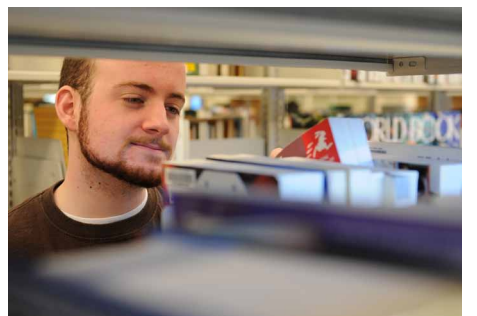




Fast Track

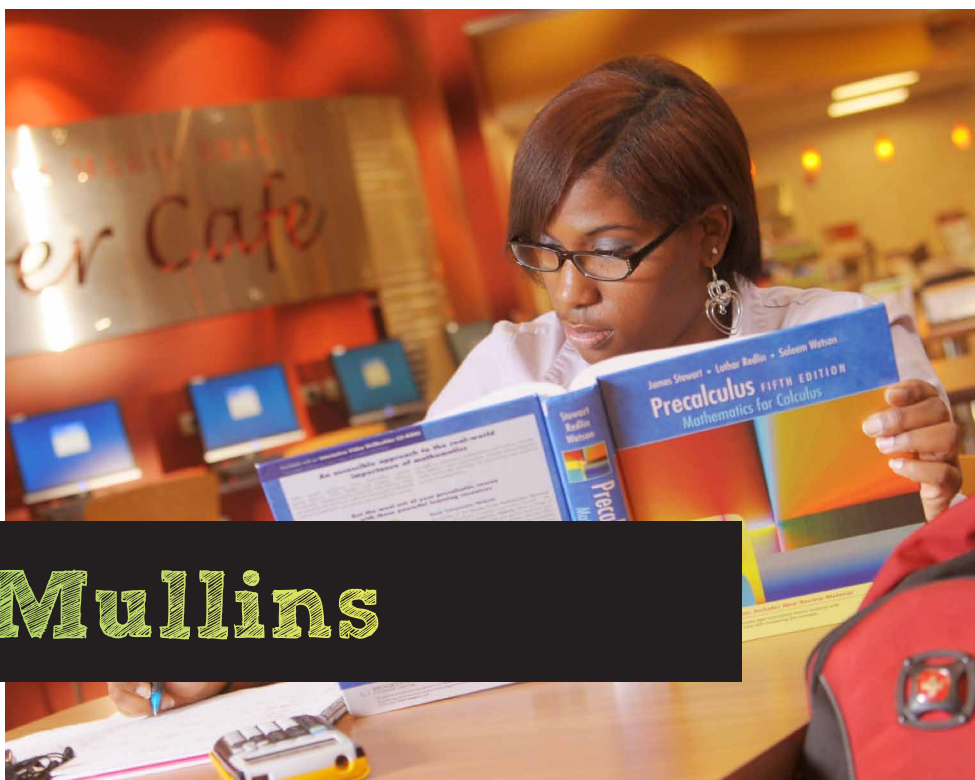
Graduates of Ohio's Early College High Schools set a pace for early success

Excerpt:
Kiani



Graduate of
Africentric Early
College.

Attending Ohio
Dominican University,
studying math
education.



Kiani Mullins

Following her role models into teaching

Kiani Mullins arrived at Ohio Dominican University with 31 hours of college credit and a clear sense of what she wants to do with her life.

She plans to teach high school math – and she knows what kind of math teacher she wants to be. Attending Africentric Early College School helped her figure that out.

“My method is going to be different,” she said. “There were a couple of teachers I had who didn’t do the arguing, who expected more of you. Then, when you get an A, you feel like you’ve earned it.”

One of those teachers was Tawana Arnold, who taught Mullins math in ninth and 10th grades.

“I loved the way she broke it down if somebody had a question,” said Mullins. “We’d solve a problem and then look closely at how we got there.”

But even with so clear a goal in mind, Mullins’s first year as a full-time college student wasn’t easy. Being the first member of her immediate family to go to college, Mullins was exploring what was for her uncharted territory. She almost lost her way, distracted by the draw of social life and undermined by inadequate study habits.

That’s when she found that her early college experience helped with more than her vision of her future. It also provided many of the tools she needed to problem-solve when the challenges threatened to overwhelm her.

Mullins decided to attend ODU for good reasons. While she was offered significant financial aid at the University of Toledo as well as ODU, Mullins opted to stay in Columbus because it was a small campus, she wanted to maintain her involvement in her church, and she didn’t want to be too far from close friends and family.

But deciding to go to college in her home city also created some problems, as did the new level of work that ODU demanded. In her first semester, Mullins fell back on old study habits that, because of her natural skills and ability to do well with little work, had been sufficient in the past but couldn’t keep up with the requirements of the more advanced coursework.

“It got me the first D of my life,” she said.

Leaving campus to socialize with friends and family also contributed to her first semester crisis. Balancing college and her social life was much harder with so many friends and family members a quick car ride away.

“I didn’t have self-control,” she said. “I was always going off-campus. If someone called and wanted me to take them someplace, I’d go do it. I felt like I was disappointing somebody when I couldn’t see them, then I’d be up all night

working on a big project and it wouldn't come out well."

Mullins began to lean on a few of the things that she had learned at Africentric, like the importance of getting to know her educators and asking for help.

"I learned that developing a relationship with a professor definitely helps in a class," said Mullins. One she began talking to in particular at ODU "showed me how to make things here about me and got me to talk with a counselor."

By the holiday break, Mullins and her academic advisers at ODU came up with a solution that she had to impose on herself. "I'm on car punishment. I can only leave campus two days a week," she said. "I try to treat this like it's not Columbus."

As for the friends and family who had been quick to ask her for her time, things began to change there too.

"I've had a lot of heart-to-hearts," Mullins said. "And they're being supportive. I just had to tell them what I needed."

The results were immediate.

"Kiani is taking baby steps, but I'm really proud of her right now," said her adviser, Cynthia DeVese. "She's already noticed what she needs to do differently, and I think that's a very big step."

DeVese, who runs a pre-orientation program called Stepping Stones for Success for students of color, saw that the early college experience gave Mullins a few distinct advantages.

"It did relieve a lot of stress, having her first year basically paid for," she said. "Even if someone only takes advantage of early college and is the first in their family to get an associate's degree – that's huge."

Mullins's struggle with the transition to full-time college student isn't surprising, according to those who work with students who are breaking new ground by continuing their education.

"Africentric is a school that has a lot of students in poverty – a lot of students who come from families where there is no college experience," said Arnold, the math teacher who helped inspire Mullins. "When you attend college as a freshman, your eyes are wide open, you have no idea what to do, where to go, how to function. It takes time before you get your legs up under you and learn to walk with a sure foot."

But ECHS makes a transition that otherwise could sink a student's ambitions manageable, Arnold said. "I think the early college experience makes it more real for students. They learn how adults act. Just being neck and

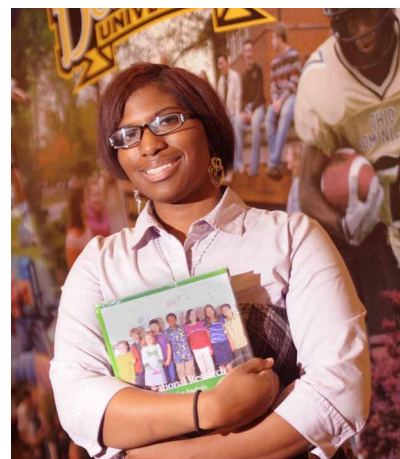
neck with 19, 20 year olds and older when they are 16, 17 years old put them ahead of the mark."

The Africentric students who attended classes at Columbus State supported each other, she said. "Those kids walked to classes together. They would sit together. When they were afraid, they would dialogue about it and get through," said Arnold. "They had a great early college counselor, who helped many of the kids understand: 'When I have an avenue for assistance, I should use that, and once I have that, don't let it go.'"

Mullins, for one, seems to have taken that lesson to heart. Arnold, who is now a school administrator at another Columbus high school and an adjunct at Columbus State, isn't surprised by Mullins's choice to teach math.

"I believe in dispelling the myth that math is hard. What's the worst that you can do? You can make a mistake,

Kiani Mullins
"was always a puzzle-solver" and hopes to instill that love of learning in her students.



so what? When you instill that in your kids, it helps them to try," she said. "I just tried to look at it as an experience instead of a class."

Mullins's college experience, it seems, is much like her life in high school math class.

"Kiani was always a puzzle-solver, she wanted to figure out a different way. If she couldn't find the answer, she would push herself to try to figure out a way to do it," Arnold said.

The way she figured out for herself at ODU includes focusing on children. She began a work-study job tutoring local middle school students in an after-school program, which not only helped her create more social connections on campus but also reminded her of the goal that led her there in the first place.

"I really love that job," Mullins said. "I actually miss the kids when I'm not there."

– Tracy Zollinger Turner

Early College High Schools in Ohio

Across Ohio, early college high schools are changing what it means to be a college student. These schools take the young teenagers who are least likely to attend college and most likely to be performing below grade level, then put them in an atmosphere with high levels of support and high expectations. They allow students to start taking college courses in grade 9 or 10 and earn up to 60 hours of college credit by the time they graduate from high school.

The nine Ohio Early College High Schools in the KnowledgeWorks network are showing remarkable results. They report an average graduation rate of 91 percent and more than one in three ECHS students graduate with a high school diploma and two years of college credit or an associate's degree. Others earn substantial college credits that speed their journey toward a degree.

More than 90 percent of ECHS 10th graders scored proficient or higher on the Ohio Graduation Test in reading, writing, mathematics and social studies, outperform-

ing the state average. Greater percentages of students from ECHS schools scored accelerated or advanced on Ohio state achievement tests than students at comparable high schools, suggesting that they are more college ready.

What happens when these young adults – almost all of them the first in their families to attend college or students who likely would not continue their education without the boost of ECHS – move beyond the carefully structured and nurturing environments of their high schools? Research shows that they are more likely to enroll in and complete college.

But research data is only part of the answer. Each of the remarkable young adults who has graduated from an Early College High School has a unique story of accomplishment and challenge. Each has a dream as individual as his or her journey. To learn more about early college high schools or meet other ECHS alumni, please go to www.OhioEducationMatters.org.