's background informs her work. She grew up in the Marietta area, and while most of her community was affluent, Turner's family often struggled to get by. Her parents did not have degrees, but emphasized the importance of Turner earning one. Turner was homeschooled throughout high school.

Then, at 16 years old, she decided to obtain her GED certificate and start college. She chose to attend Georgia Highlands College because it was close to home and affordable. While there, Turner completed her associate's degree in psychology and enrolled in the KSU Paulding Site 2+2 program to pursue her bachelor's degree in psychology.

“Upward Bound is really close to my heart because I was one of these students,” said Turner. “I felt like college was unattainable because no one in my family had even graduated high school. However, I came out the other side, and I love working with students and showing them that it is possible to go to college and succeed. When I saw the opportunity to work with students like myself and help them get into college, I knew it was something I needed to do.”



Turner's job as a work-study student at KSU helped her to develop in areas such as public speaking, connecting with students, as well as managing student files and information effectively. In addition to

professional skills, she gained self-confidence, strong relationship skills, leadership qualities and research abilities. Turner is now earning her Master of Science in First-Year Studies and working on her thesis at KSU.

Before her time at Kennesaw, Turner was uncertain about the prospect of research. She had not been exposed too much in the past and did not understand the process. Yet Turner developed an understanding and appreciation of research through her class assignments, her work at the KSU Paulding Site, and her independent research project during senior year.

“I think that my ability to connect with students owes a lot to my degree from KSU,” said Turner. “Understanding developmental and educational needs of students at this stage is something that I owe to my psychology degree.”