



Press Clippings  
July 2016  
Print

July 7, 2016 — 8:38am

## **Breakthrough Philadelphia helps students go to college**

by Dale Mezzacappa

When Derrick McLean was in 6th grade at A.B. Day Elementary School in Mount Airy, his mind wasn't focused on whether he would ever attend college.

But that changed one day when someone came to his school to talk about a special program being offered to the students. Sure, it would require him to give up part of his summer and one day a week after school. But the idea appealed to him.

"I was excited to do it," he said. "I wasn't necessarily the best student at the time, but I wanted to better myself so I could excel and become more advanced."

McLean, barely 12 years old at the time, became the only student at Day that year to sign up for a program called Breakthrough of Greater Philadelphia. Begun in 1995 at Germantown Friends School as a branch of a national program called Summerbridge, it recruits promising middle school students in disadvantaged schools and supports them to complete their education and enroll in college.

"I was a sponge absorbing information," said McLean, who graduated last month from Bodine High School for International Affairs and is on his way to Mansfield University in north-central Pennsylvania. "We took trips to Washington, D.C. It was good because it had a fun aspect and was a learning environment at the same time."

Breakthrough is one of several similar organizations that operate in Philadelphia, and it is one of the oldest. In its more than two decades of existence, it has helped hundreds of students, most from families without a background in going to college.

The Philadelphia chapter is part of the Breakthrough Collaborative, which operates 33 sites in 26 cities across the country. The Philadelphia chapter identifies students in 6th grade, helps them get into selective city high schools, and guides those who stay with the program – most students do – to get into college. Now, it is embarking on a new initiative to help them stay there and graduate.

About 60 to 65 students are recruited each year from schools near the program's two sites, one at GFS and the other at Drexel University. Last month, 48 students who are graduating high school, including McLean, participated in a graduation ceremony at

Drexel.

Robbin Smart, Breakthrough's newly hired executive director, said that 92 percent of the students who participate enter college prep high schools, 94 percent are attending four-year colleges and universities, and 84 percent persist through sophomore year.

Smart and David Kern, Breakthrough board chair, said that the organization is now dedicating more energy to following students through college. For starters, that will include sending care packages and getting them mentors. It has created an alumni association to facilitate keeping in touch.

"We are trying to raise money to help with this," said Kern, who is director of the lower school at Penn Charter in East Falls, a K-12 Quaker school.

"Breakthrough does two things that are really different," said Smart, who formerly worked in admissions for Girard College and as deputy CEO for New Foundations Charter School. "Our enrichment program is different; we follow students for six years. We give them the skills necessary to go to college, and I believe to persist through college."

The other component that distinguishes Breakthrough from most groups like it, she said, is "training the next generation of teachers to obtain best practices and succeed in the environment of urban education."

One of the ways that the program pursues that second goal – promoting the development of K-12 teachers – is through its Teaching Fellow internship. College students are hired to help with the summer program. Some of them know they want teaching careers and others may be persuaded.

Almost all the Breakthrough participants come from District and charter schools in Philadelphia; a handful attend Catholic schools. Occasionally, benefactors will help a student enroll in a private school.

One of those students is Avione "Ivy" Williams, 18, who was recruited for Breakthrough while attending the Overbrook Education Center in West Philadelphia. She went to Bodine for her freshman year, but then transferred to Springside, a private girls' school in Chestnut Hill (now merged with boys' Chestnut Hill Academy).

"I always wanted to go to a private school, and they found a sponsor willing to pay for me to go," she said.

Now preparing to enter Bowdoin, a small liberal arts college in Maine, she intends to go to medical school and is considering becoming an orthopedic surgeon, a plastic surgeon, or an obstetrician-gynecologist. "I am open to any options in the medical field," she said.

Asia Kaiser, 18, was at Masterman when she got involved with Breakthrough during the summer after 6th grade. She will be attending Princeton University.

Of Breakthrough, she said, “Their summer program was really helpful in teaching me better study habits and making me more focused.”

Ainya Gray, recruited from Andrew Hamilton Elementary School in West Philadelphia, will attend **Peirce College in Philadelphia**. She hopes to become a paralegal and “work my way up” in the legal profession. She helps to take care of her sick mother, so she decided to stay close to home.

“From the moment I walked in, a lot of people had the same mindset,” said Gray, 18, who also attended Bodine. She said she was one of those students who loved learning, going to school, and participating in enrichment activities. Breakthrough had all those characteristics.

The application process, she recalled, is rigorous; she wrote several essays, one about how taking care of her mother “helped build up my character as a person. Breakthrough seemed like the right program for me.”

And the college guidance component is focused and detailed.

“It prepares you for college financially, mentally, and academically,” said McLean. “We applied to colleges in the summer; it also taught me how to look at loans and choose the right loan and the wrong loan. It’s also making sure I’m ready and choosing the right college for me, not necessarily the best college in the world, but the right college for me.”

The Philadelphia chapter’s origin at Germantown Friends more than 20 years ago started when several of the elite Quaker school’s leaders were looking for ways to make life and education better for students who lived in its neighborhood. GFS had committed to staying in Germantown and is just blocks from some of the city’s most low-income schools. One of those was Pastorius, on Cheltenham Avenue.

Kern, who was the middle school principal at GFS at the time, was involved in the genesis.

“I helped the middle school close its classrooms so Summerbridge could come in. I’ve been with the program since,” he said.

Peggy Greenawalt, then a GFS parent and trustee, remembers running into Pastorius’ dynamic but beleaguered principal, who was trying to find ways to enhance the lives of her students, nearly all of whom were from families living in poverty.

Greenawalt soon committed herself to find ways to get kids at Pastorius a better education.

“The kids at GFS had resources nobody else had. I started by arranging field trips to the Franklin Institute and other places that would be intellectually stimulating; I said this is what I do with my kids. But then I realized that this kind of approach did little to change

the trajectory of somebody's life," she said.

At the same time, a GFS graduate was pushing to start a Summerbridge chapter at GFS, Greenawalt said, and "this sounded like an opportunity to be more focused in your attention and have outcomes that were measurable, instead of just providing a happy experience."

She is particularly interested in the mission to create a new generation of urban teachers. Her son, Matt, now teaches in the New York City public schools after getting his start as a Summerbridge teacher while at GFS.

"He's been teaching 8th-grade math for 10 years," Greenawalt said. "I just keep thinking, one good teacher can change the lives of 100 kids."

McLean hopes to fulfill the promise of the program in both of its goals. At Mansfield, he will study to become a math teacher. He will start as a Breakthrough teaching intern this summer.

"I want to be a teacher," he said. "Growing up, I realized I only had one African American male teacher, which doesn't seem that noticeable. But it had a huge impact on me."

He hopes to come back to teach in a low-income neighborhood.

"A lot of African American young males grew up without fathers, and African American male teachers or mentors play a huge part in their lives," he said.

Plus, "I love math, and I feel like I can give that back to my students."



Jul. 7, 2016 11:37 am

## Peirce College wants to make it super easy for IT pros to get a bachelor's degree

**Brian Finnegan** is aware of the glass ceiling that many IT professionals face when they don't have the proper degree to back up their skills and experience.

Even when IT professionals have extensive on the job training or industry standard certifications, they find that they can only move so far up in the business world without a bachelor's degrees, said Finnegan, an associate dean at Center City's **Peirce College**.

That's why Peirce launched a new IT program. It's an effort to offer students a faster, more affordable and more useful path to a bachelor's degree. Called the CBE (Competency Based Education) Information Technology Bachelor's Degree program, it will launch in the fall with a cohort of roughly 30.

"We expect students to come with a lot of material already mastered, whether on the job or through their own independent passion of information technology," Finnegan said. "I think it represents a new opportunity to not waste time or money to get the opportunity to demonstrate what you have already learned in the trenches."

The program is the first of its kind in Philadelphia, the school said. It's also one of the few programs we've seen that focuses on IT professionals without an undergraduate degree — a population that is largely ignored for those working on the sexier side of tech (read: startups). It feels like a natural partner with the **Urban Technology Project's Digital Service Fellowship**, which trains high school graduates in IT and prepares them for the workforce.

The CBE program, which is offered completely online, allows students to primarily focus on what Peirce believes are the necessary skills when entering the IT workforce. These skills include data management, databases, programming and networking (the IT kind, not the hand-shaking kind). Peirce says this program will also equip students with essential professional skills that land outside of the IT realm such as ethics, professional communication and critical thinking skills. Having a combination of both these hard and soft skills are essential especially in the IT field — it creates a more humanistic

experience in a profession that is so focused on hardware and devices.

Students pay a flat per-semester tuition rate at \$3,000 (after fees). There is no limit to how many credits can be earned during a semester. This model allows students to work at their own pace. There is no waiting around to start another class once you finish.

“You just pay one fee and you can learn as much as possible,” said Peirce Vice President of Academic Advancement **Rita Toliver-Roberts**.

This isn't the first time Peirce has experimented with offering students more flexibility. The Fall 2016 launch of the CBE program follows the implementation of **Peirce Fit**, an initiative that allows Peirce students to decide, on a day to day basis, whether or not they want to attend classes online or on campus.

In regards to other CBE degree programs, Peirce College is looking at healthcare and business degrees as potential candidates.



## KU Council of Trustees appoints new officers

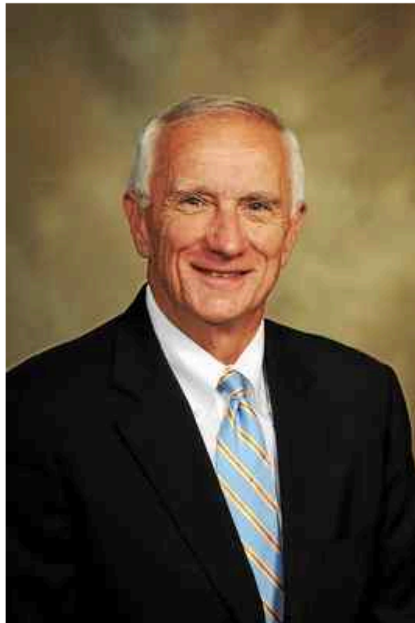


Photo courtesy of Kutztown University Dr. Charles Blocksidge, appointed chair of the trustees

*By KU University Relations*

POSTED: 07/08/16, 12:18 PM EDT | UPDATED: 3 WEEKS, 2 DAYS AGO

0 COMMENTS

The Kutztown University Council of Trustees has appointed new officers for the 2016-2018 academic years.

Dr. Charles Blocksidge '65 has been appointed the chair of the trustees, Tom Heck has been appointed vice chair, and Dianne Lutz has been appointed secretary

Blocksidge served in multiple capacities at the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) and retired as executive director of government relations and special projects.



He was also CACC's executive director of the college's workforce alliance as well as vice president of organizational development and executive assistant to the president. Prior to CCAC, Blocksidge held administrative positions in a number of school districts, including superintendent and principal of an elementary, middle and high school. He also worked in county government as the director of budget and finance for Allegheny County. Additionally, he has taught as a member of the adjunct faculty at CCAC and the Graduate School at Robert Morris University.

Blocksidge received a bachelor of science in education from Kutztown State College, a master's from Duquesne University and a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. He also completed additional graduate work at Temple University.

Blocksidge was inducted into the Kutztown University Athletics Hall of Fame for football in 1979 and was recently named to the 1960s All-Decade Team. He has served on the KU Council of Trustees since 2009. He was vice chair the past two years, and is succeeding Jack Wabby '68.

Heck is the owner of Heck Brothers. With locations in Reading and Wyomissing, Heck Brothers, a third-generation family-owned business, has been a full service florist serving Reading and the Berks County area for 109 years.

Heck is **a graduate of Peirce College in Philadelphia.**

Heck was a member of the KU Foundation Board from July 2002 through June 2011 and has served on the KU Council of Trustees since June 2012. He was secretary the last two years.

Lutz is managing director and registered representative of Concert Wealth Management, Inc., San Jose, California, and Dinosaur Securities, New York and London. She is the president and founder of Dianne Mae Financial, Sinking Spring, since 2014, serving institutions and individuals. She began her investment management career in 1987 at E.F. Hutton & Co., Wyomissing, and stayed with the firm until 2014 when she left Morgan Stanley as first vice president and senior investment management consultant. She achieved CIMA (Certified Investment Management Consultant) certification in 1997 at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania through IMCA (Investment Management Consultants Association).

Lutz is also co-owner of Pappy G's, Inc., Sinking Spring, where she is vice president/treasurer/secretary. Pappy G's, Inc., also known as the American House of Fritztown and Pappy G's Tavern, was formed in 1998 by Lutz and her husband.

Lutz attended Reading Area Community College and Albright College, majoring in liberal arts/business and accounting. She also served on various boards and committees including six terms as vice chair of the Berks County Republican Committee from 1994-2005.

end articleparagraph1.pbo start articleparagraph1.pbo

Lutz was also previously employed in positions at Gilbert Associates, Reading; Construction Fasteners, Inc., Wyomissing; Hickory Farms, Wyomissing, and Community General Hospital; and The Reading Hospital & Medical Center, Reading.

Lutz has been a member of KU's Council of Trustees since 2001. She was chair from 2008-2010, vice chair from 2006-2008 and secretary from 2004-2006.

Each of the 14 Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education universities has an 11-member Council of Trustees, which carries out board policy and deals with a variety of local issues. The council must have at least two alumni members and one student representative. Members of the council are appointed by the governor of Pennsylvania for a six-year term and are eligible for reappointment. The chancellor is an ex-officio member of every individual university Council of Trustees in the State System.



## **Another Voice: Why police officers get the benefit of the doubt**

By A. Benjamin Mannes

The horrifying carnage in Dallas following the recorded police shootings in Louisiana and Minnesota has once again brought forth a heated, racially charged debate on police use of force in America.

The Black Lives Matter movement and related groups have painted the police shootings of African-Americans as an epidemic of racism. The “killer cop” narrative is often in direct conflict with the evidence that is later made public when an investigation is completed.

In Ferguson, Mo., two autopsies, a state investigation and a federal investigation concluded that Mike Brown assaulted the police officer who took his life. In New York, the media and protesters focused on Eric Gardner’s saying “I can’t breathe” and attributed his death to an unauthorized choke hold administered by a far smaller police officer.

However, expert grand jury testimony showed that it was Gardner’s obesity and bad heart that contributed to his death. If the police had administered a true “choke hold” on him, he would not have been physically able to resist arrest and say “I can’t breathe.”

So why is the public, through the media, so quick to judge the police?

Consider these facts:

- The law enforcement community functions with intense oversight and scrutiny, from internal affairs to inspectors general, to civilian oversight boards, to elected mayors and their appointed police executives.
- The average law enforcement officer undergoes a background investigation, psychological exam, months in a training academy and a year of both probation and field training.
- Lastly, if the news footage from the scene at Dallas showed anything, it’s that being a member of a public safety agency or military shows how little racist one can be.

Dallas officers, white, black or brown, were rushing to protect their fellow officers and the very protesters who cursed their name that night. These men and women volunteer to take a job with marginal pay to serve the very communities that are demonizing them as you read this.

It may not be “cool” or “progressive” to side with law enforcement, but it’s hard work and they deserve the respect they have earned by raising their hand to take a dangerous position of public service in the very communities accusing them of hatred.

The metrics and independent, scientific evidence support these statements, So what will it take to get people to take a breath and let the process play out before staging knee-jerk protests, fueled by a competitive, ad-driven media, that tie up valuable police resources that can be spent preventing and responding to violence in underserved communities without any regard for potential facts or outcomes?

**A. Benjamin Mannes serves on the Criminal Justice Board at Peirce College in Philadelphia.**

# THE MORNING CALL

## Hires and promotions at Lehigh Valley businesses



Ervin (HANOVER VIEW ANIMAL HOSPITAL / CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)



ADVERTISEMENT

### Related



SEP. 16, 2009

### **CHARLES BLOCKSIDGE, TOM HECK and DIANNE LUTZ**

Blockside has been appointed the chair of the trustees of the Kutztown University Council of Trustees, Heck has been appointed vice chair and Lutz has been appointed secretary.

Blockside served in multiple capacities at the Community College of Allegheny County and retired as executive director of government relations and special projects. He was also CACC's executive director of the college's workforce alliance as well as vice president of organizational development and executive assistant to the president. Blockside received a Bachelor of Science in education from Kutztown State College, a master's from Duquesne University and a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. He also completed additional graduate work at Temple University.

Heck is the owner of Heck Brothers. With locations in Reading and Wyomissing, Heck Brothers, a third-generation family-owned business, has been a full service florist serving Berks County for 109 years. **Heck is a graduate of Peirce College in Philadelphia.**

Lutz is managing director and registered representative of Concert Wealth Management Inc., San Jose, Calif., and Dinosaur Securities, New York and London. She is the president and founder of Dianne Mae Financial, Sinking Spring, since 2014. Lutz is also co-owner of Pappy G's Inc., Sinking Spring, where she is vice president/treasurer/secretary. Pappy G's, also known as the American House of Fritztown & Pappy G's Tavern, which was formed in 1998 by Lutz and her husband.

Lutz attended Reading Area Community College and Albright College, majoring in liberal arts/business and accounting.

July 20, 2016 — 11:42am

## Don't forget higher ed: Students voice concerns

The town hall-style meeting was hosted by America Forward.

by Darryl Murphy



A panel of guests gathered at the America Forward Student Town Hall meeting to discuss issues of higher education.

As a prelude to the Democratic National Convention, on Tuesday night the America Forward Coalition, a network of 75 community-based organizations working in cities across the country, hosted a Student Town Hall meeting at the Philadelphia History Museum. The purpose was to expand awareness about higher-education issues during the presidential campaign.

Before a guest panel, students voiced their concerns about debt and finance, the special problems concerning part-time students, and diversity and culture in higher education. Representatives from both presidential campaigns and academic administrators were among those who attended the Town Hall.

The panelists included State Rep. Jordan Harris, Philadelphia's 186th District; Joseph Coyle, executive director of Year Up Philadelphia, a job-training nonprofit; Barbara

Mattleman, executive director of Graduate! Philadelphia; Jeffrey Krug, dean of the College of Business at Bloomsburg University; Sheldon Horowitz of the National Center for Learning Disability; and David Croom, strategy officer at the Lumina Foundation. The event was organized and conducted by America Forward managers Juanita Tolliver and Sarah Groh.

“Today’s college students don’t look like they did 50 years ago, 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago,” Tolliver said. “But higher education policy hasn’t kept pace with these changes. And it’s important for the next administration to understand who today’s students are and the challenges they’re facing by yielding the floor to them.”

Philadelphia college students and **graduates from Peirce College**, Cabrini College, St. Joseph’s University, and Oakwood University in Alabama shared stories of their journeys to higher education before a question-and-answer period.

Gladys Sistrunk, a Cabrini College student and ordained minister, talked about how she was diagnosed with lupus and had to give up her job. She was also homeless at one point, but with the help of Graduate! Philadelphia and her faith, she was able to enroll at Cabrini and today has a 4.0 GPA.

“To any of the presidential candidates’ delegates here,” she said. “I wanted to let you know: Take another look when you walk over someone that is laying on the street. It doesn’t mean that they’re lazy. It doesn’t mean that they’re on drugs, crackheads, or people that just don’t want to move forward. Situations happen in life. Today we can be up, tomorrow we can be down.”

During the question-and-answer session, Courtney Thompson, a student at Temple University, spoke about losing her financial aid and scholarships after changing her enrollment status from full time to part time due to financial and family obligations. She said colleges should be fair to the financial needs and extenuating circumstances of part-time students.

“They’re not doing it to prolong their college degrees,” Thompson said. “They’re doing it because they have financial needs that they need to fulfill. And you’re not incentivizing students to graduate sooner by denying them aid that they need. They’re not going to become full time just because you take away their money. They’re going to drop out of school.”

Unlike other town halls, this format was designed to maximize student input, said organizer Groh.

“You think about that traditional town hall,” she said. At these, “There has been that occasional bright spot of the student story that goes viral.”

But, she added, they were looking for more than the occasional success story.

Instead, she said: "What if we flipped the script and the majority of the air time goes to students?"

In between discussions, audience members who didn't speak had an opportunity to be heard through a real-time text message survey asking questions that related to job security, cost of education, and the challenges of outside obligations during college. The results will also be shared with both presidential campaigns.



# BizPhilly

## Peirce College To Help IT Pros Get A Bachelor's Degree Quick and Easy

The new program will launch this fall and help "opportunity students" get ahead.

BY ESTHER YOON | JULY 22, 2016 AT 3:51 PM

[SHARE](#) 18

[TWEET](#) 4

[G+](#) 0

[Pin it](#) 0

[EMAIL](#) 2

0 COMMENTS



*Photo via Peirce College*

**Peirce College** is at it again, sticking its neck out for the 99 percent.

The small Center City college has historically served non-traditional students, professionals who took an alternative path to their education or career, or "opportunity students," as Peirce College President **James Mergiotti** calls them.

And this fall, the college is opening up a new program to support this side of Philadelphia's business community.

The college will launch the Competency Based Education (CBE) Information Technology Bachelor's Degree program, for information technology professionals who never received a college degree.

The program, like some of Peirce's others, will be completely online and will be competency-based. Students earn their degree based on skills mastery as opposed to the amount of hours they spend in the classroom.

"There are a lot of people who have made something significant out of themselves professionally in IT, but would really benefit from a degree credential," said **Brian Finnegan**, an associate dean of IT and education at Peirce. "They may be reluctant to sit in a classroom with a bunch of 18-year-olds and be graded on attendance, do weekly quizzes and come to class three days a week."

Since the college announced the new program, more than 30 people have completed the first part of the application, an assessment that will determine whether the CBE program is the right fit, said **Amanda Frey**, Peirce's supervisor of marketing and communications.

Because Peirce doesn't recruit for a set academic year, the college's admissions occur on a rolling basis.

The program is tailored to working professionals, those who may have already mastered various skills in IT and are looking to advance their career with a degree. The program's coursework will cover skills like data management, programming and networking.

Students who already have some college credits or industry certifications aligned with Peirce's curriculum can complete assessments on that material and throughout their term will focus solely on the skills sets they still need to learn, eliminating the need to relearn areas they have already mastered.

"Working adults need the flexibility to work in the evenings, on weekends, or even their lunch hours so that they're able to complete their coursework," said Peirce vice president of academic advancement, **Rita Toliver-Roberts**.

The college has long recognized a need to specialize in providing quality, affordable education for working adults in Philadelphia. Not long ago, it didn't matter as much to attain a degree or even a high school diploma to successfully build a professional career, said Finnegan, noting the need to adapt to the changing work field.

For the CBE program, students will pay a fixed price of \$3,000 per term, and there is no limit to how many credits they can earn. Students are also assigned a dedicated CBE coach, a faculty member who serves as a cheerleader to support and help students develop a plan to complete the program.

Peirce is confident that the program is aligned to industry standards.

“When people are looking to advance their careers, we spend a lot of time and effort to make sure that what we’re offering is what employers are looking for,” Toliver-Roberts said. “And we will continue to do that.”