



# Lessons Learned

**Young college students share advice on what they wish they had known earlier about preparing for higher education.**





**C**UNY GEAR UP graduated its first cohort of 1,763 students beginning in June 2005. The majority of these up-and-coming professionals are now sophomores and juniors in public and private colleges and universities in New York State and beyond.

Many of the CUNY GEAR UP alumni knew as children that they would attend college, while others developed the goal to attend college in middle or high school, often after participating in a GEAR UP-sponsored event. What both types of scholars could agree upon were the benefits of earning a college degree and the importance of learning about college very early in life.

We asked these future leaders what they wish they had known about college as a middle school student. They were more than happy to share their thoughts with you...

## **Jana Kasperkevic**

JUNIOR, BARUCH COLLEGE (CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK — New York, New York)

MAJOR(S): POLITICAL SCIENCE AND CREATIVE WRITING/JOURNALISM

MINOR: GRAPHIC DESIGN

FUTURE CAREER: INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT

### ***What would you tell a middle school student about college?***

First and foremost, while it might seem to you at the moment that college is ages away, it is not. It's also not what you expect. College isn't really all about studying. It's about learning. Learning that takes place both inside and outside of class. It is here that you realize what life is about and who you really are. It's truly an experience of a lifetime and you shouldn't rob yourself of it.

### ***What do you wish you had done in middle school to prepare for college?***

I wish I read a little bit more. Not because I feel my reading skills are not up to par with those of other college students, but because I wish I knew more things before coming here. I always believed that you learn mostly through reading. Reading is essential to surviving in college.

## **Britney Watson**

JUNIOR, UNIVERSITY OF BRIDGEPORT — Bridgeport, Connecticut

MAJOR: GRAPHIC DESIGN; MINOR: PSYCHOLOGY

FUTURE CAREER: UNKNOWN AT THE MOMENT

### ***What do you wish you had done in middle school to prepare for college?***

I wish I would have started looking at schools earlier than when I did so that I could have prepared myself better and opened myself up to numerous opportunities of different schools.



## Omar Lewis

JUNIOR, PENN STATE UNIVERSITY — State College, Pennsylvania

MAJOR: FILM AND IST TELECOMMUNICATION

FUTURE CAREER: DIRECTOR AND RADIO PRODUCER

### **What would you tell a middle school student about college?**

I would tell a middle school student to find out more about college — to think about it at least.

### **What do you wish you had done in middle school to prepare for college?**

I wish I had spoken to my mom about it. I didn't even really want to go to college until it was almost time.

### **What most surprises you about attending college?**

How much freedom you actually have, which is a bad thing at first, but it gets better as the semester progresses.

## Stella Katsipoutis

JUNIOR, PACE UNIVERSITY — New York, New York

MAJOR(S): PSYCHOLOGY, ENGLISH; MINOR(S): JOURNALISM, WOMEN'S STUDIES

FUTURE CAREER: MAGAZINE EDITOR

### **What do you wish you had done in middle school to prepare for college?**

In order to prepare for college, I wish that I had taken a few more challenging courses in middle school. By taking more challenging courses in middle school, you are then able to take even more challenging courses in high school, for which you can receive college credit. Taking classes for college credit in high school has helped me tremendously in college, and I wish that I could have taken more of those courses.

## Jhanna Perez

JUNIOR, MANHATTAN COLLEGE — Bronx, New York

MAJOR: MANAGEMENT

FUTURE CAREER: HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER

### **What most surprises you about attending college?**

Unlike middle school or high school that usually have all local kids attending them, in college people come from all over the state, and even other states. I found out that there have been people who live in other boroughs that know people I know. It's unbelievable how you have connections that you had no idea existed.

# So what can I do now to get ready for college?

**Tell your family and friends** that you are planning to attend college and ask for their support in reaching your goal.

**Speak with your school counselor** and ask whether you are in the right classes in order to take college preparatory classes when you enter high school.

**Ask all of your teachers** about what steps you can take in class to improve your grades. Colleges look at your grades when deciding whether to accept you.

**Sign-up** for at least one extra-curricular activity that interests you. Your school counselor, teachers, and principal can help you find the right program if you are not sure what is offered in your neighborhood.

**Search the Internet** for at least one college or university program that interests you. Request a brochure about the college and when it arrives in the mail, read it from cover to cover with a family member.



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The New York State Higher Education Services Corp. (HESC) is the state agency that has been designated by Gov. George E. Pataki to administer the NYGEAR-UP program. HESC helps people pay for college by providing a comprehensive range of financial aid services, including the Tuition Assistance Program, guaranteeing student loans, offering guidance to students, lenders and colleges, and administering the nationally recognized New York's College Savings Program. New York State is a leader in the national financial aid community, providing more grant money to college students than any other state in the nation.

*Here are some websites that can help you GEAR UP for college!*

**CUNY College Now**  
[www.collegenow.cuny.edu](http://www.collegenow.cuny.edu)

Take classes for high school and college credit while you are still in high school!

**Know How 2 Go**  
[www.knowhow2go.org](http://www.knowhow2go.org)

Hear from other students and families like you about how they succeeded in going to college!

**Higher Education Services Corporation**  
[www.hesc.com](http://www.hesc.com)

HESC is the New York state agency that helps people pay for college.

**Upromise College Savings Plan**  
[www.upromise.com](http://www.upromise.com)

A 529 savings plan specifically designed to help families pay for a child's education.

**CollegeBoard**  
[www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)

A college information site that is best known for its PSAT, SAT, and AP programs that help students get into college.

**Education Planner**  
[www.educationplanner.com](http://www.educationplanner.com)

A very informative college and career planning site.

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For more information on how you can prepare for college and the CUNY Middle Grades Initiative/GEAR UP, please contact:

**Donna Linderman**  
*Project Director*  
646.344.7352  
[donna.linderman@mail.cuny.edu](mailto:donna.linderman@mail.cuny.edu)

**Ciji Portis**  
*Project Coordinator — Advising and Counseling Services*  
646.344.7354  
[ciji.portis@mail.cuny.edu](mailto:ciji.portis@mail.cuny.edu)

**Sarah McConnell**  
*Project Coordinator — Academic Support Services*  
646.344.7353  
[sarah.mcconnell@mail.cuny.edu](mailto:sarah.mcconnell@mail.cuny.edu)

<http://mgi.cuny.edu>