



## LOSFA Near Peer Mentors Offer Insight to Louisiana Students during Application Season



The month of October marks an essential month for Louisiana students, especially high schools seniors. Starting on October 1, 2017, the 2018-2019 Free Application for Federal Student Aid opened for students to complete or renew their

applications. In addition to marking the opening of the FAFSA, October is also Louisiana College Application and Access Month, or LCAAM. During LCAAM, LOSFA staff collaborates with key education partners across the State of Louisiana to assist Louisiana students with completion of applications for post-secondary admissions.

As LOSFA staff travel across the state to assist Louisiana students with applications, there are three invaluable staff who may attend these LCAAM events: LOSFA's Near Peers Darius Spurlock, Isabel Reyes, and Oscar McClain. These Near Peers are current college students who come from similar backgrounds and statuses as many of the students served by LOSFA. They are familiar with the stressors of being recent high school graduates and current college students. As such, they are in a unique position to offer advice and insight to Louisiana students and parents.

"It is beyond a doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience."

*Immanuel Kant*

Here's how they responded to "If I had known then what I know now..."

### *Darius Spurlock*

If I had known what I know now, I would have researched more colleges and universities during my junior and senior years of high school. Now, as a current junior in college, I believe that I made a great decision, but there were many schools that I could have also considered. Thus, my advice to other students would be to be open-minded, research post-secondary institutions, and apply to different colleges and universities that they are interested in. If worried about the costs of applying to different institutions, students should utilize some of the resources available to them to reduce or cover the costs of college applications. Some post-secondary institutions accept the NACAC Request for Application Fee Waiver Form, which allows students to have their application fees waived for those institutions. In addition to the NACAC form, students should speak to college access representatives or financial aid representatives to inquire about programs or initiatives that pay for their college application fees, if eligible.

As a Near Peer, I am able to share my advice about college with high school seniors, and I have found that my role is very important. Many students prefer to hear about college from actual college students. Whether at an FSA ID workshop or Match and Fit event, I receive similar questions from students regarding

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general preparation, financial aid, and the degree of complexity within certain classes and majors. Some students even ask about my experience as a minority at a PWI, or Predominantly White Institution. I love assisting the students of Louisiana, and being a Near Peer allows me to support students who often do not otherwise have access to college access and financial aid resources.

### *Isabel Reyes*

Applying to colleges was such an exciting time for me. It was like applying for a new chapter in my life or a new adventure! I have learned a lot of new information during my experience as a college student who has attended a variety of post-secondary institutions. I attended the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and Baton Rouge Community College before attending Louisiana State University. Through my experiences at all three institutions, I gained new insights on the different environments that I am able to offer the students that I work with as a Near Peer. If I had known what I know now, I would have attended a community college immediately after graduation before attending a 4-year university. It would have been the best fit for me, and it is critical that students find their post-secondary fit.

Now, as a Near Peer, I am able to discuss my insights and experiences at the three post-secondary institutions with students in addition to continuously evolving in my position. As a Near Peer, I love having the opportunity to meet students from across the state of Louisiana and supporting them on their journeys to post-secondary institutions. Through my position, I have also learned so much about financial aid and college access that I even help students when I'm not at work. In fact, there have been occasions in which I was wearing a LOSFA shirt and people have approached me with questions. Because of the experience and knowledge gained in my role as a Near Peer for LOSFA, I was able to answer their questions, and that is so amazing to me.

### *Oscar L. McClain*

During my senior year, I applied for colleges, completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and got accepted into all of the colleges that I applied for. I decided to attend Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge. Since starting college, I have accomplished great things. Still, looking back, I realized that I could have done some things differently.

When I was in high school filling out college applications, I only applied for institutions in Louisiana. I thought that it would be best for me because I did not want to lose my TOPS (Taylor Opportunity Program for Students) award. However, with my excellent performance in high school, I would have been able to attend institutions outside of Louisiana at no cost to me. Because of this, I encourage other students to apply to every college that they are considering, regardless of where it may be. Applying to both in-state and out-of-state institutions will allow them to see everything that is available to them.

In addition to the great things I have accomplished at Southern University and A&M College, I have accomplished great things as a Near Peer mentor with LOSFA. For me, the experience has been phenomenal. As a Near Peer, I have been given the opportunity to visit schools across the state, talk to students about my transition from high school to college, and encourage them to strive for their dreams. During my time as a Near Peer, I have realized the importance of my role because students enjoy having mentors in their lives, and I have motivated many students to overcome the adversity that they may face in their lives. That means a lot to me.

We are fortunate to have these exceptional young adults on our team. They are shining examples of the importance of the work we do.

Best, S.

## Louisiana GEAR UP Students Celebrate National GEAR UP Week

*The article below was featured in the GEAR UP Digest, which is a weekly national publication circulated by the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP). NCCEP is a national organization that serves as the voice of GEAR UP in Washington D.C.*

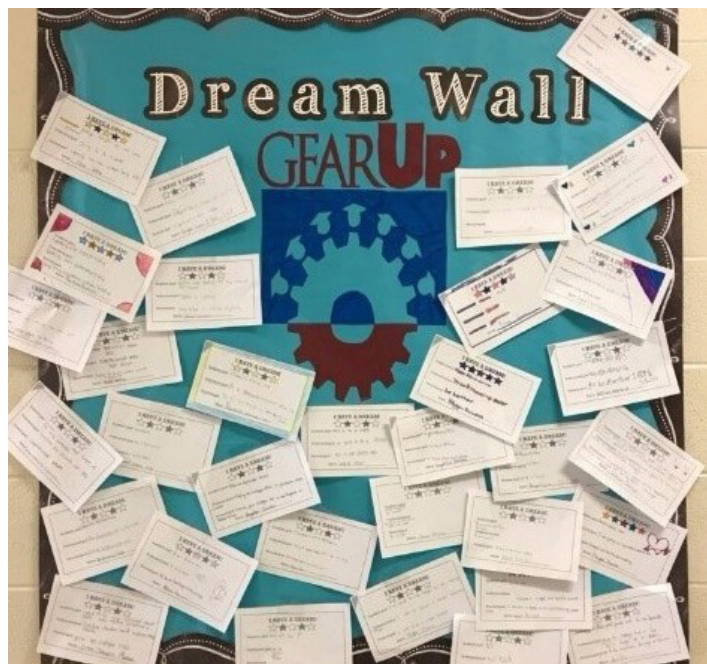
In Louisiana (see images above), National GEAR UP Week was filled with celebration for GEAR UP students. Middle and high school GEAR UP students participated in creative activities and programs that

highlighted the impact GEAR UP has in their lives. Some of the activities included placing their dreams and aspirations on Dream Walls, playing GEAR UP Bingo, creating college-themed classroom doors, and attending the Financial Literacy for You (FLY) Tour, which is a dynamic theatrical presentation that focuses on financial awareness, academic performance, and college preparation. In addition, Governor John Bel Edwards proclaimed September 17-23, 2017 as GEAR UP Week in Louisiana!



**Scotlandville Middle Pre-Engineering Academy students pose alongside Khristopher Hobbs and their school coordinator, Stephanie McCoy, after their National GEAR UP Week Celebration.**

**Students at Park Forest Middle School posted their dreams and aspirations on their Dream Wall for the entire school to see.**



## LOSFA Hosts First Fall FLY Tour to Educate Louisiana Students

The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance hosted its first Fall FLY (Financial Literacy for You) Tour from September 18-21, 2017. The FLY Tour, which is usually held in early spring, is a dynamic theatrical presentation designed to provide middle school and high school students with information and resources related to financial awareness, academic performance, and college preparation.

The live performances, which are written and performed by LOSFA staff, were hosted at four post-secondary institutions: Central Louisiana Technical Community College-Alexandria, the University of Louisiana at Monroe, Southeastern Louisiana University, and Dillard University. Over 700 middle school and high school students from the following school systems attended the Fall FLY Tour: Sabine, Algiers Charter Schools Association, Monroe City, St. John the Baptist, Calcasieu, Madison, East Feliciana, and Orleans ReNew.

The students thought the creative skits and songs were entertaining and informative. Topics that the FLY Tour focused on included the FAFSA, the ACT, TOPS, money management, college preparation, and academic performance.

"The performance was nice, and it was very entertaining. I learned more information about the FAFSA like the website, and I learned that I can complete the FAFSA in October," Johnnesha Cameron responded when asked about her experience at the FLY Tour performance at Southeastern Louisiana University.

In addition to learning new information during the FLY Tour performance, the students were given guided tours of the post-secondary institutions. For some students like Cameron, a senior at ReNew High School, it provided an opportunity to learn new information and tour one of her prospective institutions.

We asked students to give their most important takeaways from the 2017 Fall FLY Tour, and here are some of their responses:

"Doing the college applications on time."

"The information about TOPS and different programs."

"It was very informative. It was nice to learn about new information about TOPS and the required ACT scores for TOPS."

"Signing up for the ACT."

"It was most informative to hear about financial aid."

"The performance was good. It taught me a lot of new stuff that I didn't know like I can get more scholarships by just applying. Also, if I don't know what I want to do when I grow up, I can go to a website called Unlock My Future, and it'll help me."

"I think it was awesome. I liked the performance. I learned more information about college and the ACT scores required for TOPS."

"The FAFSA was important. It gave me information on how to earn money."

"The focus on middle school preparation."

"I thought it was great. It helped us to learn what we need to do to prepare for college."

"Ways you can improve your ACT to attend college."

"Learning more about TOPS."

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## LOSFA Hosts First Fall FLY Tour to Educate Louisiana Students *(continued)*

"I loved the performance because it was very educational and fun. I also learned a lot of new information about TOPS Tech and LOSFA."

"Taking the correct steps needed to apply for college."

"I learned a lot about how to do my application for FAFSA and financial aid. It was fun, funny, and it kept my attention. It was great!"

"The ACT score we need to apply for Dillard."

"I learned that the time and effort that you put into preparing for college is important."

"To work hard and to listen."

"How she talked about pre-algebra prep."

"The college credits information was important."

"You have to work hard, study, and make good grades."

"I learned a lot of stuff that I didn't know about college preparation, TOPS, and the required ACT scores for TOPS."



# Fall FLY Tour 2017





## LOSFA Staff Represented Their Alma Maters on National #WhyApply Day

National #WhyApply Day was September 22, 2017, and it kicks college application season off. LOSFA Staff participated in National #WhyApply Day by wearing college gear to showcase their alma maters and sharing their insights on attending and graduating from college.

*Dr. Sujuan Boutte:* I encourage you to apply for college so that you can get focused on what you do best, get even better at it, and become skilled enough to get paid to do what you love to do.

*Jack Hart:* I encourage you to apply to college because by furthering your education, you can become qualified to do something that you like and provide a better quality of life for your family and yourself.

*Tiera LeBlanc:* I encourage you to apply for college because college may open doors of opportunity for you. Additionally, not only does college provide you with advanced knowledge and training, but it also provides you with a support system of fellow students, professors, and administrators who will motivate you to excel in all aspects of your life.

*Brandi Morrison:* Being a college graduate has helped prepare me for my career. For me, gaining an education was the key to my success.

*Cassandra Watson:* Being a college graduate allowed me to have better career opportunities.

*Breanna Paul:* Being a college graduate allowed me to pursue my dreams and build the foundation for a better future.

*Deborah Paul:* I was a first-generation college student, and I applied to college because my oldest sister went to college. She started a family tradition of attending Southern University where six of our eight siblings attended and graduated. Now, we have a third generation family member enrolled at Southern University at Baton Rouge.

*Brittani Williams:* I was a first-generation college student, and I applied to college because my younger siblings looked up to me to show them the way to go.



# LOSFA's Social Media Sites



<http://www.facebook.com/LOSFA>



<http://www.twitter.com/LOSFA>



<http://www.youtube.com/LOSFA1000>



<http://instagram.com/LOSFA001>



For more information, contact the  
Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance  
A program under The Board of Regents

By Phone: 800-259-5626

By E-mail: [custserv@la.gov](mailto:custserv@la.gov)

By Mail: P.O. Box 91202,  
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-9202

Web Address: [www.osfa.la.gov](http://www.osfa.la.gov)



For submissions, opinions, or comments for the LOSFA LOOP, please  
contact Gus Wales at [Gus.Wales@la.gov](mailto:Gus.Wales@la.gov).