

Black Student and Family Night



Panelists (left to right) Ezekiel Wells, Chishayla Kimmons, Dr. Debi Jenkins, and Chris Smith answered questions about their experiences in college and at Clark.

Clark College graduate, social worker, and restorative justice champion Ezekiel Wells presented an inspiring keynote address at Black Student and Family Night on May 14 in Gaiser Student Center. The event was presented by the college's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Guided Pathways.

The purpose of the free event is to provide opportunities for Black students, and folx of the African diaspora, of all ages, their families, and community to learn about the ways Clark College can be a pathway to college, careers, and beyond. Students and their families learned about Running Start, financial aid, various programs at Clark, and career opportunities. Attendees also learned about available community resources, such as the NAACP and iUrban Teen, among others. A delicious catered dinner of soul food was served.

Entertainment for the youngest potential penguins was provided by Nikki Brown Clown.

Dr. Debra (Debi) Jenkins, a tenured professor in the Department of Early Childhood Education/ Psychology and department chair of Early Childhood Education, was an honored presenter. She shared her journey that began as a student at Clark, where she earned an associate degree in Early Childhood Education. She then achieved a bachelor of arts degree and her first master's degree in Human Development specializing in Developmental and Bicultural Development. Next, she acquired a second master's degree in Psychology and a doctorate in Higher Education Administration.

She was first hired at Clark as an adjunct faculty member in the Psychology, Sociology, and Early Childhood departments. Now she is a tenured professor and chairs the college's Early Childhood Education department. Dr. Jenkins has been an influential member of Clark College for 32 years and was the first African American woman to receive tenure at Clark College.

The event's emcee was Kevin Thomas, Director of Workforce Education Services. In attendance were Clark College Board Vice Chair Denise Gideon and Trustee Marilee Scarbrough as well as Clark College President, Dr. Karin Edwards, Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Vanessa Neal, and Vice President of Student Affairs, Dr. Michele Cruse.

Other presentations included:

- **Professor Earl Frederick** (a.k.a. "Chef Earl") represented the college's culinary programs. He shared his own story, the grandson of Black sharecroppers whose education ended in fifth grade. He applied for 150 scholarships and told the students: "Don't think you can't get scholarships. Apply for every scholarship you can."

- **Gaby Posteuca**, an admissions recruiter, discussed Clark College programs and told the high school students: “Your story matters.”
- **Professor Carol Hsu** presented an overview of Clark’s engineering specialties and encouraged students to register for Clark’s free Guided Pathways STEM camp June 27-28.
- **Hernan Garzon**, a recruiter for the Automotive Technology program, talked about the program’s hands-on learning opportunities, paid internships at local dealership shops, and the 100% employment rate for the program’s graduates.
- **Lisa Barsotti**, a recruiter for Allied Health programs, gave an overview of Allied Health programs and said, “We really need more people of color in the health care field. If you want a job in high demand that pays well, go into health care.”
- **Chelsea Perrone** explained the various types of financial aid and encouraged students and their parents to complete either a FAFSA or WASFA.
- **Dany Depuy-Grobbe** talked about Running Start and invited the students to check out Clark’s new Penguin Early Center (PEC).
- **Panelists professors, alumni, and students:** Dr. Debi Jenkins, Chris Smith, Chishayla Kimmons, and Ezekiel Wells answered questions about their experiences in college and at Clark.

Some highlights of the panel discussion:

- “When we talk about motivation, we consider hopes, wants, and needs. In Black and brown communities, hopes and wants are not something we get to. It was about survival. What would bring me the biggest paycheck?”
- “My mom always said: ‘They can’t take away your education.’”

- “My advice to someone who is afraid to speak in class is: Speak up! Be bold.”



Roman Eliezer Gonzalez talked to students about opportunities with Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement (MESA).

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A woman who has worked in her field for more than 22 years told Vanessa Neal that listening to the speakers had impacted her so deeply that she was inspired to go back to school to learn about STEM fields. She told Neal: “I know a lot of people in the community, and I can’t wait to tell them about tonight and the programs Clark offers. There are many people I work with hoping to finish their education, and I will bring them to Clark.”

Another high school student stepped up to Gaby Posteuca’s table and asked how to apply for Clark College. Posteuca smiled and was happy to oblige.

About Keynoter Ezekiel Wells

Ezekiel Wells responded to adversity by vowing to be the change he wanted to see in the world. First, he got an education. He is a first-generation college graduate who earned an associate degree at Clark College and then a bachelor’s degree in social work from Eastern Washington University. Learn more about his work in restorative justice [here](#).

Photos: Clark College/Susan Parrish