



Left to Right: Student Jeremy Martell, Access Bank VP/Director of Organizational Experience Kathy Headley, Student Lexus Diggs, Student Ally Miller.

ACCESSbank partnership benefits students

The Avenue Scholars partnership with ACCESSbank is another model of success in the community of 120 business partners the program has established in the Omaha area. Currently, three Avenue Scholars students — Lexus Diggs, Ally Miller, and Jeremy Martell — are reaping the benefits as full-time employees at ACCESSbank.

Kathy Headley, Vice President, Director of Organizational Experience, has provided the leadership connection with Avenue Scholars. She is impressed with how well Avenue Scholars students are prepared for engaging in the Omaha workforce.

"These students have interviewed so well, and they really show they want to be here," Headley said. "They are very well prepared. Their skills are better, or at least test as well as any we are getting from other sources."

Before joining the program as a partner in March 2021, ACCESSbank became acquainted with Avenue Scholars by participating in various activities and events, including Intern Omaha, postsecondary internships, and boot camps. After integrating the Avenue Scholars students as paid interns, ACCESSbank "graduated" them out of the internships into permanent employee positions, qualifying them for full-time benefits.

"We start all new employees as tellers," Headley said. "It's a great way to start in the banking business. They need to learn the foundation of the business. An internal poll showed that 92% of leaders in our company started as tellers."

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Left to Right: Dr. Randy Gilson, Chris Ross, Jill Gross

Avenue Scholars welcomes Blair High School

The Avenue Scholars program has expanded to 11 schools with the addition of Blair High School this school year, in collaboration with Metro Community College (MCC). The existing partnership between MCC and Blair made Blair an ideal location for the expansion of the Avenue Scholars program.

Nine juniors are currently enrolled in the first Avenue Scholars class at Blair, led by High School Career Coach Jordyn Smith, a former student and teacher at Blair High School.

"We have had amazing support from the BHS staff, which has made recruitment a lot better," Smith said. "I will be bringing a full class of sophomores to the 2023 luncheon, which is very exciting. We are still working on the recruiting for that class; I am hopeful we will have 25 students in the class come next August."

Blair counselors Chris Ross and Jill Gross credit Superintendent Dr. Randy Gilson with initiating the partnership with Avenue Scholars, noting that Blair had already become familiar with the AS program through Intern Omaha.

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Avenue Scholars

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Metropolitan Community College partnership prepares students for the future

Avenue Scholars' partnership with Metropolitan Community College (MCC) has long been a key component of the program's success in fulfilling its mission to guarantee careers for its youth of hope and need.

"From the beginning of Avenue Scholars, the partnership with MCC has been a linchpin to our success in working with the business community, and most importantly, the success of our students," says Dr. Ken Bird, Avenue Scholars President/CEO.

Key pieces of the partnership that has developed over the years include Senior Academy, Explore 1000, and "Light My Fire" courses.

High school seniors were first required to take the Explore 1000 in the fall semester of the 2020-2021 school year. The course description outlines the objectives: Through a variety of methods, students learn introductory concepts and practices of interdisciplinary study, including use of inquiry, critical thinking and problem solving. Students apply techniques for analyzing information, solving problems, and communicating results while learning about academic and personal self-discovery and applying academic strategies. Students explore and choose a specific career pathway, identify how it aligns with their personal goals, and examine how various disciplines address a societal need or challenge. Students also develop purpose and connection, positive social and academic behaviors, and engagement with the college and community.

Light My Fire courses provide options for students to explore potential careers or areas of study they might not be exposed to in traditional courses.

Senior Academy has been instrumental in preparing Avenue Scholars students for the rigors of postsecondary education and job training.

"Senior Academy provides Avenue Scholars students a unique and direct path to Metropolitan Community College," says MCC President Randy Schmailzl. "The main purpose is to bridge the gap from high school to college with wrap around support systems through Avenue Scholars coaches and MCC. This program was an early dual credit model that was built on the foundation of opening access to students where barriers had previously existed. Many students have benefited from and have been successful in both high school and MCC due to this partnership."

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Mike Flesch, MCC Dean of Math and Natural Sciences, has been involved the past nine years with “planning and creating the right math classes” for the Senior Academy program.

“At first we tried to have every Avenue Scholars student enrolled in a math class,” Flesch said. “Now, we place only a certain percentage based on screening. Now, it’s evolved to where we are focused on helping students who might be weak in pre-algebra or basic arithmetic. Now, we have some students who want to go into Trades Math to get an associates degree in that area.”

“Avenue Scholars coaches have become better at determining what kids really need and where best to place them,” he said. “We have had the same two [Math] teachers leading these courses for the past 9 to 10 years. So there’s a lot of consistency, which leads to improved outcomes.”

Senior Academy courses have included Pre-Algebra, Intermediate Algebra 1, Accelerated Intermediate Algebra, Business Math, Technical Math for Trades, Reading and Responding, Applied Communications, English Composition 1, Introduction to Information Technology, and Introduction to Power and Process.

Avenue Scholars has always appreciated MCC’s commitment to the Senior Academy program.

“The development of Senior Academy would have never happened without the unwavering support and commitment from MCC,” Bird said.

Explore 1000 and Light My Fire courses are also the result of Avenue Scholars and MCC working together to evolve and improve the college experience for Avenue Scholars students.

Carly Frost, MCC’s Assistant to the Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness, the “point person” in coordinating the instructional needs, facilities, and staffing to deliver the Senior Academy, Explore 1000, and Light My Fire courses, has been impressed by the cooperation and professionalism displayed by both Avenue Scholars and MCC as the programs have evolved over the years.

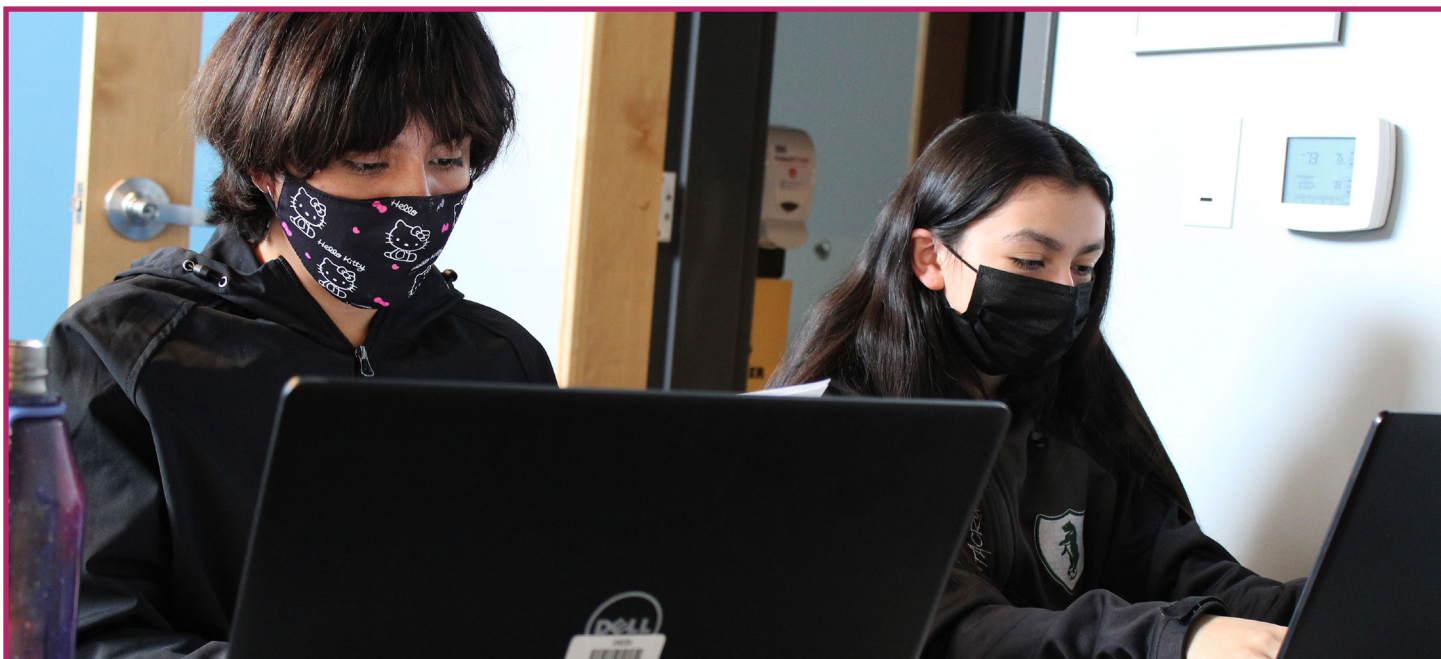
“It is complicated, and we have all pivoted and changed aspects of the programs year after year,” Frost said. “What I have admired about the Avenue Scholars team is how they’ve pivoted and adapted to best meet the needs of all their students.”

Jordan Pirtle, Director of Secondary Partnerships, is passionate about her department’s role in ensuring that the Explore 1000 course prepares Avenue Scholars students for a smooth transition into college life at MCC.

“Through the Explore 1000 class during the first semester of their senior year, we are focused on getting them geared up to be a college student — what it means to be a college student, and what careers do they want explore, study, and learn more about,” Pirtle said. “We want to guide them on their path. Our staff’s responsibility is to streamline that process, getting students enrolled and registered so they’re comfortable and set up for success.”

In addition, Light My Fire courses have been added in the past couple years, giving students a chance to explore possible career interests outside the scope of general courses.

“These courses give students a chance to explore areas that might ‘light their fires’ in areas they had not imagined, such as information technology (IT), diesel mechanics, architecture, precision technology, or CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant),” Pirtle said.





Autism Care Clinics beckon Scholars

Since 1919, The Munroe Meyer Institute (MMI) has been a service provider for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Considering the immense impact this institution has on the greater Omaha community, Avenue Scholars is especially proud to partner with MMI through its Autism Care for Toddlers (ACT) Clinics, which have been established as community outreach programs in Central Omaha and North Omaha.

Mary Halbur, Director of ACT-Central Omaha, and Regina Carroll, Director of ACT-North Omaha, have organized a multi-phase program to introduce Avenue Scholars students to a high-demand, specialized career opportunity in the healthcare industry.

These clinics provide early intervention services for children two to five years old using Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), which is a research-supported treatment for autism spectrum disorders. The clinics offer one-on-one services for toddlers with autism and a caregiver-training program.

"The ACT Clinics' involvement with Avenue Scholars consists of active participation opportunities for students, such as clinic tours and meetings, shadowing experiences of early intervention service, applied behavior analysis service delivery, a training program for behavioral technicians, and potential future employment opportunities," Halbur said.

Over the past year, a three-phase program has been established: (1) a clinic tour and/or career awareness event during a student's junior year of high school; (2) a shadowing experience to learn about the role of ACT staff and client programming; and (3) a behavior technician training program (structured as an internship) during the second semester of a student's senior year of high school. During the third phase, students learn about the process for obtaining a certification as a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT).

"The goal of the final phase is to promote job opportunities at the ACT Clinics following high school graduation," Carroll said. "We anticipate having approximately 30 students participate in Phase 1 each year, six students in Phase 2, and four to six students in Phase 3. Additionally, the ACT Clinics are consistently hiring and expanding, so we anticipate having regular opportunities for employment."

During second semester of this school year four Avenue Scholars will be participating in Phase 3. Halbur and Carroll are pleased with the progression of the program and the partnership.

"It's been great working with and partnering with Avenue Scholars," Carroll said. "We have enjoyed working with a variety of people to develop the programs."

"One of the things that stands out for us is the comprehensive, individualized support the students get," Halbur said. "We feel that's also so important here in how we work with our staff, so it's been rewarding working with a like-minded organization."



Mary Halbur



Regina Carroll

Michael Johnson, Assistant Director of Programs at Avenue Scholars, has been impressed with the organization and the early success of the partnership with the Munroe Meyer Institute's ACT Clinics.

"The steps and systems they have built for our students allow both the student and their agency the chance to get to know one another and the work that is being done," Johnson said. "It beckons the students to become invested in the population while showing more and more of the realities they might face while working in the field. Overall, each step asks the students to invest a little more, while MMI invests a lot more; and the hopeful outcome this summer will be four Avenue Scholars students who are licensed to work full time in this role that is desperately needed."

Halbur is hopeful for the potential of those students entering Phase 3 of the program.

"We're very excited. That's a great number for us," she said. "We want to be able to provide them a comprehensive, full experience to set them up for success."

Scholar 'natural' fit at ACCESSbank

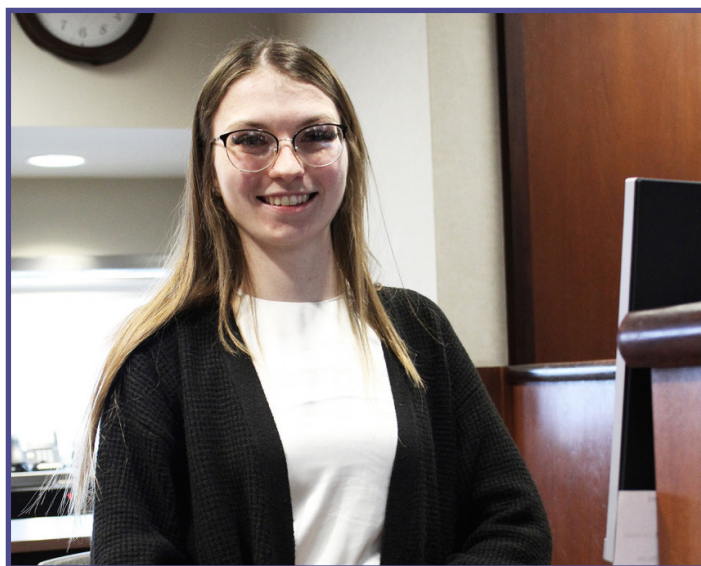
Lexus Diggs, a 2020 Millard South graduate, admits she "never even thought of going to college" when she was a high school sophomore, let alone having the job title she has today — "Universal Banker" at ACCESSbank of Omaha.

"I never thought of going to college because I didn't want to pay for it," Diggs said.

As an Avenue Scholar, Diggs found the means and the guidance to pursue her dreams.

"I had found a passion for banking; I liked working with numbers," she said. "Avenue Scholars gave me the push I needed to get into banking."

In May 2022 Diggs graduated from Metropolitan Community College with an associate degree in Business Management and a certificate for accounting and bookkeeping.



Lexus Diggs

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ACCESSbank partnership benefits students cont.

Students are not the only ones to benefit from the partnership.

"We have really benefited from the partnership as well," Headley says. "We are able to tap into a talent pool of young, diverse talent, which is typically a challenge for banking. It's been a natural partnership where we've been able to find some of these incredibly talented, diverse young professionals."

Headley was not surprised the Scholars quickly advanced from interns to employees.

"It's really about the talent," she said. "They showed they wanted to be here. They performed. They have been responsible. We have had no concerns or issues."

Headley gives much credit to the Avenue Scholars staff.

"The team at Avenue Scholars has made it so easy to work with them," she said. "It's all well organized. They are very supportive of and respectful of employers."

Reminded the partnership with ACCESSbank was established less than two years ago, Lindsay Decker, Director of Communications & Development at Avenue Scholars, says Headley's leadership has been a key to early success.

"Reflecting on the relationship we have with ACCESSbank and Kathy in particular is how she has uplifted and organized others at ACCESS

work with Avenue Scholars. It's comforting to know we have people at ACCESSbank that want to see as much success for our students as we do. It's like our Career Coaches at Avenue Scholars and the workforce representatives on their side are mirroring what we want for our students."

In establishing a community business partner, Decker says Avenue Scholars is looking for two key components: (1) A workplace culture that embraces workforce development and working with Avenue Scholars in an "intentional" process of building a talent pipeline; and (2) A person at the organization to be a "champion" for this process.

"In this case at ACCESSbank, Kathy has been the connector who is driving this process; she has been the force of energy that gets everyone at ACCESSbank just as excited about what we're doing together," Decker said.

Headley is looking forward to continuing the partnership in 2023.

"Going forward, I'm definitely excited for the partnership," Headley said. "It would be really great to expand on this at the high school level, to provide more mentoring and job shadowing. We want to get them interested in banking as a business industry."



Avenue Scholars welcomes Blair High School cont.

Ross says Blair was definitely ready to become the first Avenue Scholars school outside of the Omaha metro area. Several elements of the Avenue Scholars program stand out for Ross and Gross — High School Career Coaches, Postsecondary Career Coaches, and grants to attend MCC.

"It's great for our students, having all the support Avenue Scholars provides," Ross said. "And having that financial piece is something families have certainly grabbed onto."

Gross sees the Avenue Scholars program as a great opportunity for students to find a career path.

"We ask kids what they want to be when they grow up, starting in kindergarten," Gross said. "Of course they know the popular careers they hear about — fireman, doctor, teacher, etc. — but they don't always know about all the other careers available. They may not have that kind of exposure to other careers through their parents, and we don't have time, or have a class, to help them explore other careers. We need more in the trades. We need all professions and for them to be trained in those professions."

These counselors know Avenue Scholars can help students explore these careers and help them navigate the paths to be successful in those career choices.

"Avenue Scholars has proven to be successful in the Omaha area schools," Ross said. "There's so much support. When we've had questions, they've been right there to help."

Dr. Gilson is looking forward to the new opportunities for students to explore career choices and to have more resources to be trained and educated along the way.

"We are elated and excited for the opportunity to have the full range of support that Avenue Scholars provides," Gilson said. "It's exciting to know all of our kids in the program will be supported all the way through high school, through college, and into the start of their careers. This program helps them find their passion and ignite that passion."

Ross and Gross noted they have already seen improvements regarding focus and confidence in their nine junior Scholars.

"Having some direction and focus on careers empowers them and makes them feel more confident," Ross said.

"Looking forward to next year, we are excited to start from the beginning, rather than the middle," Gross said. "With the sophomores, it's going to be really exciting to see where they go, how they grow during the process."

The Avenue Scholars administration is also enthusiastic about the new partnership.

"We are excited about the start of Avenue Scholars in Blair," said Dr. Lisa Sterba, Senior Director of Programs. "MCC has a very strong presence at Blair High School, and Avenue Scholars is a value add for students. Students now have the opportunity to get a job start on their education as their career search with the help of AS coaches."

Scholar 'natural' fit at ACCESSbank cont.

Her Postsecondary Career Coach encouraged Diggs to apply for an Avenue Scholars internship at ACCESSbank. Although a little nervous at the beginning, Diggs became comfortable and was quickly promoted from her intern status to a full-time Teller 1 position, becoming the first of four Avenue Scholars to be employed by ACCESSbank.

"It was scary at first; it almost felt too professional in the moment," Diggs said. "Coming from KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken), I had no professional clothes."

The welcoming culture at ACCESSbank made a difference.

"Everyone made me feel very welcome," Diggs said. "It was easy to have real conversations; no one was super uptight."

After six months, Diggs was promoted out of the intern status to Teller 1. Twelve months later, she was promoted to Teller 2. This past October, she was promoted to Universal Banker status, which means

she can work with and assist customers to open personal accounts.

Kathy Headley, Vice President, Director of Organizational Experience, says Diggs — like the other three Avenue Scholars employees — is a natural.

"Lexus has shown a commitment to the bank," Headley said. "Her progression through the company demonstrates her dedication to her professional development."

Headley continues to be impressed with the level of preparation of Avenue Scholars students in transitioning into the workforce. She says these students are a good fit for ACCESSbank because "we treat them just like we do all our employees."

"It's really all just natural; we don't treat them differently, and they are ready to go to work," Headley said.

Volunteers Needed for Mock Interviews



AVENUE SCHOLARS
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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

MOCK INTERVIEW DAYS: FEBRUARY 2023

We want our juniors to have interview experience with a caring professional!

If you're able to donate your time to interview an Avenue Scholars student,
please email Jessi Hedlund at jhedlund@avescholars.org



Avenue Scholars is looking for volunteers to participate in our upcoming mock interview sessions.

If you're able to donate your time and support the professional development of our high school juniors, please contact Jessi Hedlund at jhedlund@avescholars.org for more information about available dates and times.

Thank you!

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