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minority outreach program goes back to Jamaica High



“You are at the beginning of your life,” said program founder Gary Ross. “Take advantage of these opportunities. That’s what we’re here for.”

NYSSA’s Minority Outreach program returned to Jamaica High School, Queens, on June 2 for another panel presentation. Since the program’s inception in April 2004, founder Gary Ross and invited speakers have made three school visits, two to [Jamaica High](#) and one to [Harry S. Truman High School](#) in the Bronx. The program focuses on high schools with significant populations of minorities that are underrepresented on Wall Street. Panelists provide an overview of the financial industry and offer their personal perspectives and career advice.

After introductory remarks by NYSSA board member Eric Stieglitz, Ross outlined the program and gave a history of his scholastic and

professional achievements. He recalled that, after receiving his MBA from Fordham University, he found it difficult to get a job because recruiters did not believe he was from the “right” school. “You may face a challenge that you think is insurmountable,” he remarked. “The question becomes, how do I turn this thing around? What you have to do is always reassess yourself. And sometimes you have to create your own opportunities.” Ross’ opportunity came through NYSSA: He became the Society’s first student member and found his first job at Lehman Brothers—where he still works today—through networking with a NYSSA mentor. “As you grow in your career, as you grow in life, you will learn the importance of building solid relationships, hanging out with positive friends, and building mentors. This is a step right here. This is the beginning of your future. Use these resources to make yourself better.”

Panelist Hamilton Lin continued on the theme of opportunity. “What is luck?” he asked the audience. “The way I’ve always defined luck is when preparation meets opportunity.” In order to be ready for an opportunity when it arises, students need to be able to show potential employers that they are the most competent and knowledgeable of all the candidates. Lin, founder and president of Wall St. Training, spoke briefly about his youth in a nearby Queens neighborhood and admitted that he did not always earn high grades. For Lin, grades are important but are only a stepping stone. “It’s not just what you know, but who you know.” Self-marketing is essential at



Hamilton Lin, owner of a financial-services training and consulting company, shared his expertise.

interviews, and all meetings are to be considered interviews. “You’re always promoting yourself, you’re the product. Know what you want, what motivates you. At the end of the day, money is not the end goal in life. But if money is one of your more important goals, you need to proactively figure out how to go from where you are now to the point where you can make a lot of money.” Lin also stressed constant reading as a way to maintain awareness of what is going on in the world and to get tips from successful people in a variety of fields.



Dyice Ellis-Beckham, vice president of NASP's New York chapter, provided information on FAST Track.

Next up was Dyice Ellis-Beckham, vice president of Lehman Brothers Asset Management. "It takes a certain student to go above and beyond," she stated. "The fact that you're here today at this forum says that you are interested in what we have to say and in learning more about what's out in the marketplace." Ellis-Beckham grew up in Detroit, where there were many programs in science and engineering available to students; however, she realized early on that she was not interested in these disciplines. "There are high costs involved in trying to climb up the ladder, especially if it's not an area you will enjoy working in. I encourage you to explore all different types of options," she

advised. She found her direction while working in marketing and research for General Motors, where she got exposure to many different positions. Since an MBA was required for the positions that interested her, she got involved in an educational program in which the company paid for her tuition at Harvard Business School. Ellis-Beckham also serves as vice president of the National Association of Securities Professionals' New York chapter (NASP-NY) and chair of the NASP-NY Foundation. She encouraged the Jamaica High students to get involved in NASP's Financial and Scholastic Training (FAST Track) Program, which helps students prepare for work in the financial industry through mentoring, assistance with college applications, workshops on public speaking and interview skills, internships, campus visits, sessions at Bloomberg, and a portfolio competition.

Marvin Thomas and Adrian Grant, recent graduates of NYU's Stern School of Business, provided a student's perspective. Thomas and Grant are the founders of NYU's Student Enrichment for Academic Development (SEAD) program, a student-run, student services organization committed to fostering support and cultural enrichment through innovative presentations, activities, and services. High-school students involved in SEAD get the chance to shadow an NYU undergraduate for a day, attending classes and interacting with professors and other undergraduates. Thomas and Grant also co-wrote *Students of Life: The Compact Guide to Get the Most out of Yourself and the College Experience* ([click here for more information](#)). During the presentation they underscored the importance of self-determination. "I understand that the world is placing circumstances in front of you—where you live, how much money your parents are making, where you're growing up—and these are impacting decisions that you're going to make in life," said Thomas, whose upbringing and youthful experiences were similar to those of the Jamaica High students. "What I'm asking you to do today and for the future is realize that you have the power to change those circumstances with the decisions you're making. I want you to be able to make those decisions and feel confident in yourself in facing the world and your society."



SEAD co-founder Marvin Thomas and teacher William Moya.

After the Q&A session, students completed a survey on the Minority Outreach initiative. One hundred percent of the 40 students who responded understood the message that the panelists were trying to convey and felt it to be affirmative, educational, and relevant. They offered highly positive comments:

- “Being ‘proactive’ is the key to success.”
- “Study hard and you will be rewarded.”
- “I learned you need to read a lot, be focused on what you want to do, go out for your dreams. Nothing is impossible.”
- “I learned that in order to be successful, don’t have a friend by the name of ‘Should Have.’”



SEAD co-founder Adrian Grant (foreground) and students.

The speakers were rated a 9.39 out of

Students gave extremely positive feedback on the event. A survey showed that 100% of students understood the panelists’ message.

10. One hundred percent of the students indicated that they would recommend the program to friends, and 95% said that they would like to see it return during the next school year. A number of the students registered for FAST Track and SEAD. NYSSA is maintaining databases on students’

survey responses and on the progress of students who participate in FAST Track and SEAD.

Ross is forging partnerships with INROADS & The Posse Foundation, two nationally recognized organizations that help high school students prepare for college and obtain summer internships. He is also reaching out to the NYSE & the NYMEX to arrange visits to these exchanges for students who participate in the program, and contacting principals of other local schools to expand the number of schools visited next year. Contact Ross at comments@nyssa.org for more information or if you are interested in being a panelist at the next Minority Outreach presentation.



The Minority Outreach team at Jamaica High: Marvin Thomas, math teacher William Moya, Hamilton Lin, Adrian Grant, Gary Ross, Eric Stieglitz, and Dyice Ellis-Beckham.