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SOUTHERN STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
PRESS RELEASE
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CUTLINE: Recent Southern State Community College graduates Nicole Elliott, Breanne Johnson and Kylena France are back on campus serving as College Completion Coaches through a statewide partnership.

AmeriCorps volunteers mentoring students at Southern State

Three recent graduates have returned to Southern State Community College this fall to serve as College Completion Coaches dedicated to supporting first-time students who are enrolled in developmental education courses to earn a certificate or degree.

It's all part of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches Initiative, a strategic partnership between the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC), the Ohio College Access Network (OCAN), and ServeOhio (Ohio Commission on Service and Volunteerism).

"In this exciting initiative, we are using the leadership skills of recent community college graduates to provide mentoring and coaching to community college students, many of whom are first-generation college students," said Dr. Ronald Abrams, president of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, which represents the 23 community colleges in Ohio. "These 'coaches' will provide their students with the support needed to create their educational completion plan, and then mentor them through challenges they may encounter as they move ahead through their plan."

The three College Completion Coaches working on the Southern State campus are Kylena France, Breanne Johnson and Nicole Elliott. France is a 2009 graduate with a degree in human and social services. She is currently working as a graduate assistant while pursuing her master's degree from Lindsey Wilson College on the SSCC Central Campus. Johnson is a 2011

graduate with a degree in corrections and a 2012 graduate with a degree in human and social services. She was a member of the SSCC Patriots softball team and currently serves as a volunteer with the program. Elliott is a 2011 graduate with an associate of arts degree. She is currently working on her bachelor's degree through Lindsey Wilson College.

Throughout the state, these coaches, who will be at 10 Ohio community colleges, will each serve a cohort of 100 students who are first-time community college students, enrolled in developmental education courses and Pell-Eligible.

The coaches' first task will be to help their student cohort in completing their developmental courses and then helping them to enroll in college-level credit courses. This, research shows, is a big stop-out point for students. Coaches serve as a valuable support system that will help students power through this potential obstacle and assist them in progressing through their completion plan.

"The Ohio College Access Network is pleased to be part of this innovative initiative. We are grateful to share the vision of ServeOhio and the Corporation of National and Community Service in supporting the effort," said Dr. Reginald Wilkinson, president and CEO of the Ohio College Access Network. "We know that with proper support, students will graduate from college at a higher rate and add to the talent pool Ohio's workforce needs for a successful economy."

Participating coaches receive a modest living allowance and \$5,550 education award to help with college debt at the successful completion of their 11-month service term.

"ServeOhio is proud to support this AmeriCorps program that will provide data-driven, hands-on support to first-time community college students," William Hall, ServeOhio Executive Director stated. "We're confident that this local, state and federal partnership will improve the college completion rates across Ohio, allowing students to stay on course to earn their degree or certificate. By completing their courses on time, with passing grades and AmeriCorps support, students save time and money."

In all, more than 20 coaches are participating within the following community colleges: Columbus State Community College, Cuyahoga Community College, Hocking College, Lakeland Community College, North Central State College, Northwest State Community College, Owens Community College, Southern State Community College, Terra Community College, and Zane State Community College.

The Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) and the Ohio College Access Network (OCAN) entered into a strategic partnership to develop and implement the AmeriCorps College Completion initiative, combining the expertise and mutual goals of both organizations to make an impact on college retention and success in Ohio. The collaboration received a \$287,842 grant for the first year of a three-year grant cycle from ServeOhio, Ohio's Governor-appointed Commission on Service and Volunteerism, that helps solve Ohio's critical economic challenges by administering AmeriCorps funding in target areas of education, opportunity, healthy futures, veterans, environmental stewardship and disaster services.

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