Most of us on campus know about the residence hall named after Mr. Nathan R. Miller. However, Mr. Miller also lends his name to the Nathan Miller Scholarship, a four year tuition award given to outstanding first generation college students who graduated from a Boston public high school. For these scholars, the BLC becomes a mainstay during their first year at Suffolk.

Among other requirements, scholarship recipients must maintain a 2.8 GPA, attend a weekly seminar during their first year, commit 15 hours to community service, and attend cultural excursions. Some past cultural trips include the African-American Museum, Nichols House and Blue Man Group. By the spring semester the students select their community service sites. Some students elect to return to their old schools to mentor or tutor current students; others choose to help out at sites including the Boston Food Bank, Prison Book Club, and Supper Club: The Paulist Center.

Greetings! As we begin another year, we look forward to the new student stories that will emerge. In this edition of our BLC Bulletin, we continue to highlight some of the individuals whose paths we have the benefit of guiding and who truly represent the work that we do. Please check out the individual profiles about Nacef Bahri, one of our Peer Tutors and Study Group Leaders, and Katelyn Fornaro, one of the Nathan Miller Scholars. And while Orla Downey doesn’t use students’ names, her article shares examples of the personal impact Early Alert has for students. These are just a few of the many stories that we will be a part of this year.

Also, I want to remind you that the academic support services’ central web page (http://www.suffolk.edu/academics/48409.html) can be used for referrals and to obtain the most-up-to-date information on the Math and Computer Science Support Center, Second Language Services, the Writing Center, and the Ballotti Learning Center. Here you will also find a quick reference sheet that can help in pointing students to the most appropriate tutoring resource depending on the specific need. All our offices are practiced in making referrals based on a student’s unique needs. If we realize there is a better match, we’ll be sure to get the student connected.

We look forward to partnering with you again this semester. Please don’t hesitate to contact us if we can be a resource to you or one of your students.

Best wishes for a successful academic year with many compelling individual stories,

Michael Dickinson
Early Alert: A Turning Point!
ORLA DOWNEY

Week six, fall and spring semester, the submission of Early Alert codes translates into many hours of outreach and academic coaching at the BLC. So, what is the ultimate purpose of the Early Alert program, and what happens in these coaching sessions? Early Alert is a cooperative effort between faculty and staff, driving students to assess their academic progress early in the semester. Academic coaching assists students with this self-evaluative process, and a typical coaching session will include the following steps:

• The coach will refer the student to the professor(s) who alerted her.
• The coach and the student
  > will review the student’s overall academic progress. This often encompasses a detailed review of all course syllabi.
  > if appropriate, will hash out the pros and cons of withdrawing from a class.
  > will discuss factors hindering the student’s academic success.
  > will work together to generate an action plan for academic success. This will encompass setting goals, working to enhance specific skill sets, and identifying academic and/or personal support services critical to success.

The outcome of these sessions can be of significant consequence, a turning point in the academic and personal life of a student. Student situations can be complex and varied, but for the purpose of highlighting the impact of early alert on student lives, the following sketches some success stories representative of those we experience every early alert period.

The first situation involves a high-achieving student. Meet “Deanna,” a senior, alerted in all her classes. She had a 3.0 cumulative GPA but was floundering in her final semester. Her sister had recently passed away and her mother was just diagnosed with cancer. She was struggling to focus and time management was a major concern. Encouraged by her coach, she immediately communicated with her professors to discuss how to get back on track academically. Deanna and her coach met weekly to create a schedule, which allowed her enough time to be with her mother, affording her greater focus during designated study periods. She commendably sustained her 3.0 GPA.

In other creative endeavors, some of our tried-and-true topics have received a technological makeover: we entered the realm of podcasts this summer with the creation of three mini-modules based on our workshops. Please send your students to this link to view our podcasts. There they will find a fresh, condensed take on the popular topics “Smart Study Skills,” “Goal Setting,” and “Time Management 101.” We hope they will like what they see and attend the in-person, full-length versions at the BLC.

BLC Workshops give students practical tools for success.

95% of workshop respondents for AY 2011-2012 agreed or strongly agreed that “I learned skills or information I can apply to my life.”
BLC Student Employee Profile:
Nacef Bahri

Nacef Bahri, a senior biology major and huge soccer fan, hails from Tunisia. He started at the BLC in the spring of 2012 and he came highly recommended by his professor, Dr. Denyce Wicht. Nacef pulls double duty at the BLC acting as both a tutor and a study group leader. He aspires to attend dental school.

What made you decide to work at the BLC?

The opportunity presented itself when my professor Dr. Wicht recommended me for a job here at the BLC. I was familiar with the BLC’s work and I wanted to be part of it and offer my best.

As a Biology major, how do you feel your work at the BLC has contributed to your career interests?

While working at the BLC, I have had the opportunity to meet a lot of other science students and enlarge my ideas about job opportunities in the scientific field. For instance, I was exposed to the idea of doing research for pharmaceutical companies and also possibly teaching in grad school.

Describe one of your most memorable moments at the BLC.

If I had to choose, then I would say that one of my most memorable moments at the BLC is when I was approached by Hillary (the study group program coordinator) and she told me that I had good reviews from the students and that my name was mentioned somewhere. Knowing that what you have been doing is working and that you are helping the students that come to see you is very fulfilling. You always hope that you are doing your job right, but when you actually see the proof and students tell you thank you either in person or via reports, that’s very gratifying.

Early Alert continued

Another situation that we regularly encounter during early alert is the student on probation. “Sam,” a first semester sophomore on probation, was alerted in three classes. Sam had been unresponsive to previous outreach and didn’t sign up for AIM (www.suffolk.edu/aim), despite having been mandated to do so. Feeling distressed over her early alerts, she finally responded to outreach. A first generation commuter student, Sam was feeling isolated on campus, struggling with her classes, and receiving no support from home. Sam and her coach quickly worked to establish a study routine. She was coached on the importance of communicating regularly with faculty, and immediately began to speak with her professors. Sam committed to regular coaching and tutoring at the BLC, connected with the University Counseling Center, and subsequently got off of probation.

A third typical scenario involves “Peter,” a struggling freshman, alerted in two classes. Peter didn’t understand why he was issued alerts but responded to outreach and met an academic coach. He was apprehensive about connecting with his professors but rehearsed some “talking points” with his coach and consequently felt very encouraged by the conversations he had with his instructors, as he discovered specific areas he could work on to improve his course results. In creating an action plan for success, Peter committed to tutoring, participated in study groups and continued with coaching for the remainder of the semester.

What can you as faculty do to help make Early Alert a success?

Submit early alert codes each semester.
Announce in class that you are available to meet alerted students and encourage students to pursue academic coaching in the BLC.
Be ready to provide specifics as to how each student you alerted is performing in your class. Alarmed students need to know if they can feasibly pass your class, or if they need to withdraw.
Work with alerted students to plan what they need to do to get back on track.
Make referrals across campus as appropriate.

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The BLC's Best Kept Secret continued »

The Nathan Miller Scholars Program may sound like an easy commitment, but the scholars are not exempt from common college transition challenges. However, most surpass the GPA expectation for the scholarship. For example, 80% of the class of 2014 group earned a GPA of 3.0 or better in fall 2010; the following spring 60% earned a GPA of 3.0 or better. Continuing to excel, some students are accepted into the McNair Scholars Program after their first year and hold leadership positions in various student clubs and organizations. This past April, I held the first graduation/reunion celebration in honor of the fourteen Nathan Miller scholars who graduated in May 2012 and to provide an opportunity for current scholars to reconnect. Many, like our profiled student Katelyn Fornaro, will move on to graduate programs for which their scholarships have prepared them well.

Nathan Miller Scholar Profile: Katelyn Fornaro

Katelyn (Katie) Fornaro is a rising junior Nathan Miller scholar. She attended Boston Arts Academy, where she excelled both academically and socially. Katie always knew she wanted to attend college; when she applied to Suffolk and was awarded the Nathan Miller Scholarship she was elated that her dream of a college education would be realized. A stellar student most of her life, Katie learned some significant lessons her first year at Suffolk that she agreed to share.

When asked to think of her greatest challenge and success since starting at Suffolk, Katie immediately thought of her freshman year. Katie declared biology as her major but quickly realized this was not a good fit. She struggled both fall and spring semester and was becoming very discouraged. Instead of giving up, she decided to utilize a service offered to all students: academic coaching. Katie met with both her scholarship coach and academic coach, and notes that “they really helped me through all the hard times.” Like many freshmen, Katie struggled with adjusting to college, and the new workload. “I didn’t know how to study, or how to set proper goals, and make action plans to carry them out.” She improved her study skills, changed her major to Psychology, and has continued with academic coaching and tutoring. Out of her challenges was born her greatest success thus far: her sophomore year she earned recognition on the Dean’s List for both fall and spring semesters.

What really added to my success at Suffolk are the endless resources [Suffolk offers its] students. I spent a great deal of my freshman and sophomore years in the Ballotti Learning Center, but I do not regret it. I also have a huge support team at the learning center and without their help I would not be as successful as I currently am.

When asked what advice she would give to incoming Nathan Miller scholars, she explained,

No one ever said school will be easy but luckily you don’t have to do it alone, you have a great team who are more than willing to help you, all you have to do is ask.

In addition to her academic success, this past year Katie has taken on volunteer positions with Jumpstart and ATASK (Asian Task Force against Domestic Violence). Katie anticipates a May 2014 graduation, upon which she plans to pursue a career in Marine Mammal Training. She hopes to work specifically at the Mystic Aquarium in Connecticut before moving to her dream job of working at Sea World as an Orca trainer. Katelyn is also considering graduate school in order to become a grief counselor to young people. The support that Katie received when participating in the Nathan Miller Scholars Program has allowed her to achieve the success necessary to engage in the many rewarding opportunities her future will bring.