

Pinellas County Schools First Generation Student Graduates from The University of Chicago

Sydney Soskin is one of 27 first generation students profiled in the book, *Their Stories: Volume I - Inspiring Essays of Students from Challenging Backgrounds*

MARIETTA, GA, USA, May 28, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Sydney Soskin, a 2020 graduate of the

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Mr. and Mrs. Wynn are invested in every student like they are their own children. They encouraged me to pursue my PhD and have provided voices of comfort and support since I was in the 3rd grade.”

*Kimberly Hadaway, PhD
Candidate in Math*

St. Petersburg High School IB Program (FL) and one of 27 first generation students profiled in the book, “Their Stories: Volume I - [Inspiring Essays of Students from Challenging Backgrounds](#)” has not forgotten the college planning program that made her dream of attending The University of Chicago a reality. Sydney fondly recounts, “I remember as clearly as if it was yesterday that I was a good student, but not a great student. I had good test scores, but not great test scores. I was not ranked at the top of my class, and when no one at my school thought that I had any chance of being offered admission to The University of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Wynn were steadfast in their belief that I could get in. I did not find out about the

[college planning cohort program](#) until the second semester of my junior year of high school. When I told Mr. and Mrs. Wynn that my top college choice was The University of Chicago, they helped me to see myself through my résumé and high school course taking. They helped me plan how to assume more leadership roles, engage in meaningful community service, and ensure that I was taking the most rigorous classes possible. They got me onto the UChicago campus through a fully funded summer immersion program during the summer prior to beginning my senior year of high school. They worked with me over the course of many weeks in writing my Common Application essay and UChicago supplements to tell ‘My Story’ and speak my truth. Mrs. Wynn was the first person I called when I opened my UChicago portal and read the words ‘Congratulations...’ However, Mr. and Mrs. Wynn did not say good luck and goodbye. They have been a part of my journey throughout my time at UChicago. UChicago paid for me to serve as a college intern for their foundation, I have mentored students and served as a discussion group leader throughout my time at UChicago and I was the guest speaker for the 2024 Senior Recognition for college cohort students graduating from high schools in Florida,

Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Occasionally, I still reflect on the note that I received from my UChicago admissions officer, 'Dear Sydney, it is with such joy that I welcome you to the class of 2024. You are a remarkable young woman and have worked so hard for this. Your application exuded eloquence and maturity, and your essays were deeply thoughtful. In your 'Why UChicago' essay, you said that you believe that you are a perfect fit for UChicago, and we do too.' On June 1, I will receive my BS in neuroscience from The University of Chicago. I will graduate debt-free on the strength of a scholarship that allowed me to travel to 10 countries—all as a result of the college planning cohort program and Mr. and Mrs. Wynn who believed in me."

Mychal Wynn, a first generation graduate of Northeastern University and CEO of the foundation, notes, "Sydney's success, and that of so many other Pinellas County Schools students who have participated in our college planning cohort program since 2018 is because of Dr. Lewis Brinson, the Pinellas County Schools Minority Achievement Officer. Dr. Brinson has been a relentless champion of the program. As a result of his efforts, students have discovered pathways into such highly selective schools as UChicago, Caltech, Johns Hopkins, and Swarthmore, as well as into such HBCUs as North Carolina A&T, Claflin University, FAMU, Tennessee State, Xavier University of Louisiana, Hampton, and Morehouse. Dr. Brinson has been an advocate for all students and believes that every student should be supported in pursuing their postsecondary aspirations, whether they are graduating at the top of the class, in the middle of the class, or at the bottom of the class. Like my wife and I, Dr. Brinson has been a part of Sydney's journey from the time that she entered our program throughout her journey through The University of Chicago."

The Foundation for Ensuring Access and Equity's College Planning Cohort Program has been recognized by the National School Boards Association as a [2020 MAGNA Award](#) recipient through their partnership with Guilford County Schools (NC) and expanding postsecondary pathways for first generation and refugee students. Since beginning their program at the Turner Chapel AME Church in Marietta, Georgia in 2013, the community-based organization has partnered with Florence School District 3 (SC), Guilford County Schools (NC), Judson ISD (TX), and Pinellas County Schools (FL). In-person monthly sessions are offered in Florida and South Carolina, and students are able to participate in virtual sessions from throughout the country.

Dr. Anne-Marie Brown, a Pinellas County Schools' parent who had two children participate in the program, laments, "With Dr. Brinson's retirement, we do not know if anyone will step into his shoes as a champion for students from our community. Children who are the first in their family



Sydney Soskin - UChicago

to attend college must navigate an oftentimes difficult and confusing postsecondary landscape. I know firsthand how much my children learned through the program and the assistance they received in researching colleges and scholarship programs, and even with their essays. Every school district needs a champion like Dr. Brinson who will shout from the mountaintop, 'Yes they can, Yes they can' and people like the Wynns who help students to believe, 'Yes I can, Yes I can.'"

Their Stories: Volume I - Inspiring Essays of Students from Challenging Backgrounds [ISBN 13: 978-1-8880463-99-4] \$19.95 is published by Rising Sun Publishing: Marietta, GA. The College Planning Cohort Program (TM) is the signature program of the Foundation for Ensuring Access and Equity. The program is supported by an online curriculum and print materials: A High School Plan for Students with College-Bound Dreams (Wynn) [ISBN 12: 978-1-880463-06-2] \$19.95; and A Middle School Plan for Students with College-Bound Dreams (Wynn) [ISBN 13: 978-1-088463-67-3] \$15.95.

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