

Hello,

My name is Paris Pruitt, I am a first-year graduate student studying to obtain a master's in educational psychology with an emphasis in Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology. I completed my Bachelor's degree in May of 2019.

I participated in the Student Support Services (SSS) Program during my undergraduate career. I can truly say that I would not be where I am without the support of the program. As my mother and father were going in and out of jail my entire life, I did not have anyone to prioritize my education. I had to make sure that I did it myself. When I received admissions from the University of Connecticut, I was granted in my opinion the greatest opportunity that I could have ever received. The Student Support Services program would provide me with a summer of amazing opportunities to build my academic rigor and gain meaningful experiences that I would have for a lifetime.

I was introduced to the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program that summer. Before this experience, I did not know what research was or how it would change my life. I learned more about the program and entered into the program during my sophomore year of college. Through this experience I learned what it meant to be a student researcher. And most importantly how research impacts all aspects of our lives. Through this program, I have been able to do summer research in Charleston, South Carolina at the Medical University of South Carolina. I was also able to go to different conferences around the nation to connect with faculty and students from other institutions.

The summer after sophomore year I was granted the opportunity of a lifetime to travel to Capetown, South Africa with the SSS program. To gain a global view of poverty and understanding of where my ancestors once may have been from changed my life forever. I learned so many things about myself that I would not have been able to do without the experience. Returning from the trip, I received unexpected news that I would need to find somewhere else to live. At this moment I did not know what to do because my mother incarcerated. I called over to my SSS advisor and explained the situation and by the end of the day, they were able to help with on-campus housing and a job to support myself for the summer.

Currently, I am pursuing a master's degree that has afforded me the opportunity to be a graduate assistant in the Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies Department at UConn. As a graduate assistant I teach discussion sections on the topics of gender and globalization. In addition to teaching I am also a research assistant and I am currently training to become an academic advisor in the department. In the future I hope to obtain my Ph.D. and become a professor. I would not be here without the support of program like these.

I just want to say that thank you for allowing me to share my story today and I hope that my story resonates in your heart because the Student Support Services program is doing work to change the lives of many people not just myself.