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Student Profile

A President for the People

As the first African-American to lead the Spring Hill College Student Government Association, senior Kristi Vaughn says she's focused more on getting the job done than breaking down barriers

By Greg Walker

Kristi Vaughn looks comfortable in the Student Government Association office on a warm fall afternoon. She is the president of Spring Hill's SGA, but those who don't know that probably wouldn't be able to pick her out of a crowd of average college students.

"I'm a college student representing other college students," Vaughn says. "I don't want to be the type of leader that isn't in touch with my classmates. I can stand up for them and sometimes make tough choices that affect them because I'm one of them."

That attitude, along with her endearing personality, genuine concern for her peers and an energetic spunk, helped Vaughn become only the second African-American SGA president at Spring Hill in an election last spring. It's also what helps Vaughn continue to communicate so well with the student body today.

On a campus where 21 percent of undergraduate students are African-American or from families of color, marine biology major Katie Van Deven and others say it was her personality and not the color of her skin that made Vaughn a favorite among all students.

"I don't think our students gave much thought to the historical aspect of the election or to the color of Kristi's skin," says Tracey Childs, associate dean of students at Spring Hill. "She focused on what would make Spring Hill better for all students, not just a particular group."

Vaughn says she never gave much thought to breaking down barriers at Spring Hill. She's more interested in serving others, a desire she says she developed at Xavier University Preparatory High School in New Orleans.

"I had a lot of teachers and adminis-



Spring Hill College Student Government Association President Kristi Vaughn meets with College administrators in her role as representative for the student body.

Kristi Vaughn

trators at Xavier that inspired me," Vaughn said, recalling a math teacher, a counselor and her principal. She credits her father, Darryl Vaughn, and her stepmother, for her success as well.

Beyond SGA, Vaughn has been active in a variety of clubs and organizations, including Multicultural Student Union and the Spring Hill College Gospel Choir. She's also a standout secondary education student and is a senior resident assistant in one of the College's residence halls.

"I wanted to run for the SGA presidency, but I debated over it. I went around and around in my mind," she said. "I was really nervous."

Vaughn and her vice president received an overwhelming majority of votes, but neither had much time to celebrate. Kristi went right to work, learning as much as she could about current

issues and preparing to implement the platform on which she campaigned: developing an alternative book buy-back program, organizing a summer storage program and an end-of-the-year garage sale, helping interested clubs and organizations become chartered, and implementing an honor code for students.

Vaughn says students should look beyond their day-to-day campus experiences to find events and activities they're interested in and that touch their lives. One such event of particular interest to Vaughn is the College's 50th anniversary of integration, to be commemorated this spring.

Vaughn says the anniversary is significant, but most likely means more for alumni and former students than those today. She said she feels the same about her position as an African-American SGA president.

"The fact that people don't see anything out of the ordinary about diversity on campus today is a wonderful thing. It says a lot about racial coexistence at Spring Hill," Vaughn said.

When her term is up this spring, Vaughn says she will turn her focus more to her career plans. She is currently exploring the Teach for America program in which teachers are placed in inner-city schools for two years or more. Vaughn says she'd like to teach high school in Houston and eventually become a superintendent of education.

"I really want to help under-represented students," Vaughn says. "They're the ones most often left behind and the ones who most deserve a chance."

Greg Walker is editor of the Spring Hill College Alumni Magazine SHC. Freshman Mel Yeates contributed to this profile.