Meet the new TRIO Director - Malee Xiong by Kong Yang

Warmest greetings!

My name is Malee Xiong, the new Director of TRIO/Student Support Services (SSS). I completed my undergraduate degree in Social Work at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and my Masters in Administrative Leadership at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I worked at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) for 8 ½ years. At UWM I worked for the Educational Talent Search (ETS) and Upward Bound Math and Science (UBMS) programs (both are Federal TRIO programs just like SSS). I was an Advisor for ETS and a Director for UBMS. These two programs are very similar to SSS and have similar goals. Like SSS, the goal of the ETS and UBMS is to work with students from disadvantaged backgrounds to help them realize their potential to excel in higher education. Educational Talent Search works with high school students and college drop-outs, while UBMS works with only high school students to help them realize their potential in Math and Science. These two programs help expose students to college and instill in them that going to college is a very feasible goal.

As I am new to the area, many have asked me what I thought of the Twin Cities, and my initial answer was WOW! I came from a small town, and attended college in an even smaller town so moving to the Twin Cities is a big step for me. Though it will take some time adapting to it, I am excited to be here as there are so many opportunities. Yet, it’s difficult to leave my family. As a Hmong person, it’s normal to remain close to one’s family, but Minnesota to Wisconsin is just a “hop and a skip” away. Plus, I have relatives in the twin cities area, and with me being here, it’ll give my parents more reasons to come for a visit.

I am very lucky that everyone has been very supportive. The staff at Metropolitan State University has welcomed me into this family. The staff in TRIO/Student Support Services welcomed me as well and has been very patient with me while I learn the procedures of our system and of the system here at Metropolitan State University. The transition from UBMS to SSS has been an excellent one, and I am very happy to be here. I feel that there’s always room for growth and hope my experiences with TRIO will help us improve our services even more so that we can foster our students’ academic, professional, and personal growth. My motto is “Student first.” I feel when students come to our office, with or without an appointment, servicing them should be our top priority. It is important to maintain a positive attitude and a welcoming environment so that our students feel a sense of warmth and welcome every time they stepped into the TRIO office.

Lastly, I come from a similar background as many TRIO students. My parents were not fluent nor could they read and write English, but they wanted so much for my siblings and I education wise. My parents have instilled in me to believe that everyone has the potential to excel, and this positive attitude has allowed me to overcome many challenges. I would have been the perfect candidate for TRIO programs, but no one ever informed me such programs existed. Hence, my educational journey was a struggle, but with will and determination, I overcame the obstacles that all students face in higher education. I hope I can provide guidance to students who are at a crossroad and not sure of what to do. I hope that through sharing my educational journey with TRIO students, they too can realize that anything is possible if we believe in our potential. Though obtaining a higher education degree is not an easy task, the truly devoted can and will achieve it. As Director of SSS, I hope I can be a positive force in helping you achieve your educational, professional, and personal goals.
Being a TRIO Mentor  By: Mary Bailey Bustos

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, a mentor is a trusted counselor or guide. A person who helps guide another through personal development.

A mentor is also someone that can act as a sounding board for ideas and plans with regards to the student (mentee). Mentors bring in their own unique life/work/college experiences and are willing to share their skills with others. Mentors listen to their mentees empathically and provide feedback.

Having a mentor can aid you in achieving your goals, while pushing ahead with your college and future plans.

As a TRIO participant, I wanted to be able to provide my assistance to my peers. Hence, I became a TRIO mentor after I had completed approximately eight weeks of volunteering with TRIO. I wanted to make sure that I felt comfortable doing what would be asked of me: calling students, workshops, etc.

My first official day with the TRIO was February 15, 2005. Since becoming a mentor with TRIO I have watched as though looking through a mirror just how much I have changed from a very shy, insecure student, to a confident student with abilities that I would have never thought I could possess. I have also had the chance to conduct workshops and speak with METRO 101 students, (taught by Professor Danforth), regarding “Time Management,” and “How to Write and Win Scholarships.”

As a mentor, my job duties include, but are not limited to the following: conduct various workshops, mentor TRIO students, aid TRIO students in writing scholarship essays, look over TRIO student’s class assignments for errors, make call reminders to mentees, and aid TRIO students with registering for classes. Mainly I am here for any student who walks into the office and needs to see a mentor.

In the short time that I have been a TRIO mentor, I have seen many changes. I have seen a few of my fellow TRIO mentors graduate and move on. I have seen both, Pauline Danforth, and Eve Nichols move on to other positions within Metropolitan State University. I have also had the opportunity to get to know our new director, Malee Xiong.

As I near the end of my undergraduate studies here at Metropolitan State University and prepare to graduate on December 19, 2006. I was going to move on to graduate school in Spring of 2007, however; I am still waiting to hear back from the many graduate schools that I applied to, so in the meantime I have decided to return to Metropolitan State University, for a second undergraduate degree in Women & Ethnic Studies. Once I have completed this, I aspire to go to graduate school.

Finally I would like to say that if any of the TRIO students feel as I once did, stop by and apply to become a TRIO mentor. It was the best thing that I could have done for myself.

THE ROAD TO A NEW BEGINNING

The 2006 MAEOPP Adult Student Leadership Conference  By: Joan Lee

On October 20, seven Metropolitan State University TRIO students and one staff member made the long trip to St. Charles, Illinois to attend the leadership conference at the Hilton Garden Inn. This is an annual event that students look forward to all year long. Students come from all the upper Midwest states.

The accommodations and food were great! The featured speakers were informative, moving and entertaining. In between events, the students attended workshop sessions on everything from effective communication, stress reduction to overcoming obstacles. I myself attended 3 Amigos and a New Beginning given by Nick Galm, Tony Chavez and Tom Kruger. This workshop was a humorous look at the obstacles faced by non-traditional students returning to school. They shared their experiences and how they turned those experiences into positives to be successful in college. I was able to relate to a lot of what they had to say such as working and going to school and all the age and cultural differences we have at Metropolitan State. I also attended Shades of Gray presented by Richard McMullen, Jr. and Elizabeth Grady. This workshop was on ethical dilemmas. We broke into groups and were given a situation to discuss and then shared with the group what our thoughts were on the resolution of the situation. It made me aware of the fact that ethical questions often have answers that are not self-evident or easy. All the workshop sessions were led by TRIO students and professional speakers.

Other activities included college fair and evening activities such as the game room, movies, pool time and a dance.

The leadership conference was a wonderful place to meet and greet students from other universities, and to learn about their schools and programs, and get new ideas that we could bring back to our own university.

As we made our way back from Illinois to Minnesota, we were all tired but reflected on what we had learned and the fun we had, and thus, were making plans for our trip next year.
In August 2006, I along with three other TRIO students attended a four day Graduate Symposium in Berkeley, CA. While there we stayed in dorm style housing, and walked to the University of California Berkeley, which was about a 10 minute walk from our residence.

Topics covered included, but are not limited to the following: How to Write Graduate Essays, the GRE, LSAT and GMAT, Applying to Graduate School, and How to Score High on the GRE tests.

One workshop that we as a group attended was regarding the “Do’s and Don’ts of Applying to Graduate School.” The workshop was led by Don Asher, who states the following:

- You should research the colleges of interest to you from your home.
- Ask if there is a way to have the GRE fee waived.
- Apply only to one graduate school at a time.
- Apply for scholarships, and grants.
- Do internships or assistantships.

He concluded his workshop by saying “write your essay with confidence and you will be accepted. Make your essay a positive one. Focus on the areas of both your past and future.”

Another workshop that we attended was “Getting the Scores You Want on the GRE.” This workshop was facilitated by Joseph Brown, PhD. Professor Brown gave a lot of useful information in his presentation. A few of the highlights are:

- Go to the website, www.review.com
- Go to the website, www.Kaplan.com
- Buy the 10th Edition of the Kaplan GRE book and study, as it contains questions from actual tests
- Schedule to take GRE exams near the end of the month
- You can take the GRE exam five (5) times per year

Graduate students from different colleges presented their dissertations. One McNair student presented on “Predictors of Drug and Alcohol Abuse Among Native American Teens.” Another McNair student presented on “Who’s the Best Diversity Trainer, Testing the Similarity Hypotheses.” We attended several together and at different times we split up and went our own ways to different meetings.

On our final night the entire national group of 400+ students boarded a yacht, the Galaxy Commodore. Aboard the yacht we enjoyed dinner, conversing, and networking with other McNair College students. The cruise lasted four hours and as the clock struck 8pm, dancing started on the second deck.

The symposium was held on a national level and was open to students from Upward Bound, Student Support Services, and McNair. During the evenings we mastered the ©BART transit system and went to San Francisco and took in the sights. We had an excellent time and learned a lot.

We would encourage all TRIO students who will be graduating in the spring or next fall to check with the TRIO office early in the summer semester and find out about attending the symposium next year.

Upcoming Events

“The Best Christmas Pageant Ever”
SteppingStone Theatre
Friday, December 8, 2006
7:00 PM
Limited amount of tickets available
Come to the TRIO office to sign up.

“Lorie Line and her Pop Chamber Orchestra Holiday Spectacular”
Orpheum Theater
Tuesday December 12, 2006
7:30 PM
Limited amount of tickets available
Come to the TRIO office to sign up.

TRIO Holiday Open-House
Tuesday December 12, 2006
11 am - 2 pm
Founders Hall 221
Come meet and mingle and enjoy food and drinks.
With interest rates on existing student loans on the rise, Consolidation Loans combine several of your student loans into one bigger loan from a single lender. When you consolidate, your lender pays off the balances on the other loans, and replaces them with our new consolidated loan (similar to refinancing a mortgage). Consolidation loans are available for most federal loans, including FFELP (Stafford, PLUS and SLS), FISL, Perkins, Health Professional Student Loans, NSL, HEAL, Guaranteed Student Loans, and Direct loans. Though most educational loans can be consolidated, **do not consider consolidating your Perkins Loan.** The reason is because your Perkins Loan already carries a low fixed rate of 5%. Also, the Perkins Loan is eligible for loan forgiveness to students who pursue certain public-service professions such as education or health care.

There is no cost and no fees to consolidate your loans. Do not pay a fee in advance to consolidate your federal education loans. If you are asked to pay an up front fee, chances are it is an example of an **advance fee loan scam.**

Both student and parent borrowers can consolidate their education loans (students and parents cannot combine their loans through consolidation because only loans from the same borrower can be consolidated). In addition, married students are no longer able to consolidate their loans together. When married students consolidated their loans together, each spouse became responsible for the full amount of the loan, and the loans cannot be separated in the event of a divorced. Moreover, students cannot consolidate their loans while still enrolled in school. You can only consolidate their education loans during the grace period or after the loans enter repayment. Parents, on the other hand, can consolidate PLUS loans at any time.

There are benefits and drawbacks to consolidating your student loans. A benefit is that you lock in a fixed interest rate (your existing student loans are variable rate loans—meaning the rate will change every year on July 1). The interest rate on a consolidation loan is the weighted average of the interest rates on the loans being consolidated, rounded up to the nearest 1/8 of a percent and cannot exceed 8.25%. Another benefit is that your repayment is extended from 10 years to 20 or 30 years (depending on the size of your student loan), reducing your monthly payment. A drawback is that by stretching out your loan payment from 10 years to 20 or more years, you’ll end up paying more in interest, but there is no prepayment penalty. Furthermore, if you only have a couple more years or a few thousand more dollars to go until your student is paid off, and can handle your current monthly payment, consolidation may not be the route to consider.

To find out more about loan consolidation, please go to the federal government’s web site: [www.loanconsolidation.ed.gov](http://www.loanconsolidation.ed.gov).

This article is derived from information obtained from [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) and [www.bankrate.com](http://www.bankrate.com).