

Good evening. My name is Lauryn Ashong and I am a senior at UConn Stamford, majoring in Human Development and Family Sciences with a concentration in Early Childhood Development. My family originates from Accra, Ghana, but I grew up in Bridgeport, CT in a single-parent household. My mother worked more than one job to make ends meet for my brother and me. She has engraved in me the true meaning of hard work and perseverance. Living in Bridgeport has its highs and lows, one day it's a beautiful day, and the next day it's clouded with social vices. As a young black woman with many aspirations to bring change to my family's economic situation and environment, it has always been my desire to get a good education, be successful and push the boundaries of the black narrative.

I thought a lot about which university I should attend. I realized UConn had a great offering, including me being accepted in the Student Support Services program, which was a blessing in disguise. The SSS program serves students that are first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented in higher education. As a low-income student, I was supported in my transition from high school to college by participating in the SSS pre-collegiate summer program before my first year, which was a condition of my acceptance to UConn. During my time at UConn, SSS supported my academic, professional, and personal goals. Because of this program, I was able to be victorious in my education.

I am grateful to have been able to complete my full degree at the UConn Stamford campus. The Stamford campus has provided me a full college experience. One thing I personally find profound is UConn Stamford's quality of student social life. Through my enrollment, I was fortunate to have joined the African Students Association ( ASA ) which was a positive peer group for me. I now serve as the President of ASA and continue to strive to make a difference for others in my shoes.

I viewed that education was going to be a struggle because of my financial instability, however, despite the challenges thrown my way, I am victorious and accomplished because of the SSS program. The SSS program provided me tools, opportunities and resources to achieve my degree. Through the SSS program, I was given the chance to start my freshman year with 6 credits, offered exclusive opportunities for scholarships, and provided personal and professional development while being counseled by my SSS advisor.

Coming from Bridgeport, I know a lot of people who could have benefitted from the support of the SSS program at UConn Stamford. I was one of 40 students selected for the SSS program in my first year, but there are so many more students who need the program's support and services. Programs like SSS need funds to support additional students at UConn Stamford. It is my wish and prayer that the SSS program of UConn gets the maximum encouragement and support by the state to make way for people in similar situations as mine, to be uplifted and to believe they can also bring change no matter their background or economic class. After graduating, I hope to work with the Department of children and families to help less fortunate children. All of this is possible because of my UConn education and the support of the SSS program. In closing, thank you for allowing me to share my story today I hope that the support continues to grow for years to come. Thank you