



EDUCATION 2017: **CHOOSING TO LEARN • LEARNING TO CHOOSE**

TEAM HBCU:
TOMMI:
Age: 20
School:
University of Arkansas
Pine Bluff

TEAM PWI:
JOHNESHA:
Age: 21
School:
University of Tennessee -
Knoxville

Our interns wanted to compare notes between historically black colleges and universities and predominantly white institutions.

Here's what they found

(Photo: Lee Eric Smith)

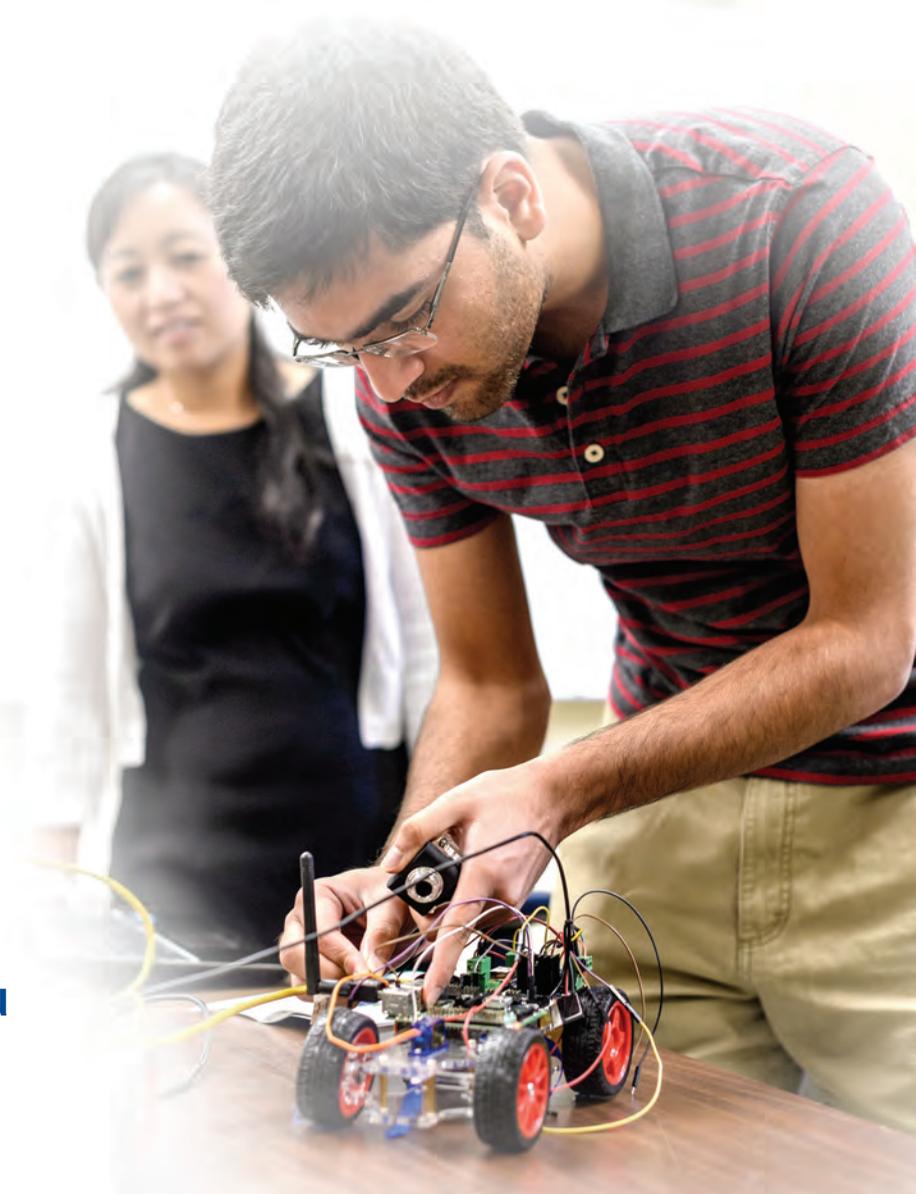
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PWI vs. HBCU: What are we really fighting for?

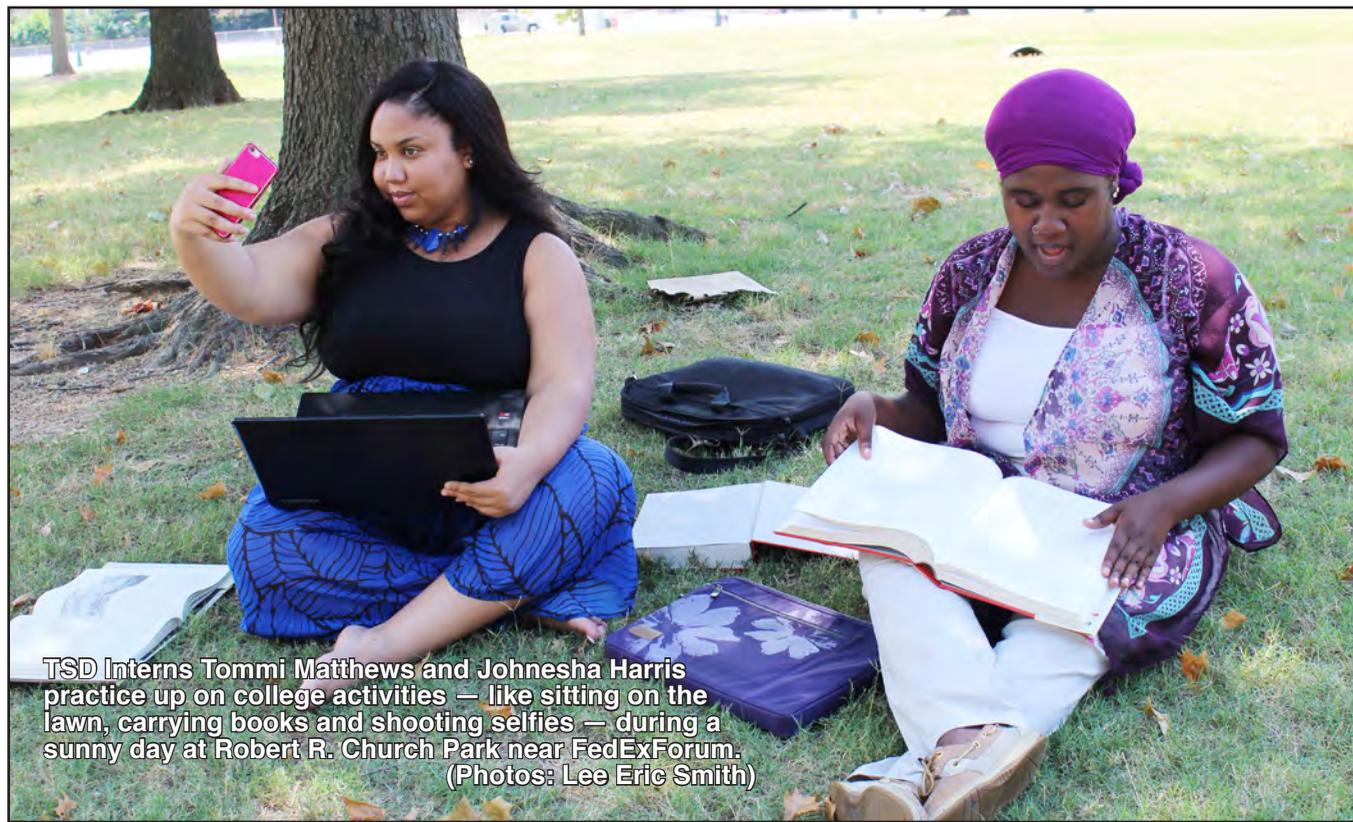
by Tommi Matthews and
Johnesha Harris

Special to The New Tri-State Defender

Conversation. Debate. Argument. Each of those words is being associated with the back and forth that has been flaring up for a while on social media – especially Twitter – about predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

We are college students – one who attends a PWI and one who attends an HBCU. We met this summer while on internships with *The New Tri-State Defender*. Encouraged to interact, we did. And when the door was opened for us to work together on a story project, we stepped up with a topic that already had caught our attention and was part of our ongoing conversations.

Knowing that the PWI-HBCU issue had become a tug of war for many, we decided to share our individual choices and sets of experiences and circumstances. The idea was to elevate the overall quality of the social media exchanges on the subject.



TSD Interns Tommi Matthews and Johnesha Harris practice up on college activities — like sitting on the lawn, carrying books and shooting selfies — during a sunny day at Robert R. Church Park near FedExForum. (Photos: Lee Eric Smith)

Whether you view the PWI-HBCU discourse as a matter of respect for history and culture, an issue of education preference relative to career development or some blending of the two, we found

common ground on this point – the need to uplift students who want to continue their journey of learning and discovery with a post-secondary education experience.

This is not a pick-me war. At the end of the day, we both support each other because going to college is about getting an education and trying to find your place in the workforce, as well as life.

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'I've always wanted to attend an HBCU'

Student says she's always learned better with black teachers

by Tommi Matthews
Special to The New Tri-State Defender

I've always wanted to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

I would watch the early 90s sitcom, "A Different World" growing up, and imagined how my future college experience would be. I pictured myself as a "Whitley" on campus, but I didn't know exactly which college I wanted to attend.

In fact, I didn't begin to seriously think about it until my high school career planning teacher was passing out our high school graduation requirements at the end of my junior semester. On the list, it said: "Apply to 27 colleges and must be accepted to four."

I sat calm in confusion for a second, knowing I needed to meet the criteria to graduate. That summer, I went on the Internet to type in a list of HBCU'S on Google and I checked YouTube for videos of various schools' different campus functions. I wrote down the ones I was familiar with and might be accepted to. I narrowed my list to the colleges that will accept a 2.0 - 2.7 GPA. There was hope for me getting accepted to different schools.

I started applying for HBCUs and the acceptance letters came rolling in, even with a (relatively) low ACT score. Some acceptance letters were conditional, but only a few. I got accepted into 10 colleges in total, all were out of state. My mom tried to persuade me to apply to the University of Memphis, the hometown university.

But I knew a predominantly white



'I wanted to be in a comfortable environment where my blackness wouldn't offend anyone.'

'At a PWI, I thought I'd be more of a number than a name. How could a professor notice me if I was struggling to pass an assignment?'

— Tommi Matthews

(Photo: Lee Eric Smith)

institution (PWI) wasn't for me and that I needed to get out of state. I argued that I wouldn't get a full understanding in my studies if I went to The University of Memphis or any PWI. My comfort with African-American teachers goes all the way back to grade school.

In middle school, I went to a predominantly white private school, where I got firsthand experience in learning from white educators. I distinctly remember school administrators complaining about my neatly braided African cornrows, even ordering me to take them down.

Like I told my mom, when a black teacher taught me, I comprehended better, they were more enthusiastic and I felt like they truly cared for me and my classmates. The white teachers I had, they didn't have any personality, they weren't hands on and they couldn't identify to me as a black student.

For college, I wanted to be in a comfortable environment where my

blackness wouldn't offend anyone. At a PWI, I thought I'd be more of a number than a name. How could a professor notice me if I was struggling to pass an assignment? Or would it be hard to get in contact with a professor, given how many students they have to attend to? Teacher to student ratio had something to do with my choice; so did the cost.

So in September 2014, I decided to attend The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff — before I even finished high school, or was even accepted. I waited patiently on an acceptance letter and focused my senior year on finding friends already at UAPB.

UAPB is a little over two hours away from Memphis — far enough away to finish growing up, but close enough to get back home in case of emergency.

Freshman year of college went about how I expected it. But I didn't know I would be so homesick! One great thing about UPAB is that it's very small and family-oriented and I

had the support of classmates. I was able to get hands-on learning due to the small teacher-student ratio and my teachers knew me by my first and last name.

The UAPB campus is pretty safe due to the visitation policy and campus security patrol. The food is great, especially on "Fried Chicken Wednesday" and "Fish Friday." There are plenty of scholarship opportunities on campus as well as funding from private donors in case a student has an outstanding balance.

All in all, my experience at an HBCU has been all I dreamed of, and I'm glad I chose UAPB. But I also wanted to know what others thought — both at UAPB and at other HBCUs. Here's what they said:

Rev. Earle Fisher

LeMoyné-Owen College alumnus

HBCUs have a huge impact and offer things that a PWI can't. I attended LeMoyné-Owen College because of

SEE TEAM HBCU ON PAGE 6

Amid the debate, my PWI choice and the reasons why

by Johnesha Harris

Special to The New Tri-State Defender

I mostly was focused on schools with top journalism programs when I started looking for colleges. And because my household was full of athletes and people who support athletics, I also knew I wanted to go somewhere with an amazing sports program.

After two years of filling out applications and weighing acceptance letters, I chose the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The thought of going to an Historically Black College or University (HBCU) never crossed my mind, even though my mother attended one.

In the age of social media and largely through Twitter, I soon learned that many people didn't see my decision to attend a predominantly white institution (PWI) as a wise one. I was smack in the middle of a raging HBCU-PWI Internet debate that is ongoing.

I started digging to get a better handle on the divide. And while my digging continues, I have no regrets about becoming a Vol three years later.

Among the friends I have made since entering college is Ryan Jones, a Washington, D.C. native, who will be a senior at the University of Memphis this fall. Like me, he is a second-generation college student. Our bond is cemented by a shared desire to make our parents proud and to find our place in the world. One of our many daily conversations concerned the HBCU vs. PWI debate.

"One has to keep in mind everything when talking about another institution such as the majors and opportunities they offer," he said. "I was offered a full ride with the track team at an HBCU but I decided not to go because they did not have the original major I wanted to pursue, which was International Business.

"To the question of (which) is better, I would say whichever one has



'The thought of going to an HBCU never crossed my mind, even though my mother attended one. No HBCU had popped up when I began my college search for journalism programs and I didn't think to ask why.'

'But three years later, I have no regrets about becoming a Vol.'

— Johnesha Harris

(Photo: Lee Eric Smith)

the best programs for your major and gets you the most prepared for your career."

No HBCU had popped up when I began my college search for journalism programs and I didn't think to ask why.

Another of my friends, Kaylee Wilkes, is a first-generation college student from Trenton, Tenn. She attends the U of M and envisions using a health studies degree to gain entry into the city's medical field.

One of Kaylee's parents is white and the other is black. Her blended background contributes to the fact that she tends to see a lot of things much differently than do many others.

"I try to stay away from the whole (PWI-HBCU) debate because I tend to have an open mind and I don't want to judge others based off their choices," she said. "But, I think people only discredit HBCUs because of how today's society views blackness. People automatically put PWIs on a higher

pedestal because they are 'white' colleges and there's this idea that a majority-white school is quality.

"We're all furthering our education with a common goal in mind, whether it be at an HBCU or a PWI," she said. "At the end of the day, it's not about where you get your degree, it's about what you do with it and how hard you're willing to work for your own future."

Community and environment are the two biggest factors that people bring up when detailing their school choice. My high school environment was Houston High School, where there was heavy emphasis on football season, homecomings, senior nights and many other things associated with sports. That fed into my desire to attend a college with a complimentary tradition.

High school is also where I met my friend Kennedy Stieff. Ambitious and originally from Atlanta, she was a model for being social while staying focused on your studies. A year

ahead of me, we reconnected at UTK. With a degree in therapeutic recreation, she now works in Memphis as a recreation therapy, helping underprivileged and behaviorally challenged youth.

A first-generation college student and the oldest of three, Kennedy addressed the PWI-HBCU debate with a simple observation.

"I feel like it (the debate) is very relevant and we should definitely be aware of the issues that black people that went to a PWI have faced that HBCU students just didn't have to," she said. "And I think it should be the same vice versa. We all went through the struggle.

"PWI black students dealt with low-key racism from peers and professors every day. HBCU students most commonly dealt with low funding in their programs and internal issues among their campus. It's messed up and it needs to be

SEE TEAM PWI ON PAGE 7

TEAM HBCU

CONTINUED FROM 4

basketball, and it was the best decision I've made. Coach Jerry Johnson took an interest in me. Before attending I had skills but they weren't fully cultivated yet and Lemoyne Owen helped fixed that.

The experience taught me a lot about Memphis, America and Black Dignity, about perseverance, brilliance and productivity. I wouldn't be doing half of the things I'm doing now in the community or in the church if it wasn't for Lemoyne-Owen.

**Kimberly Boyd
(UAPB)**

Attending an HBCU is a spiritually and culturally invigorating experience.

As a high school senior, at the brink of adulthood, I was afraid of the future that awaited me. I had high test scores, an impeccable GPA and a resume adorned with accolades that would make me an asset to any institution of higher education.

However, the predominantly white institutions (PWI) that I applied to were offering me little to no tuition assistance or scholarships. Attending a PWI would have made me subject to thousands of dollars in student loans. This attracted me to attending a historically black university.

I received two full ride scholarships (one institutional and one from an outside organization). And from the moment I received my acceptance letter, I was treated as a missing part of the puzzle.

Attending an HBCU has transformed me into a powerhouse in any endeavor I pursue. Whether coming from the heritage of my school, training and confidence building in my extracurricular activities, or the personal experience in the HBCU Classroom, I can truly say there is no place like "THE YARD."

**Jermaine Raymose
UAPB**

I chose an HBCU over a PWI because as an African American male, I feel that UAPB is a melting pot where different flavors of people can come together and coexist as one. An HBCU

has a smaller teacher-to-student ratio and that plays a lot in the retention rate. For African Americans it helps us experience our culture and make us stronger. An HBCU tuition can be more affordable than a PWI's tuition, not to mention that PWIs can be very expensive and less lenient. At UAPB, they have taught me to be versatile and prepared.

**Keenan Lowery,
Lane College, SGA President**

The experience that I received at my HBCU was more than I could've ever asked for.

I was a young African American male from the inner city of Memphis, raised by a single parent. I didn't even graduate from high school. I got my GED and my HBCU took me in, they loved me and actually cared about me. They groomed me and showed me the ropes of life. They gave me opportunities that I don't think I would've ever had access to at a PWI.

They taught me professionalism and taught me how to be unapologetically black and proud. The president of my institution is one like no other on this planet. We go to lunch every month just to talk and discuss plans and life. Now I go all over the country with leadership and networking opportunities.

Because of what my HBCU saw in me, that I didn't even see in myself, I am now the Student Government Association President, I am a Tennessee Governors Volunteer Star and much more. That is my experience at Lane College and I wouldn't trade it in for absolutely anything in this entire world.

That is the purpose of HBCUs and what they do for African American Students every day — they take rocks and make diamonds.

**Keenan
Lowery****WHAT ARE THEY SAYING ON
TWITTER?****Black Jon Snow**
@DealMethToKids

PWI look down on HBCUs because they "arent as good" and HBCU look down on PWI for "going with the white man and not the brothas and sisters"

7/24/17, 3:39 PM

**Patty**
@kid_patty

There's no such thing as "black PWI" or correlating a hbcu to a pwi. Y'all didn't choose a hbcu so stop trying to claim it

7/28/17, 4:12 PM

**1 of 1**
@itwasntvic

The HBCU vs PWI debate is stupid. Causing more division than there already is.

6/6/17, 11:00 PM from [Forestdale, AL](#)**T-Time**
@Ayo_TTime9

Y'all gotta let that HBCU vs PWI debate go. If you black and getting an education I'm proud of you 🍌

6/12/17, 11:55 PM



'We should definitely be aware of the issues that black people that went to a PWI have faced that HBCU students just didn't have to. And I think it should be the same vice versa.'

'PWI black students deal with low-key racism from peers and professors every day. HBCU students most commonly deal with low funding in their programs and internal issues among their campus.'

***— Kennedy Stieff,
UT-Knoxville***

TEAM PWI

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

changed both ways. Black education is the main priority.”

Bernal E. Smith II brings a key viewpoint – that of a business professional – to the PWI-HBCU discussion. He attended a PWI (Rhodes College) and as the publisher of *The New Tri-State Defender*, he is heavily invested in a business that focuses on the black community.

Smith used his four years at Rhodes to his advantage. He got involved on campus, learning

how different cultures operated and used Rhodes' career services to find internships and a job prior to graduation. He helped restart the Rhodes chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, the first intercollegiate Greek-letter fraternity in the country established for African American Men.

“The amount of nurturing, culture and experience at an HBCU is unmatched,” Smith said. “They have robust

cultures that are important to the college scene. I can see why people are passionate about their schools. Rhodes helped me see my place in the world as a black man. The environment helped my self-development and I became much more aware of my surroundings.”

'We're all furthering our education with a common goal in mind, whether it be at an HBCU or PWI. At the end of the day, it's not about where you get your degree, it's about what you do with it and how hard you're willing to work for your own future.'

— Kaylee Wilkes, UT-Knoxville



know your self,” he said.

“Is the connection to our culture a better environment to your success? Or, do you need to be outside of your comfort zone to help you thrive and prove yourself? Know your own needs, challenges and issues to determine your future. It is a very personal decision and a way to learn the world through the resources you have.”

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Social work graduate chooses to move forward with resolve

by Karanja A. Ajanaku
kajanaku@tsdmemphis.com

Marquetta S. Johnson has two degrees – a Bachelor of Science from The LeMoyne-Owen College and a Master of Science from the University of Memphis. Both are in social work, marking milestones on a journey of resolve and choice.

Three months after her graduation from the U of M, Johnson is loving her job as a foster care caseworker at Porter Leath, a primary source for serving the city's at-risk children and families.

For Johnson, "social work is like a gift from God. Me doing it is doing what He would have me to do – help people, help children in any way that I can; to be a servant to them."

The foundation for the viewpoint of the 25-year-old Johnson is a string of experiences, including instances during which pain registered on a deeply personal level.

"I started undergrad in 2010 at (The) LeMoyne-Owen) College. It was the college I chose from all the ones I applied to (and) where I actually got the most scholarships," Johnson said.

"My grandmother's birthday is Christmas Day. She died the day after Christmas in 2010. She had a lot of heart things going on, heart complications (and she had Alzheimer's disease.) It was an experience. My grandmother was the one who took care of me when I was younger. She was like support."

Johnson's mother died unexpectedly in 2007.

"She (her mother) took us to school one day and she never picked us up again."

At the time, Johnson had already been exposed to social work and actually had worked with kids with trauma, but she didn't realize that she was in the midst of her own trauma drama.

"It just seemed like life," she said. "We just picked up and continued doing normal things and just making it the best way we could."

Johnson is the middle child. She has an older sister (Caneka), a brother (Shuntario),



(Photos: Shirley Jackson)

who is a year older than her and a younger sister (Nikeyia). The siblings stayed with the elder sister.

"We just kind of played our roles," she said. "I set doctors' appointments and made sure that everything was right in school. My younger sister did my hair. My brother was like our protector."

Her father, Marvin Johnson, "wasn't around in the beginning but I've known him

my whole life. Our relationship had kind of just got started when I was 16. That was the first time I had ever stayed with him. ... This was after she (her mother) passed."

On graduation day back in May, her "dad" was at the FedExForum beaming, along with her two sisters and her aunt.

Degrees in hand and experiences in context, Johnson emphasizes her bottom line:

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‘Social work is like a gift from God. Me doing it is doing what He would have me to do – help people, help children in any way that I can; to be a servant to them.’

— Marquetta S. Johnson



MARQUETTA

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

“(Social work) is something God called me to do. Every experience I have had in life has kind of been on the pathway to social work. Even my mom passing, I feel like that was just another step, another process of me learning. I feel that is where it really started. All of the experiences after her death were kind of the lead way to it.”

Johnson started doing social work internships when she was 18.

“I feel like I was going in the direction that God wanted me to go. He never came down and said, ‘I want you to do this and this and this.’ I just feel like his hand was on everything. Everything that I did, every decision that I made, every internship that I took, the schools...my whole life.”

Johnson “joined the church” when she was 18. A student at LeMoyné-Owen, she joined nearby Metropolitan Baptist Church.

“I think that is when I began to blossom and began to flourish into a young woman,” she said.

When her undergraduate Graduation Day rolled around, Johnson marched proudly across the stage at Temple of Deliverance Church of God in Christ. The funeral services for her mother and grandmother had been held there.

“I was excited that ...my mom and my grandmamma could be part of graduation,” she said. (The) graduation just happened to be at the church where I went with them and the last place that I actually got to ‘see’ them.”

And if she were asked to be a graduation speaker, Johnson knows the message she would share.

“Don’t dwell in the negative. Although a lot of things may happen and it may feel like the worst thing you have ever experienced, it is to prepare you for a greater future and greater purpose.

“You have to embrace it, maybe cry in the moment, wipe the tears away, stand up stronger than you were and fight on, move forward!”

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(Grades 9 - 12)

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Second Place Prize -- \$200 plus 2 tickets to the game
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Deadline for entry is Friday, September 1 at MIDNIGHT!

Email all entries to: njohnson@tsdmemphis.com

Contact Nina Johnson at (901) 679-8545 for more information

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The Southern Heritage Classic



Southwest is a shoulder of support for those looking to 'reconnect'

TSD Newsroom

Jacqueline Faulkner and her cohorts at Southwest Tennessee Community College are into connectivity. For many in need of a hook-up for a deferred dream, their help awaits.

Faulkner is Southwest's vice-president of Student Affairs. The support vehicle is dubbed "Reconnect Today with Southwest!"

The community college crafted "Reconnect Today with Southwest!" to be its portal for tapping into Tennessee Reconnect. That's Gov. Bill Haslam's initiative to help more of the state's adults enter higher education to "gain new skills, advance in the workplace, and fulfill lifelong dreams of completing a degree or credential."



Jacqueline Faulkner

With the beginning of the fall 2017 semester set for Aug. 27 and early registration already underway, Faulkner and others at Southwest are in full-speed ahead motion. Their projected service population includes the thousands of people who started college, but for various reasons never completed their degree.

"Southwest Tennessee Community College cares about the academic and career success of our former students" is a declaration included in a media promotion heralding "Reconnect Today with Southwest!"

In connection with the outreach, last Tuesday (Aug. 8) was designated a special campus day to meet with faculty and staff and get schooled on how to reconnect to

the education path.

According to Faulkner, the campus day represented a "unique opportunity to allow students to get one step closer to fulfilling their goals of college attainment. We believe that education is the key to creating opportunity and changing the lives of students and their families. We are thrilled to be able to help students remove the financial barrier to completion of their degrees through Tennessee Reconnect funding."

Those ready to get the ball rolling can visit <http://www.southwest.tn.edu/ApplyOnline.htm> to

complete a readmission application.

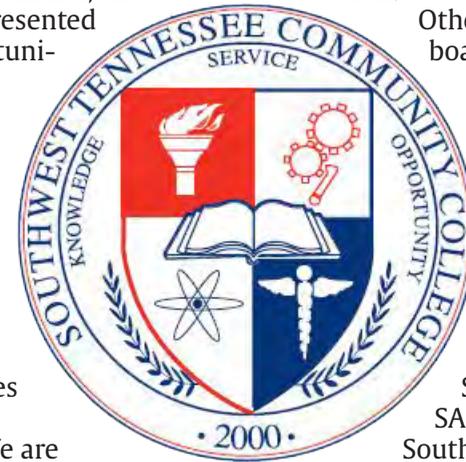
Other get-back-on-board steps include:

- Sending any transcripts from schools attended since leaving Southwest;
- Completing the 2017-2018 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. Use the

Southwest school code: 010439.

Southwest has a team of counselors and advisors available to answer questions.

For more information, visit <http://www.southwest.tn.edu/>.



"At Rhodes, my horizons were broadened in ways I never expected."

Chloe Moore
Rhodes College Class of 2016
Houston High School Class of 2012

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