

Cornelius D Griggs - 3min. Address

My journey to this podium has been one of filled with obstacles and challenges, but in the great words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

Challenge and Controversy was a normal part of my life at an early age. At the age of 9, my mother mad a very difficult decision to place me under the care of the department of children and family services. I spent 9 years of my life, from the age of 9 until the age of 18, bouncing between 3 different foster homes from Cabrini Green Housing Projects to Robert Taylor Homes with a brief stint at a local group home on the Westside of Chicago.

Growing up as a ward of the state, my first introduction to the Trio programs occurred during my sophomore year of high school at Steinmetz Academic Centre located on the Northwest Side of Chicago. I was introduced to Mr. Bernard Clay and Introspect Youth Services during an afterschool learning summit. From that point, my relationship with the organization would grow and Mr. Clay would take me under his wing as he did with many of the youth that walked through his door. He began to lecture me on the educational opportunities that were at my disposal and began to steer me in the direction of colleges and universities. Mr. Clay was the first individual to inform me that you had to take the ACT or SAT to get into college, unfortunate but true.

Through introspect, I was afforded the opportunity to visit colleges and universities across the state, participate in summer youth programs and gain an understanding of what college was all about before ever stepping foot on a campus as a student. But like many others who grew up in the gang infested neighborhoods of Chicago, going to college was a far stretch of the imagination. As a young African American male, simply surviving was a celebration within itself.

After choosing college over the Marine Corps in the fall of 1999, I enrolled into Chicago State University to pursue a dual degree in Criminal Justice and Computer Science. It was during my time at Chicago State University that I was introduced to another Trio program called McNair. The McNair Program afforded me the opportunity to participate in educational and career focused conferences across the country. The program would later prepare me for my graduate studies at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Trio programs and organizations like McNair and Introspect have made it possible for me and many other Alumni to be successful. It’s been 15 years since I graduated from high school and 9 years since I completed my undergraduate’s studies. In that time frame,

- I served 10years in the United States Army Reserves including a tour in Afghanistan where I was awarded the Army Accommodation Medal for my service during a foreign conflict.

- Completed a Bachelors of Science from Chicago State University and a Masters from the Illinois Institute of Technology in Industrial Technology with a concentration in Construction Management
- Working towards my 2nd Master's degree at Northwestern University in Real Estate Development
- Assisted in the chartering of the City Colleges of Chicago's first Construction Management Program in 2009, primarily serving minority and disadvantage students across the City of Chicago(In the Spring of 2013, we graduated our first class of 6 students, 5 of which have went on to 4 year institutions on full scholarships).
- And working as a Project Manager for the 12 largest General Contractors in the United States. I have had the opportunity to lead teams that have built such projects as The Tides, a 52-Story \$112MM high-rise in downtown Chicago, the historic Dunbar High School, a \$10MM renovation in the Bronzeville area of Chicago and Altgeld Gardens, a \$35MM, 440 unit renovation for the Chicago Housing Authority

But, my most rewarding duty is fulfilling my responsibilities a single parent to my 9 year old daughter Kyla Kamora Griggs.

For nearly 50 years, Trio programs have changed the lives of countless individuals across our great country. My accomplishments, thus far, would not be possible if it were not for the opportunities that the Trio Programs provided. I understand that our work cannot stop because there are others who need the same inspiration, guidance, and access that I was afforded.

I close with a quote from LTC Washington, my commander during operation enduring freedom, moments before our plane landed at Bagram Air force Base in Bagram, Afghanistan in February of 2003. He looked into the eyes of his troops and stated "If you wait until you can do everything for everybody, instead of one-thing for somebody, you'll end up doing nothing for nobody." The words have inspired me to no longer be ashamed of my early challenges but use them as the vehicle to initiate change.

Thank you and God Bless.

Cornelius D Griggs