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# OVCS Newsletter December 2015

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The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

# OVCS NEWS

December 2015  
Build Community  
Make Change



## Social Justice Leadership Conference

Chakena Sims  
Class of 16'

Wesleyan University collaborated with the Connecticut Campus Compact to host the Social Justice Leadership Conference (SJLC) on Saturday, October 31st. Students, faculty, and staff from different colleges and universities in Connecticut gathered at Wesleyan University to facilitate and attend workshops related to the theme, "Unmasking Social Change". The workshops ranged from art and storytelling, to sustainability and movement building.

the important, yet tiring work of community organizing. The Student Government Association (SGA) recently organized a vigil to show our solidarity with Mizzou, but how many of the students in attendance are willing to turn their words into action? Occupy Harris, a direct-action protest, was held the same week, but among the 200+ student protesters that participated, how many are truly invested in community organizing?

The keynote speaker, Kiese Laymon, spoke at Connecticut College a few days before the conference, and shared a powerful narrative that discussed race, violence, music, and family. Despite being open, honest, and completely uncensored, Laymon emphasized that honesty is only a small part of the work needed to create social change. In order to create movements that are sustainable, it is important to identify the people who are willing and able to do

A common theme among the workshops at the SJLC is that quality is as, if not more, important than quantity in regards to movement building. Among the eighteen Connecticut College students that attended this conference, my hope is that each student left inspired, and ready to do the work needed to ensure that the social and structural dynamics at Connecticut College are improved for the class years that follow.

As part of the Expanded Learning Time initiative at Jennings Elementary School, Connecticut College's Office of Community Learning implemented programming to encourage elementary school students to explore multiple ways of learning while also pursuing their curiosity and sense of discovery.

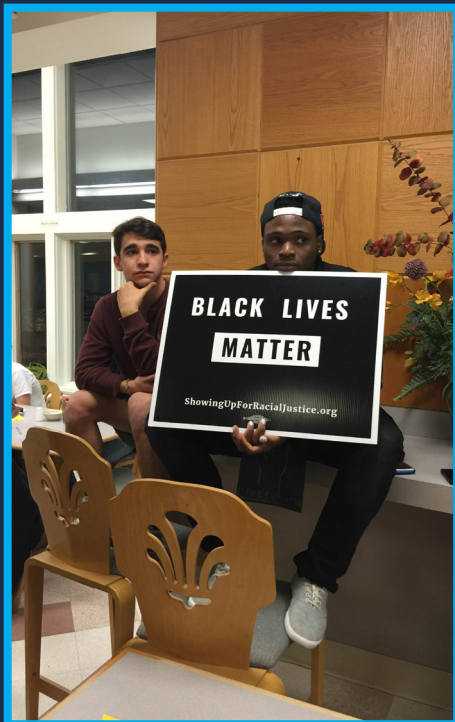
During this session of ELT, Connecticut College mentors worked with 50 2nd graders on enrichment activities to compliment their classroom studies. College and elementary school students worked together on interactive projects including: building marshmallow towers, creating submarines, and making homemade ice cream.

*In the Connecticut College ELT culminating activity, Maurice Tiner '17 assists Jennings Elementary Students to construct gingerbread houses.*

## Social Justice (Continued)



Thursday, November 19th at 6pm, 200+ students protested in Harris Dining Hall (along with Jane Addams Dining Hall, 1st Floor of Shain Library, and the Student Government Association meeting).



Student protester holding a “Black Lives Matter” sign.



Occupy Harris:  
*We Will Not Be Silenced*



# When Free Speech Harms

## *Is Resiliency Enough?*

Annette Davis '18

On Thursday December 3rd award-winning journalists Jelani Cobb and Conor Friedersdorf came to Connecticut College to discuss racism and free speech and how these issues are playing out on college campuses today.

Jelani Cobb, a writer for *The New Yorker*, has written about the difference between people of the powerful majority exercising free speech and people of historically marginalized groups exercising free speech. He argues that these acts are by no means the same. In Dr. Cobb's words from his article "Race and the Free-Speech Diversion," "the freedom to offend the powerful is not equivalent to the freedom to bully the relatively disempowered."

Conor Friedersdorf writes for *The Atlantic* and argues that free speech is fundamental and necessary to uphold no matter what the circumstance. If we make exceptions to the rule when it comes to speech against marginalized people, then that leads to a slippery slope that would even limit the speech of those who are marginalized as well. He also put forth that although instances of racist speech are horrible, it would be a good life skill for those offended by this speech to learn to be resilient and not let it take a large emotional and psychological toll on them.

Sitting in the audience, I was thoroughly intrigued and engaged by the entire discussion and pleased to

find that it was a very civil and at times almost light-hearted atmosphere, as there were a few jovial laughs scattered throughout the discussion. However, a serious mood encompassed the room many times when Dr. Cobb spoke. The attentiveness of everyone in the room was palpable when he spoke about the inability of the majority white population to understand the struggle of the oppressed minorities, and the absolute injustice of white people belittling the grievances of minorities.

The atmosphere remained serious as Professor Etoke, Chair of the French department and professor of Africana Studies, posed multiple profound questions to Mr. Friedersdorf. She made powerful statements about her exhaustion from being resilient, and combated Mr. Friedersdorf's earlier remark about the importance of resiliency for minorities. She said that her mother was resilient, her grandmother was resilient, and she was also resilient. This was not a new concept to her and she asserted that this was no solution to the suffering of minorities. The room erupted with applause after her remarks and questions.

These discussions are necessary to engage on our campus in order to open students' minds to ideas that they might have been blind to before. This talk allowed me to realize the complexity of our Constitution's first amendment. This right, although intended to protect everyone, can cause deep and profound harm.





## Dancing for Degrees

Luisanny Perez '17

Soon after starting my career at Connecticut College I quickly learned of Higher Edge. It was expressed to me that this was a program designed to focus on students from the local community and their journey to college. They assist via funding, preparation and support. I was lucky enough to meet a student from the program who was more than excited to share his experience with me. The program was enabling him to go away to college and attend Northeastern. Several Conn students intern at Higher Edge through OVCS.

Last year, I learned of Dancing for Degrees the day of the show and was unable to attend yet, I had still managed to catch a glimpse of the excitement. I would hear attendees cheering and applause vigorously. The vibes escaping the 1962 room encouraged me to find out more about the event and possibly attend the next fundraiser.

OVCS co-sponsored the event and the Office for Student Leadership and Engagement purchased a set of tickets for students. This year I was lucky enough to get my hands on a couple tickets to attend the event. As I walked in the room I noticed the anticipation of those around me. I overheard families and friends bragging about their Higher Edge students to others. Local business owners,

family members, friends, teachers, and many more filled the room. The crowd was more than eager for the students and appointed partner to perform. As soon as the Dancing began, the room was filled with love and excitement. The friends who accompanied me expressed their gratitude and felt as though they were apart of the community. From this one event they were able to understand what Higher Edge is about and the love they have for their students.

As an outsider looking in, pairing students with successful figures from the community only strengthens what Higher Edge stands for. These new connections allow students to build a bond with outstanding members within their community that can provide support and guidance. Engaging people from the community provides more relatable success stories that can push those participating to continue striving towards their goals.

Having the opportunity to attend Dancing for Degrees allowed me to partake in a greater community activity. Communities should help their own strive and be the best they can be. This is what Higher Edge is doing, helping high school students become the best versions of themselves.

## Theater Experiences



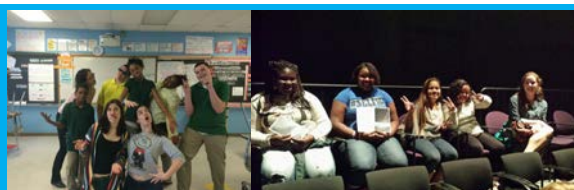
Gabrielle Schlein '18

I've always hated to think of theater as the domain of the wealthy. In a time of strong cultural and economic divisions, theater must play an important role in creating conversations and insights in the formations of equal opportunities. Unfortunately, when tickets for shows like Hamilton skyrocket to nearly \$300 a piece, it's becoming harder and harder to find affordable and accessible shows for young people. This became apparent to me on one of the first days of the theater classes I run in New London. After introductions and a few theater games, I asked my kids "What's your favorite play you have ever seen?" Only one kid had a response; Most of them said they never experienced live theater. With the College a mere few miles away, this seemed like the perfect opportunity to introduce them to different playwrights, styles of theater, and classical stories.

*What's your favorite play you have ever seen? Most of them said they never experienced live theater.*

So, with the generosity of the Theater Department faculty and OVCS, I was able to set up a night (hopefully the first of many) where 7 of the kids in my class were provided with free transportation and tickets to the College's mainstage play Elephant's Graveyard. Once they were all piled in the van they erupted in excited chatter "How are they gonna have an elephant on stage!? Will there be cool costumes? What's gonna happen to Mary!?" The excitement did not let up once we entered the theater. Throughout the show, one of my students, Daysha, would grab my arm excitedly whenever a light or music change would thrill her. It was incredible to be there to see them dive into this rich world for the first time. Seeing the joy in the kids steps as they emerged at the end of the show only affirmed my belief in theater's power and relevancy.

It is one of the best art forms for young kids to experiment with since it allows them to explore lines of identity while they too develop their own. After the success of this event I hope to make this a long standing tradition between the College and the Bennie Dover Middle School Theater Club. For these kids this experience provides an invaluable opportunity to build a rich and artistic theatrical library, which will hopefully inspire and help them as they develop their own voice as emerging artists and people.



New London  
Bennie Dover Jackson  
Middle School

**THEATER CLUB**

# Join OVCS In the Spring

Community learning and civic engagement enhance the experience of every student at Connecticut College. The OVCS partners with more than 50 organizations in the greater New London community to engage students with issues of community activism, social justice, and diversity.

Placements include:

B.P. Learned Mission  
Covenant Shelter  
Drop-In Learning Center  
FRESH Farm and Community Gardens  
Gemma E. Moran/United Way Food Labor Center  
Garde Arts Center  
Habitat for Humanity  
Homeless Hospitality Center  
Lawrence and Memorial Hospital  
Lyman Allyn Art Museum  
Mystic Aquarium  
New London Community Health Center  
New London Main Street

New London Public Library  
Writers Block Ink  
Flavours of Life  
New London Housing Authority  
Higher Edge College Access Program  
New London Adult Education  
Office of Youth Affairs  
New London Parks Conservancy  
Save Ocean Beach, Inc.  
Alliance for Living  
Covenant Shelter  
New London Public Schools  
New London Public Defenders

And many more...



OVCS operates **three vehicles** that provide transportation to students who are volunteering or working in the community



**Request a Ride!** Visit the OVCS office and fill out Ride form to be dropped off and picked up in between the hours of 8:30am - 6:00pm



Be sure to **show up on time** for your scheduled ride so all students can leave at their scheduled time

## How To Get Started

1

Schedule appointment with an OVCS Advisor on Camellink, on the top navigation bar: click on Calendar. Next, click on Advising Appointments.

2

Select the appointment type you would like (OVCS Education/Human Development, OVCS Environment/Sustainability, etc.)

3

Click 'Check Availability' - you do not need to fill in days/times

## The Mission

The Office of Volunteers for Community Service (OVCS) is dedicated to educating the next generation of active citizens. OVCS cultivates meaningful and sustained social change through respectful and effective collaboration within the New London community. Through reciprocal partnerships between students, staff, faculty, and community members, OVCS creates, implements, and supports a wide range of initiatives and programs that advance active citizenship, enhance scholarship, and improve the quality of life in our community.