



Blooming Where You Are Planted: Lavar Thomas '11



“Financial hardship stifles the potential of so many students seeking a better life for themselves and their families. The generosity of Kingsborough donors creates opportunities for students like me to thrive and grow.” – Lavar Thomas ‘11

In 2009, a young man arrived at Kingsborough Community College, feeling defeated. Rejected by nearly all the colleges he had applied to, he signed up for his first semester courses with weary resignation. His plan was simply to get through, get by, and get out. Fortunately for Lavar Thomas '11, nothing at Kingsborough went “according to plan.”

He found his first revelation in the college’s Presidential Scholars Program, where he was surrounded with highly motivated and like-minded peers. To this day, he counts his KCC colleagues as some of his closest friends. “Kingsborough taught me the value of blooming where I am planted,” he says. “This college not only changed my life, but also how I perceived my possibilities and my potential.”

When he was not finding inspiration from his fellow students, he found it in the classroom. He credits Professors like Eben Wood (English), Maureen Minielli (Communications) Marvin Williams (Communications) and Jose Nanin (Health) for providing him the tools to write effectively, think critically and speak with confidence. Equally

important were the mentors who took him under their wings, most notably Dr. Rachele Goldsmith, the former director of the Honors Program: “Dr. Goldsmith is a true champion for her students and was a constant source of inspiration for me.”

It was only fitting, then, that Lavar would go on to receive the *Rachele Goldsmith College Now Honors Award*, given annually to an Honors student who has maintained an exceptionally high level of academic excellence. “Receiving the award named for Dr. Goldsmith did not just reduce my financial hardship; it also confirmed for me what my hard work, persistence and commitment can create when I focus on my goals.” After graduating from Kingsborough, Lavar enrolled at Clark University (Worcester, Massachusetts), ultimately earning his Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science and Government. He is currently pursuing his Master’s Degree in Public Administration at Rutgers University-Camden, as a Peace Corps Coverdell Fellow.

Today, he applies the knowledge and skills he honed at KCC to bettering the world around him. He is a Community Involvement Coordinator for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), helping over 28 underserved communities deal with hazardous waste and other contaminants. Lavar is also the co-founder of Leaders of the Free World, a non-profit organization that empowers young black men through international experiential learning, and the founder of the Empower for Greatness Initiative, in which he conducts trainings at colleges and organizations on transformational leadership. Previously, he has worked as a legislative aide for the Massachusetts Legislature House of Representatives and served in the Peace Corps in Rwanda.

“I first met him when he was a senior in high school, and even then he exemplified the word ‘leadership,’” says Benjamin Stewart, a Senior Academic Advisor at KCC who has remained in close contact with Lavar over the years. In fact, when Lavar co-founded Leaders of the Free World, he enlisted his KCC mentor to serve on the organization’s Board of Advisors. “Lavar spoke his aspirations into existence,” Benjamin goes on, “and I’m proud to stand with him as he embarks on a mission to empower young black men who come from the same humble beginnings that he did.”

In just a handful of years, Lavar went from a reluctant student to a brilliant leader, from feeling defeated to feeling unstoppable. He credits Kingsborough for sparking his transformation, and hopes that others will continue to support the college and today’s students: “Kingsborough is a stepping stone for many students looking for a second chance or a new direction. **Through your generosity, you can have a life-changing impact on someone just like me.**”

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