

## All About Student Success

Building Relationships on Campus for Student Success

Fall, 2017 issue

### Letter from the Director, Lauren Smith

Welcome to Fall, MHCC Community.

While this year is off and running, it is not without sadness within our department and campus community. This summer, we lost two members of our AVID|LSC and MHCC “family”: Student **Hussain Ahmed Mohammed Alhamzah**, who was killed in a hit-and-run accident this summer, and long-time MHCC Master Tutor **Kevin Booth**, who passed away in late September.

The passing of both these amazing individuals was impactful and heartbreaking to our students and staff alike, along with all whose lives they touched. In times of such loss, you look for meaning and for connection, and I was so touched and proud of our department, campus staff, faculty, and students for coming together during those difficult moments.

The sense of belonging that was created during memorials for both Kevin and Hussain paid tremendous homage to their memory and allowed us to reflect, remember, and heal together.

The cards, memories, and stories that we provided to Kevin and Hussain’s families showed what blessings they were to our lives and the impression that they both left on us. In so many ways, out of loss came a togetherness and a connection that was beautiful.

In memory of both Hussain and Kevin, I dedicate this year to finding new ways to create a sense of belonging between our department and the students we serve. I can’t think of a better way to honor the memory of two

unique, talented, and remarkable human beings, who made every person that they encountered feel that they belonged.

Have a wonderful term and take care of each other.

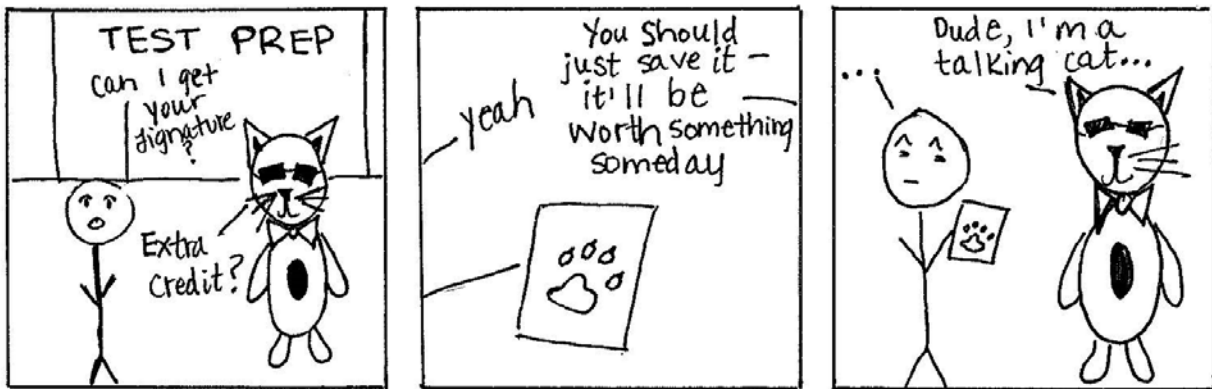
Sincerely,

Lauren

*"Your goal is to help people understand things just as well as you do."*

Master Tutor Kevin Booth to New Tutor Victor Ogelle

AVID/LSC Cat cartoon by Audrey Fisher



## Summer Bridge 2017: An MHCC Success Story,

by Sarah Aimone

In 2014, AVID Center and TRIO-SSS staff noticed a need: How can we help prepare new students to be successful at MHCC before their first day begins?

What if there were a way to connect with students, to not only help them avoid common pitfalls during their first term, but to create a sense of community and belonging?

Out of necessity, Summer Bridge was born: three days of high-engagement workshops designed to boost academic and non-cognitive skills, plus foster a connection to the MHCC campus community.

What began as three days for approximately 20 students in 2014 grew to 152 students during our recent Summer Bridge 2017.

Sponsored by East County Pathways and AVID|Learning Success Center, the event involved 25 staff members from five areas of campus over four days (Sept 11-12 and 14-15) in welcoming these brand-new Saints to our school.



(Photo of students working together in the Town and Gown Room)

Countless hours of planning and training enabled us to facilitate 32 distinct workshops to help prepare our students for their college careers.

Our team was assisted by six current students, one former student, one PSU adviser, plus twelve faculty/staff/administrator volunteers who provided personal experiences, guidance, and laughter.

Approximately 20 friends and family members of our new students joined in on the festivities. Gratefully, we were supported by an unknown number of Facilities' staff members to make the event a reality.

Numbers are wonderful, and look especially good on reports and all kinds of formal things, but I believe it is our heart and personal interest in students that makes the most difference.

The Bridge team talked to every single student on a personal level. We ate lunch with them, talked about their lives, and answered all of their questions. So, what do students have to say about Summer Bridge 2017?

***What I liked best about Summer Bridge was:***

“I learned how to deal with college and become more confident about my studies.”

“The fun activities & community feeling.”

“I made friends and got ideas of what I wanted to do once I start school for clubs and classes.”

“It helped me prepare for college and have me use all of the resources.”

“The staff was awesome. Everyone is so helpful and friendly.”

“How welcoming everyone has been. How much they have offered to help students get through school in the best way possible.”

“They introduced me to important stuff that can be really helpful during my college career.”

“It helped me with a ton of things I didn’t know about the school.”

***What could we do differently to make Summer Bridge better?***

“Nothing. It was perfect.”

“I can’t think of anything except maybe making it even longer, like a week.”



(Photo of Bridge staff and volunteers)

What began in 2014 is now officially known as Bridge Programming at MHCC. Besides Summer Bridge, the AVID|Learning Success Center runs one-day sessions before Winter and Spring terms to make sure that each student receives the necessary information and warm welcome they deserve. This unique program builds relationships, which keeps students coming back to our college. And that is a success worth celebrating.

Sarah Aimone

*Would you like to be a part of future Bridge events, or simply learn more?  
Please reach out to Sarah Aimone, AVID Coordinator:*

*[sarah.aimone@mhcc.edu](mailto:sarah.aimone@mhcc.edu)*

## **Nyasia Grant: A Student's Life Gains Traction in AVID/LSC**

When she arrived at MHCC in the Fall of '16, Nyasia Grant reviewed the assets and liabilities she'd brought with her. Her early life had been challenging.

She'd spent ages five through fourteen in the N.Y. City Foster Care System. No one from her father's side of the family had completed high school. She got a lot of negative messages from adults about her family and about her own prospects.

But she had assets too. Her grandma became her foster parent when she was eleven and legally adopted her when she was fourteen. That woman determined that she would raise Nyasia in a way that would break the cycle of family difficulties.

Nyasia says her grandma had a few unbreakable rules, chief among them that when she came home from school, there would be no "dropping my bags and running out with friends." She was required to sit and get her homework done, then do chores, all before going out. "That taught me to put my priorities in order," she says.

Her grandma was too ill to attend Nyasia's high school graduation, but her mom came, and a variety of mothers and fathers came from her church, all to represent her grandma at the event. Her grandma died when Nyasia was eighteen, but Nyasia's life was now on track. "She made me a wiser person," Nyasia says.

Six months after the death, Nyasia responded to an invitation from her father and stepmother to join them in Portland, and the new life in their home also built on her life assets.

She and her dad re-bonded over the things they both loved, starting with music. Both of them write music, and Nyasia is a talented lyricist. They've joined forces making songs published through her dad's company, "Smoke Dog Productions."

They share a love of computers too. Nyasia began to build on the computer knowledge she'd gained in high school by watching YouTube videos, alongside her father. With the knowledge they gained, they began consulting for friends and repairing friends' computers.



(Nyasia with her dad)

At MHCC, Nyasia initially felt uncertain. She remembered schooling as tiring, frustrating, and not always successful.

The college culture was new, and Nyasia needed still more helping hands. On the advice of the Orientation Center, she was assigned to an AVID Learning Community.

Audrey Fisher, an AVID/LSC Learning Specialist working on the Student Success Program, connected Nyasia with grant money that helped her buy textbooks, pay for her transportation, and contribute to rent at her father's house.

Sean McGinty, her new writing instructor, helped her quickly build confidence as a writer, a crucial skill for her academic progress.

Her College Success Teacher, AVID/LSC Learning Specialist Sarah Aimone, took Nyasia under her wing, finding her a work-study position in the AVID/LSC computer lab.

There, Nyasia immediately felt at home and productive, helping students deal with the ins and outs of Word, Powerpoint, and Excel. When she needed more help and coaching herself for tutoring computer skills, she got it from Technology Skills Specialist Lance Lannigan, and from fellow peer tutors Katie and Jace and DeGoey.

At the end of a long day, Katie and Jace sometimes invite Nyasia home with them, and Katie will give her more coaching on her home computer.

It's all paid off. Nyasia is carrying a 4.0 average, was invited to join the Rho Theta honor society, and has become a new student ambassador for SOAR.

The path into the future is also looking clear. Nyasia plans to transfer with her sociology major from MHCC into the social work program at PSU. "I want to be that social worker for kids in foster care," she says.

Maybe even the liabilities in her earlier life can be turned into the asset of understanding. "I see how the kids are treated," she says, "how they are not listened to. All they want is to be heard and to get the help they need."

After getting the help she herself needed, Nyasia is already speaking to these children in her mind. She tells them, "Some people made you feel low by doubting you or saying things about your family. But even if you are in this position in the moment, it does not define you. It does not limit what you are going to be."



## **Did You Know?**

All students can find support in AVID|Learning Success Center. Unsure where to start? Have your students go to the AVID Center in Room AC 3315; we'll direct them to the writing help, study skills help, "college knowledge," computer skills, or content tutoring help they need.

## Contact Us

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The AVID/LSC website is at: [www.mhcc.edu/lsc](http://www.mhcc.edu/lsc)

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