

Laurel graduate helps other students get to college



*Editor's Note: This guest piece is by Eric Hastings, a 2010 graduate of **Laurel High School** in the **Laurel School District**. Eric is a College Application Month (CAM) volunteer and advocate for college access.*

When I was a senior in high school my parents and I had frank, regular discussions about my college choices and our finances. We were a small blue-collar family from Sussex County who worked hard and believed in ourselves but had realistic concerns for the future. So when I applied to colleges, I had to seriously vet my options against harrowing financial concerns.

My family and I committed countless hours to researching the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), federal loans, private loans, interest rates, and the daunting process of planning the next four years of a life nobody in our family had ever experienced. For the first time, my parents and I were equals – novices in a process

foreign to us. We were exhausted by the end of the winter. Luckily we all were committed and, with their support, I succeeded in enrolling in a great university.

Not everyone has the support system that I have at home, but Delaware's College Application Month (CAM) does all it can to help bridge these types of gaps. Now that I have had the fortune of working on CAM as a research assistant at the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration, I can't stress enough how integral this program is in making future education more realistic to Delaware's youth.

As a CAM volunteer, I share my advice to seniors who mirror the same concerns I had not so long ago. Alongside other volunteers, my work with CAM helps provide students with the resources they need to be prepared.

Having this supportive environment is an undoubtedly necessary component of college access. Without programs such as CAM, I fear that many young people will fall between the widening chasm between their dreams and settling for less due to the daunting process of applying to college. Still, CAM is not enough. In addressing the growing obstacles between young people and a prosperous future, persistence is also key.

Persistence not just from the students but also from educators, community members, and families is necessary to keep students on a path to success after high school graduation. While students may have more tools at their disposal, the problems they face are more expansive than ever. Academic and financial obstacles are everywhere, but young people will push forward if given a fair chance.

I'm grateful to have seen the work that CAM can do to further opportunities for Delaware's youth. At the age of 25, in my first year as a Master of Public Administration graduate student, I continue to hold on to a piece of advice by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that has gotten me to this point: "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of

life and history, there 'is' such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action."

I have always applied this urgency of now to my academics and professional career. Through this way of life, I have become a passionate advocate of college and career readiness for youth. It wasn't long ago that I was in the shoes of our high school students. I understand that their tomorrow is today and we all have a duty to prepare them for it.