



JOURNAL OF CHILD PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHIATRY

THE JOURNAL OF CHILD PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHIATRY is a leading international journal in the field of child and adolescent mental health. It publishes original research, clinical reports, and theoretical discussions. The journal is peer-reviewed and is a key source of information for researchers, clinicians, and students in the field.

BY JAIME CIAVARRA

# C The Learning Curve

As longtime partners in education, GW and a D.C. public high school have mastered the mutual relationship.

In skinny jeans and brown leather boots, Sarah Hillware stakes out a study spot at Gelman Library. It's Friday, and she has a date with her biology book.

Ms. Hillware, who wants to be a neurosurgeon, spent the past week learning about American food history in a seminar course, reading verses at a poetry slam, and selling water bottles for a student organization. As she clicks through a packed electronic calendar on her phone and slips a bag full of books over her shoulder, Ms. Hillware looks like any other GW freshman.

Except she's only 16.

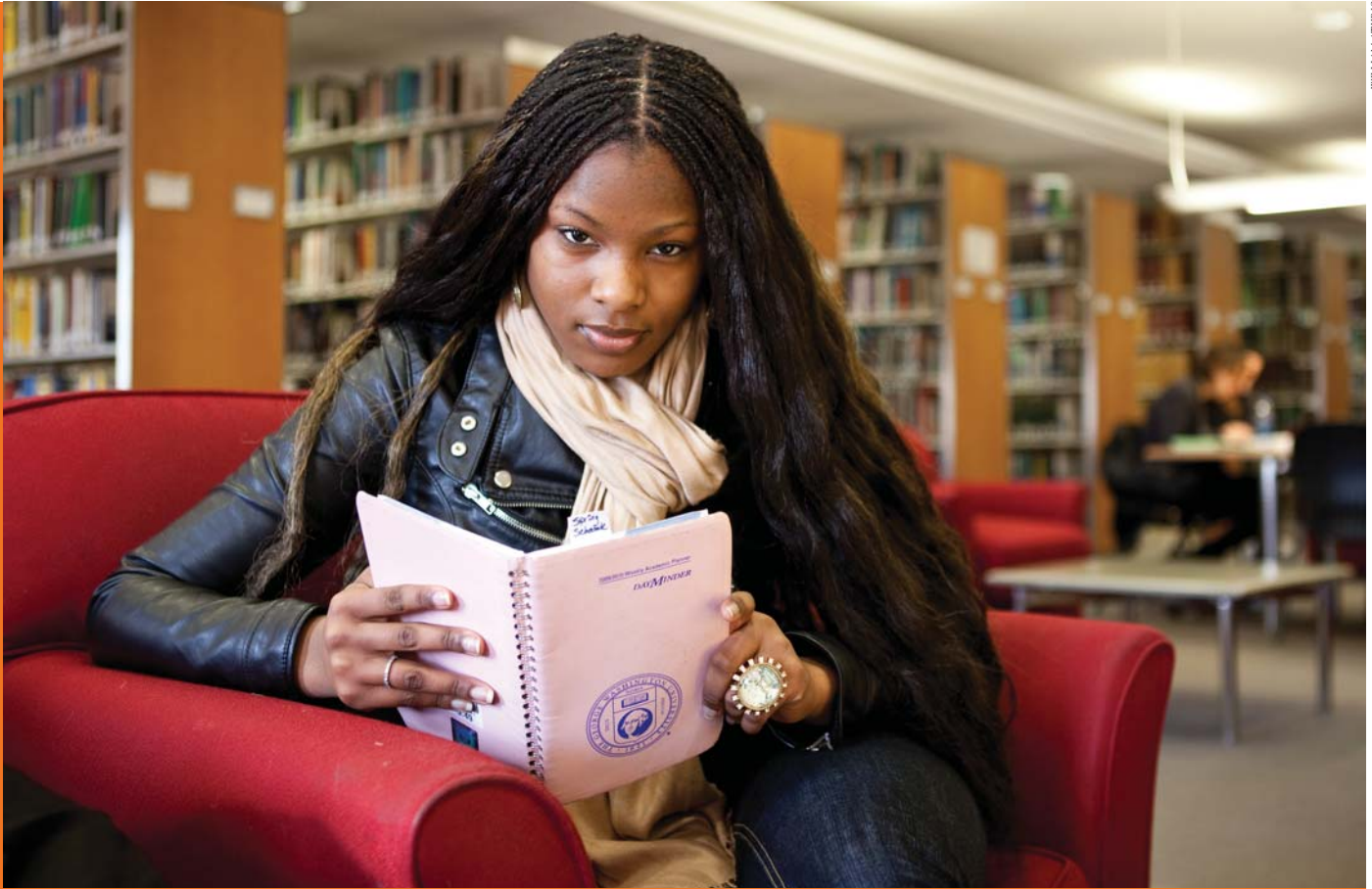
Ms. Hillware is one of about a dozen high school juniors getting a head start on higher education through GW's new Early College Program, a collaboration that allows secondary students to earn dual credits for their diploma and an Associate of Arts degree from GW's Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, tuition-free. Selected through a rigorous application process, the students attend the university full time and take four or five classes a semester.

During a period when public officials are focused on ensuring America's education system is competitive in a global economy, GW's newest program with D.C. Public Schools bridges the secondary school experience with the resources and rigors of higher education. It's also the chance of a lifetime for the teens involved, some of whom hail from the neediest D.C. neighborhoods.

Although the transition to college academics has been a learning process for Ms. Hillware, the campus is familiar. She and the other teens in the cohort are students from School Without Walls, a D.C. public high school that has been located on GW's campus since 1971. The Early College Program is just the most recent partnership between the university and School Without Walls—for years, the two have worked together on facilities sharing, graduate teaching internship programs, and, most recently, a development project that allowed both schools to gain new state-of-the-art

*Sarah Hillware, a junior from School Without Walls High School, is earning her associate's degree for free at GW through the new Early College Program.*

WILLIAM ATKINS



*Ms. Hillware wants to be a neurosurgeon and says GW is her college of choice.*

buildings. The relationship of the partners runs deep, and officials on each side say they benefit from working together.

“It’s a reciprocal relationship,” says Mary Futrell, MA ’68, EdD ’92, dean of GW’s Graduate School of Education and Human Development, which places GW graduate interns at School Without Walls to learn teaching practices.

## A COLLEGE CRASH COURSE

It’s 10:45 on a Tuesday morning and Suwratul Abdullah is early. After an hour-long commute on the Metro from Southeast D.C., he’s still listening to his iPod as he walks into health class at GW’s Old Main building and takes a seat.

Mr. Abdullah, a 16-year-old who took four classes at GW during the fall semester, hasn’t missed a class yet, but he knows that he can work on his studying skills. “I’m a procrastinator,” says Mr. Abdullah, who wants to be a graphic design artist and plans to take a digital arts elective at GW. “In college classes, you have to maintain your schedule; you have to regulate your own lifestyle. So I’m working on my weaknesses. These classes force me to do that.”

The stakes are high for Mr. Abdullah of Southeast D.C. and the 13 other School Without Walls juniors who are the first cohort to begin the program. Tuition fees of an estimated \$100,000 are waived.

“My mom told me, ‘This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,’” he says. “I’m really serious about classes because I understand it’s a big responsibility.”

GW’s Early College Program is the first partnership of its kind in Washington, D.C., and one of a growing number across the nation that offers high school students a chance to earn an associate’s degree, a postsecondary academic degree recognized by employers and higher education institutions. University officials and School Without Walls administrators discussed and planned the GW Early College Program for almost three years, taking notes on other college/high school partnerships around the nation and working with D.C. Public Schools to ensure certain GW courses match the same benchmarks for high school graduation requirements. Through the program, GW has an effective recruitment tool for some of the area’s brightest teens, while the students can choose to finish their bachelor’s degree at GW or take their credits to another institution, making college more affordable and, for some, more attainable.

Taking college classes as a high school student is nothing new; there has been a trend in teens taking college courses since the development of Advanced Placement classes in the 1950s. But there is a particular need for the Early College Program, which creates a more fluid relationship between high school and college academics for those urban students who are typically underrepresented in postsec-

ondary education, says Sheila Harris, BA '74, a former guidance counselor, teacher, and principal at School Without Walls. Dr. Harris, who is director of the Early College Program at GW, explains that some students are yearning for the challenge.

“As a counselor and a principal, I saw a common thread. By the time these kids are juniors and seniors, they teeter on being bored. Many of them have completed their high school requirements, and they are waiting to graduate. For some students, it becomes a wasted senior year,” says Dr. Harris, who was an early organizer and advocate of the program. “Working with School Without Walls students, I saw the maturity and dedication to study, and I thought, ‘This might be worth a shot.’”

That isn't to say that these high school students are abandoned to the college crowd. Dr. Harris and other GW and School Without Walls partners have built a support system to help these kids succeed, including providing mentors, donations to buy books, and a weekly seminar where students can trade advice on tutors or other resources. As for academics, the students have already been stepping up to the challenge, says Robin Marcus, a GW teaching instructor in writing who worked with the cohort last summer in a GW writing course.

“If I had expectations, it was that they would act like the juniors in high school that they are,” Ms. Marcus says. “But they were mature and attentive. They were thinking about sophisticated topics in sophisticated ways.

“I was asked to make it tough for them, so I created a challenge,” she adds. “I dealt with them like freshmen, and they rose to the occasion.”

That's the kind of drive that draws Ms. Hillware to Gelman Library, where she studies between classes. She is taking biology for science majors, and she wants to make sure she has a quiet place to reflect on her lab homework, she says. After all, she wants to someday be a neurosurgeon, and Ms. Hillware knows what it will take to accomplish her goal.

“Your mind is a stretchy thing,” she says, pulling out her homework. “The more you expand it, the better you become.”

## SCHOOL DAYS

**W**hile Ms. Hillware sits down to study, GW graduate student Daniel Zielaski is wrapping up a chemistry class at School Without

Walls, where he is interning as part of a master's in secondary education program. Mr. Zielaski, who previously worked as an environmental educator for the U.S. National Park Service, felt called to the classroom, so he quit his job and applied to GW's newest teacher education partnership. Called the D.C. Urban Teaching Residency Academy, the program allows interns to complete an intensive one-academic-year resi-

dency in one of three D.C. public schools, including School Without Walls. The residency, modeled after a medical residency where interns work full time in their fields, is designed to close the gap between teacher education and teaching practice in urban schools, where educator turnover rates are high. It is a partnership between GW's Graduate School of Education and Human Development, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, and D.C. Public Schools.

At School Without Walls, Mr. Zielaski is quickly adapting to the rigors of teaching because he has a steady support group: The teacher with whom he is working is a GW graduate, as are at least four other teachers and counselors at the school—educators he feels comfortable talking with as he experiments with the learning process. When class is done for the day, Mr. Zielaski walks down the street to his own classes at GW, where he talks with professors about what did or didn't work with his students.

“The biggest advantage to this program is that something I learned last night I can implement today,” he says. “Maybe the strategy is great, or maybe it flops, but it's a very practical approach to knowledge.”

Since the early 1980s, School Without Walls, a humanities magnet school located directly beside GW's Graduate School of Education and Human Development, has provided real world classroom experience for GW graduate teaching interns, and a network of alumni who work or teach at the school is beginning to grow. GSEHD Dean Futrell says the partnership is more than just proximity; both schools are working toward a common goal.

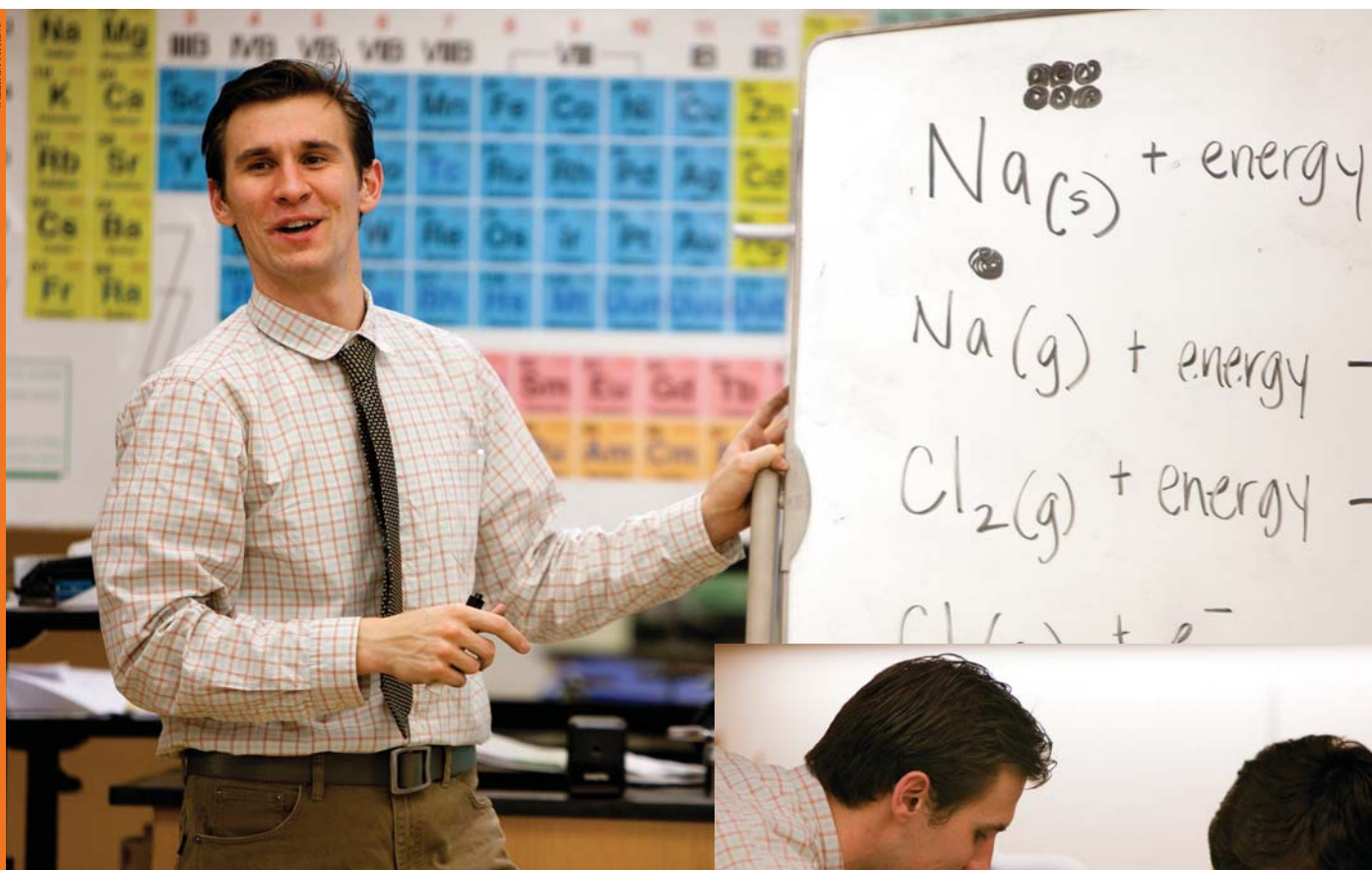
“We work with them on professional development of teachers and curriculum in their school, and, as a result, they help us improve the quality of our teacher educator programs,” Dean Futrell says. “The end product, we hope, is a quality education for everyone involved.”

The educational collaboration doesn't end there. GW faculty members, staff members, and graduate students regularly guest lecture in School Without Walls classes. GW professor James Miller, chair of the Department of American Studies, helps to coordinate the American Studies program at the school with the help of GW students, who plan and lead field trips across the city. GW staff member Bernard

*Sheila Harris, BA '74, director of GW's Early College Program (standing), leads a Friday cohort seminar where students can trade advice on professors, tutors, or other resources.*



WILLIAM ATKINS



GW master's student Daniel Zielaski teaches chemistry at School Without Walls as part of his teaching internship program. School Without Walls, a humanities magnet school located on GW's Foggy Bottom Campus, provides real world classroom experience for GW students.

Demczuck, assistant vice president for D.C. Relations, has lectured at the school for more than a decade and teaches a weekly African-American history course. In addition, School Without Walls students, faculty members, and staff members can take GW courses, tuition waived.

GW and the school also share facilities, with high school students using the GW theaters for drama class or the university's work out center for physical education class, and college students attending GW courses at the School Without Walls building at night. In October, first-year School Without Walls teacher Meg Kennedy, MEd '09, snagged tickets for a few students to see Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates discuss defense and diplomacy during an event at Lisner Auditorium.

"GW definitely provides those opportunities to connect the outside world with what we're learning in the classroom," says Ms. Kennedy, who teaches government. "There are a lot of opportunities that I just wouldn't have as a teacher anywhere else."

GW officials say they value that connection with School Without Walls students, who come from all areas of D.C. to attend the city's star magnet high school. The students are academically talented (they must apply to the school to attend), innately curious, and driven, Dr. Harris says, adding that they mature quickly surrounded by college students.

In Washington, D.C., where the school system has historically struggled and ranks among the lowest in the nation,



Mr. Zielaski says he has a steady support system at the high school, where a growing number of GW alumni teach. His mentor teacher, Cristal Piper, MA '09, MHSA '00, is a GW alumna.

this private-public partnership is opening doors. Through the years, 12 School Without Walls seniors have earned full, four-year scholarships to GW through the Trachtenberg Scholarship Program. The scholarships—given to the brightest D.C. students—include tuition, fees, housing, meals, and books valued at about \$200,000. Those School Without Walls students who grow up around GW's campus and watch college students throughout their everyday lives soon become academic role models themselves, for the generations to come.

That's why Ms. Hillware, who is getting a jump start on her education through GW's Early College Program, still stops by "Walls" every now and then to chat with friends and former teachers about what she is learning in her college courses. She will attend classes at GW for the next two years as she finishes high school, but what about after that?

"I think I want to stay here for the rest of college," says Ms. Hillware, who turned 17 in December. "GW is like my home. Why would I leave?" **GW**

# THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PARTNERSHIP

*With development project, GW and School Without Walls gain new buildings.*

When Principal Richard Trogisch started at the School Without Walls in 2005, a leaky roof forced him to close the library for two weeks. The basement flooded when it rained. The heat and air conditioning didn't work. The students rigged a wireless network so that they could use computers.

"It was a danger, really," says Principal Trogisch, a 38-year education veteran who said he had never seen a school building so dilapidated. "Students were achieving here even though the ceiling was falling on them."

After a two-year, \$33-million renovation, students at the humanities magnet D.C. public high school stepped into a state-of-the-art building in August, thanks to a development partnership with GW. In 2006, the university and the school, which is located on GW's Foggy Bottom Campus, entered an agreement that included the sale of the school's parking lot and additional development rights. GW used the land to construct a new, 474-bed, eco-friendly residence hall while supplying \$12 million toward the School Without Walls renovation.

"This partnership is a win-win for District students and GW," President Steven Knapp said at the school's July ribbon cutting, which drew D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty and D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee.

At School Without Walls, the renovations have brought big opportunities for students. The 118-year-old former Grant Elementary School structure, a historic landmark, was restored and combined with a new 68,000-square-foot, glass enclosed building that houses up to 100 more students than before. Brightly painted classrooms have Promethean boards, interactive whiteboards that allow teachers to display or store information and notes electronically. Students now have access to new

science lab equipment, an advanced media center, and wireless access throughout the building. With video conferencing capabilities, these teens can even link with their sister schools in Ghana and Nigeria.

Students say they are blown away by the new resources, but Principal Trogisch has even more reason to love the renovation. Student test scores on the D.C. Benchmark Assessment System, a standardized test given four times a year to assess reading and math skills, have soared. Last year, about 17 percent of School Without Walls student scores were considered at the advanced level in math. Data from tests taken in September show that 50 percent of student scores achieved this level. There was a similar jump, from 20 percent reaching the advanced level to 60 percent reaching advanced in the reading section, an increase Principal Trogisch partially attributes to the new building and positive student reactions. He says the university's partnership got the job done.

"GW has gone out of its way to make us feel like we're part of the campus," Principal Trogisch says. "It was their relationship, their power, and their visibility in the city that made this happen. Without them, the building would still be falling down."

GW also opened its newest building this fall: a 90-foot-tall, 192,000-square-foot residence hall built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) environment and energy performance standards. At 2135 F Street, South Hall houses mostly seniors and includes Energy Star appliances, bamboo paneling, greenly produced carpet tile, low-flow plumbing fixtures, and other eco-friendly elements. The building, which took nearly two years to construct, brings a new residential opportunity to campus.

—Jaime Ciavarra



*The two-year, \$33-million renovation to School Without Walls includes a new 68,000-square-foot, glass-enclosed building that houses up to 100 more students than before. In a development partnership, GW supplied \$12 million toward the renovation.*