



Advise and Ascend: The Georgia College Advising Corps

Advisers (from left) Ryan Carty, Truitt Broome, Ashley Holmes and Mamie Harper

So many students, so little time. With a state student-to-guidance counselor ratio of 400:1, is it any wonder guidance counselors across the state are facing this dilemma daily? Nationwide high school guidance counselors are spread especially thin as their duties have expanded to include assisting students with social, behavioral, and personal problems, providing special services like drug and alcohol prevention and domestic violence awareness, and supporting teachers and administrators by facilitating graduation and end-of-course tests. There is often little time left to assist students with college preparation, especially those students who need special attention.

While many high school students are going on to college, there are still many with potential who are not. These are the students who need someone to explain that help is available and work with them throughout the college-going process.

Now there is a solution to this problem. The Institute of Higher Education, in partnership with the Watson-Brown

Foundation and the National College Advising Corps, has begun an innovative program to recruit and train recent UGA graduates to work full-time as college advisers in selected high schools across Georgia. The Georgia College Advising Corps (GCAC), directed by Libby Morris, works alongside professional high school guidance counselors with the goal of increasing college going by helping first generation, underrepresented, and low-income students enroll in postsecondary institutions that fit their academic profiles.

"I want the students to know that everyone has an option available to them," explains GCAC adviser, Truitt Broome. "We do our best to find the kids who are falling through the cracks." And once these students are found, the advisers work with them both individually and in groups to identify postsecondary options that meet students' needs and desires.

"We are resource coordinators," adds adviser Mamie Harper. "We can't make them do anything, but we provide the resources to help them succeed." In an effort to reach those



Left: Mamie Harper works with students at Westside High School in Augusta, Ga.
Below: Yarbrah Peebles, Ph.D. student and program assistant for GCAC.



students who were especially in need, Harper formed a group at her school called "Generation Next," which targets first generation college students interested in attending college. There are 40 members this year, and 30 have been accepted into a college. Harper had one college accept a student who is a single mother of two children. By identifying a college that would accept and support single mothers, Harper has helped to open a door of opportunity to two generations.

"I wish I'd had 'me' in high school!" jokes Ryan Carty. Adviser Carty spends his days speaking to groups of 80 to 100 students at a time. He has found that college exposure and individualized attention have made the biggest impact on his students. He realized early in the school year that many students didn't value a college education because they didn't understand what it could mean for them and their futures. In an effort to emphasize the importance of higher education, Carty provides students with examples of job opportunities and the salary potential associated with different levels of education.

Adviser Ashley Holmes has an open-door policy at her school. "My office is like a club after school. I have students who hang out and that makes them comfortable, so we can talk about things." Holmes can recall several conversations with students that began with discussions of football and cheerleading but ended with discussions about college options and financial aid. Beyond providing students with access, Holmes has developed special programming designed to attract and inform students about college. She was especially delighted when a student dropped by to tell her he had applied and been accepted to college after listening to her speak at the school's College Night.

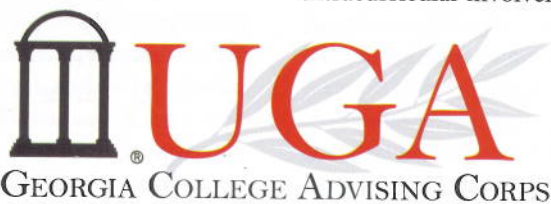
The members of GCAC have also taken to advising organizations how to reach students. Carty serves as an assistant track coach and an adviser to an all-male leadership organization. Broome serves as an adviser for the Collegiate

Candidates program that works in conjunction with the University of Georgia. By working both inside and outside of the classroom, these advisers have been able to develop bonds with students that encourage them to begin the college-going process.

After serving only one year in Georgia high schools, the advisers' impact has been remarkable. Working as an advocate for a student denied admission to Georgia College and State University, Holmes contacted an admissions representative from the college and relayed information about the student's academic potential, extracurricular involvement, and personal circumstances. Her advocacy worked and the student was admitted to the institution. Holmes also suggested the student who needed financial support apply for a scholarship she saw advertised on the NACAC website and provided a letter of recommendation. The student was awarded a \$7000 scholarship.

With the assistance of Carty several students from Meadowcreek High School will be attending the University of Georgia. That number might have been significantly smaller had Carty not arranged for a college tour in the fall semester to expose his students to the college campus with follow-up trips in the spring semester for accepted students and their families.

This group of talented and enthusiastic GCAC advisers is making a difference in high schools throughout Georgia. As the program expands, more and more students will apply and enroll in college, proving that with the right guidance anything is possible. ■



By Betz Kerley