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Means to Her Dreams

ILA scholar Bre'Anna Metts-Nixon '13 encourages students to pursue higher education in spite of life's challenges



May 16, 2013 | Jill Rodrigues '05

BRISTOL, R.I. – Four years ago, Bre'Anna Metts-Nixon '13 sat next to her mother, Christina, in their Providence home holding a piece of paper that would change her life. As they read aloud the letter of acceptance to Roger Williams University – complete with a combination of financial aid that would cover the cost of her entire college education – the two women were overwhelmed with emotion.

"We just started crying before I even got the word 'congratulations' out of my mouth. She was jumping around and screaming. She just couldn't believe that her only child was going to college and actually was going to make a difference," recalls Metts-Nixon. "We had never seen this amount of money offered to anyone in our family to succeed and get as close to our dreams as possible."

This Saturday, she will have in hand another piece of paper to put her another step closer to her dream of becoming a music industry executive – specifically, she wants to become chief operating officer of Black Entertainment Television (BET).

Unlike many of her fellow graduates, Metts-Nixon began her RWU career well before receiving that acceptance letter. Beginning in her freshman year of high school at Providence's Times² Academy, she joined Bridge to Success, a college preparatory peer mentoring program facilitated by Roger

Williams undergraduates at urban schools across Rhode Island. At the urging of multicultural recruitment specialist Don Mays, Metts-Nixon spent her summers on the Bristol campus preparing for the SATs, attending mock classes, living in college residence halls and learning the ins-and-outs of the college application process. So when that acceptance letter arrived in the mail, RWU was already a comfortable fit, she says.

“Being here I knew that I had family right in Providence and I had friends here who were my mentors, and I knew Don, so there was much more of a support base here than at any other schools. And, also at RWU, I had the opportunity to fix my major and my minor in a way that it would fit whatever my passion was at the time. So I had more wiggle room to pursue what I wanted to do.”

An Intercultural Leadership Award – a full-tuition scholarship for students who have overcome a significant life challenge and are first generation college students or English language learners – sweetened the deal considerably. As a student, she has taken full advantage of the academic and extracurricular offerings at RWU, rising as a leader and mentor herself.

“I became a mentor myself because I knew there were students at my high school that needed the same help that I was getting and I knew I could be that mentor for them,” she says.

Metts-Nixon eventually became the first undergraduate on-site director of RWU’s Summer Institute and has maintained the consistent high marks required of ILA scholars. This all in addition to completing a study-abroad semester in London where she interned at a public relations firm, serving as president of the Multicultural Student Union, working part-time in the Intercultural Center and playing flute for the University’s Instrumental Ensemble.

She is quick to acknowledge the staff and students who have supported her through her journey, most notably Mays, an associate director of undergraduate admission.

“If it weren’t for Don Mays I wouldn’t have attended Roger Williams,” Metts-Nixon says. “Before I got here, Don advocated for me, saying that I was going to be the student to come and really bring change – that I wasn’t going to be a student that was just going to be here to be here. Constantly, Don still reminds me, ‘Look what you’ve done while you’ve been here. You’re proving day by day to the people that I advocated for you, letting them know that you would make a change and you have. Don has constantly been that push for me to get through Roger Williams, especially during the tough times.’”

Other support networks include the Intercultural Center, where Metts-Nixon worked closely with center director and Associate Dean Ande Diaz and Assistant Director Candice De Los Reyes.

She also credits her peers in particular for not only helping her transition to college life, but also to succeed as a student and leader. Particularly in the past year, Metts-Nixon has found another mentor in law student Erlin Rogel, a fellow South Providence native who she says inspires many students of color on campus.

"Seeing his success so far and him being in his first year of law school is an inspiration on its own," says Metts-Nixon, who shares the goal of earning a law degree – a dream she's held onto since elementary school.

Now, with her bachelor of arts in communication (public relations) and music, Metts-Nixon has her sights set on graduate school – specifically a dual degree in business and law with a specialization in music. She aspires to be a leader in the music industry, with a focus on creating better female representation in hip hop. And as she prepares to cross the Commencement stage, Metts-Nixon can't help but reflect on all of the allies and advocates that got her to this point.

"I think it was big just getting here, and it was a big deal to my family. Getting a degree is unbelievable, because no one in my immediate family has a college degree but me," she says. "That for me is why I'm really excited about graduating. Because I know how much it means to them, I can't wait to see all of their faces and for me to feel proud as I walk across the stage to represent them. For me I feel like that's a statement for my family – to show that we can do it."

Still, she knows the road ahead will have its challenges. She is vocal about having about \$30,000 in student loan debt to repay, [recently participating in a press conference with U.S. Sen. Jack Reed](#) about the student debt crisis. Still, she believes in the value of her higher education and encourages students with financial concerns attending college to continue to pursue their goals, as she has:

"Don't let it stop you. I know it's my biggest fear. But there are always going to be people around that will inspire you and show you that there is another way. Loads and loads of people have done it. Whether that's a good thing or not – it is doable. You just have to be willing and have the passion to get through it, and to know that if you want it, to take it."

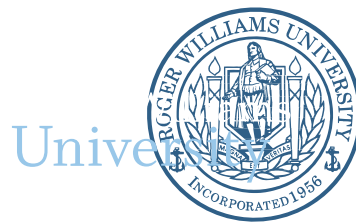
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