



FROM FIRST-GENERATION TO FOUNDER: AN INTERVIEW WITH AMINATU ABDULAI

How an ATPA Alumni Started Her Own Foundation

Education Can Start Anywhere

Picture Kolinvai, Ghana, with its 300 homes and flourishing plots of maize, rice, yams, potatoes, and peanuts. The children split their time with their families tending to crops and rushing off to school when chores and errands are finished.

Crafted from mud and roofed with flimsy metal slats, the school is cramped with students piled inside. Teachers are lucky to have one textbook per classroom, with little to no paper or pens, let alone the training and support needed to teach groups of children. And yet, Aminatu Abdulai is happy to be seated there each day she can.

At age 12, Aminatu attends school for a whole year without interruption from the needs of the farm, family, or community. Not everyone is thrilled with a young girl so determined to attend school and learn English: *"I can't remember a time I didn't want to be a doctor; I just knew. But I had no role models. Parents often disapproved of their kids learning English due to colonialism and worry that Western attitudes will breed disrespect."*

Despite setbacks and slow progress, Aminatu completes more education than most other girls. Yet her drive to complete her education is marred by trauma and a struggle not just to learn but also survive:



MC Alumni Aminatu Abdulai with her
Smith College diploma

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"Young girls and women are at a big disadvantage compared to the boys and men. Parents want their young girls to get married. Teenage pregnancies are common, and this can eliminate a young woman's chances of continuing her education. When I was 17, I was raped by a 45-year-old man. I became pregnant and had to drop out of school. My family, especially my brother, disapproved, and I left home to live with the man because I had nowhere else to go. I was still 17 when I gave birth, and they sent me home with my baby. Everything seemed okay. But three weeks later, my baby had issues and passed in the hospital. I never got a chance to say goodbye."

After losing her child, Aminatu's sister helps her move to the city and re-enroll in school. There, she meets two individuals who help change the course of her life. Peace Corps volunteers teaching at her school give her a laptop, teach her to type, and inform her of scholarships in the United States: *"I was nervous about leaving my family and I feared sex trafficking because I had heard stories like that. But they helped me pass my exams, get my passport, and they paid my visa fees. They believed in me and spent all their money on me so I could go to the U.S. and continue school."*

Building a Future

Aminatu arrives in the United States in the summer of 2018 and enrolls in Montgomery College ESL courses. At MC, Aminatu continues to be a determined and successful student, but she is not immune to the isolation common to many international students:

"I didn't need help with doing my work or being motivated or anything like that, but I was a little down and struggling to adjust. It was tough being so far away from my family... I couldn't even call my mother because she didn't have a phone. I signed up for everything I could at MC, but it was ATPA that I looked forward to the most, meeting with my coach every week."

With the support of ATPA coach Brenda Marcial, Aminatu sets a goal to tend to her emotional and social needs.



Funds raised by the Kolinvai Foundation support the school pictured here.



Every lesson [professors and staff] give, every student they speak to, it makes a difference. For me, it wasn't my classes that changed me, it was my connections to professors. I am so grateful for the love from Coach Brenda, she is now my friend and mentor.

Aminatu uses MC resources to build a resume and get a job. She buys a smartphone for her mother so they can have regular calls. And she graduates from MC and transfers to Smith College, where she finds connection and healing: *"Being at Smith transformed my life, being around these women. We compete, but in a healthy way that motivates me. Something special about Smith is its resources for non-traditional female students, especially for women who have kids and are returning to school."*

Aminatu continues to think about her little village back home, thousands of miles away. She considers the future generations of young girls, studying within the cracked and cramped school walls: *"I still wanted to be a doctor, but I thought I had to wait to give back to my home until I accomplished that goal. Smith taught me that I don't need to wait, I can start now."*

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Changing the Future for Kolinvai

Aminatu starts the Kolinvai Youth Foundation, with a mission to rebuild the school building she once studied in. The Foundation aims to hire engineers and skilled masons, secure appropriate building materials, and add three modern classrooms, an office, and a library, ensuring a safe learning environment for Kolinvai's students for years to come.



I hope to build a new school building before the old building falls down on the kids, I'm surprised it hasn't already! Building schools in Kolinvai doesn't just educate the kids. It also inspires them to continue to make positive changes in the community so they can connect to it and maintain it themselves. A lot of people are waiting on the government to step in and help, but we can't afford to wait, and we can't rely on the government. We need our own community members to step up and be inspired to improve conditions.

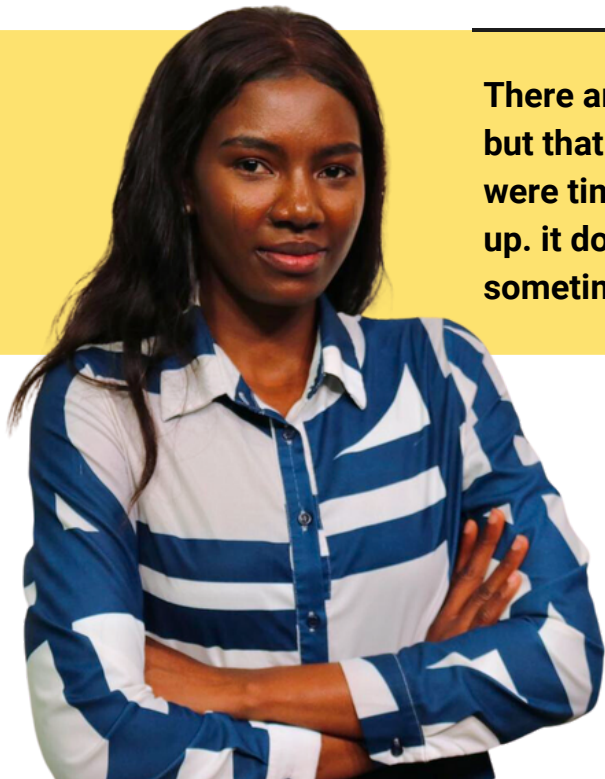


Aminatu comments on a particular student she has in mind when she envisions the positive impact she aims to have on Ghana's young girls:

*"My story is the reason I am starting this Foundation. I felt that once I became pregnant no one cared about me anymore, nobody saw any potential in me anymore. There is one teen girl I am talking to at home, and I want to make sure she can go to college, too, whether she is pregnant or not. I want to show my community what women and girls can do when I go back to rebuild the school. **I want to offer hope to the young girls who are pregnant in my community because when people believed in me, that changed me.**"*



There are times when we feel like our dreams have come to an end, but that moment can be the bridge to achieving our goals. There were times in my story where I thought it was done, all over, I give up. it doesn't mean you are not smart or that you cannot do it, sometimes you must give up before you can succeed.



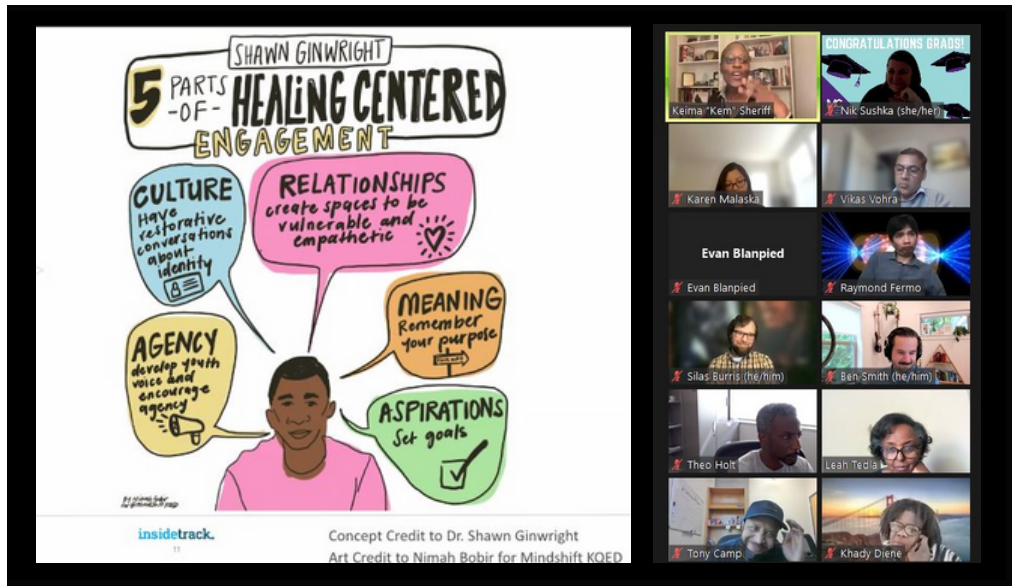
Connect with Aminatu Abdulai on [LinkedIn](#) and read more about her work with the [Kolinvai Youth Foundation](#). Aminatu is available for interviews and speaking opportunities to share her incredible story.

LEARN MORE



The Crimsonbridge Foundation supported 22 ATPA coaches and staff to complete Foundational Coach Training and program assessment with InsideTrack, a nationally-recognized non-profit working with academic coaching programs nationwide.

Crimsonbride funds education, leadership, and capacity building with programs driven by equity, innovation, and entrepreneurialism. A Latina-led organization, Crimsonbridge is one of just 2% of foundations in the United States with Hispanic leadership.



Partner Up!



Evan Blanpiéd, pictured far left, completed a year of national service with ATPA as an AmeriCorps VISTA, thanks to a partnership with Transform Mid-Atlantic (TMA). Formerly known as Campus Compact Mid-Atlantic, TMA aims to help member campuses and community partners develop global citizens who work to create a just, equitable and sustainable world.

TMA's funding supports a three year effort to increase ATPA's capacity to serve more students by:

- Implementing new technology to improve student access to coaching
- Expanding on-demand academic resources like self-paced workshops
- Enhancing College and community partnerships that connect students with academic coaches

FY23 Grants in Action

ATPA and MC's Applied Tech program continued year two of the Johnson Controls Community College Partnership supporting student pathways to living-wage, life-long careers in the HVAC field.

Funds supported outreach, coaching, and events like the "Day in the Life of an HVAC Tech" panel with industry members in April.

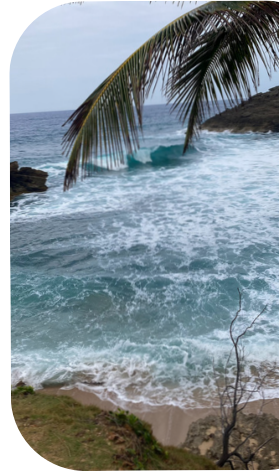


SEMESTERLY stories



My name is Betsua (Renny) Cuevas. I am a Business Major at Montgomery College. I plan to graduate from the University of Maryland with a major in Economics and a minor in Entrepreneurship. I volunteered for the Alternative Spring Break Trip to Puerto Rico with the Office of Student Life this spring semester.

My peers and I helped a young family build a concrete cement roof that was destroyed by Hurricane Maria. We also helped clear a trail for ecotourism purposes and learned that Puerto Rico depends heavily on its ecotourism to preserve its unique wildlife and history. Additionally, we walked the streets of San Juan to learn about Puerto Rican food and political history. Finally, we visited a sacred place to learn about indigenous Taino petroglyphs. I enjoyed working hands-on with the Puerto Rican community alongside my peers because it allowed me to see how everyone contributes in their own way.



To continue fostering love for the community, I intend on creating meetup or social groups for different interests I want to pursue, such as painting and hiking, to create a diverse environment from which we can all help each other get out of our comfort zones.

In the future, I also intend on working for Global Works or the Peace Corps. It has been a childhood dream to travel and serve the community.



I'm a Business Management major and I just got accepted into UMD as an Economics major. I've been at MC for 2 years. ATPA has tremendously helped me in building study, leadership, and time management skills through the workshops and tuition assistance. My coach and I have also created a close relationship that I was able to help her out with her apartment remodeling after a terrible flooding at her complex by getting her in contact with my boyfriend who is the owner of a construction company.

In retrospect, the trip opened my eyes in seeing how important community is. It helped me to be more grateful for what I have and to do everything in my power to help someone in need. It developed my interpersonal skills further because the family we volunteered for was so accepting and grateful for us. It was so heartfelt that I want to experience it again. My plans are to continue pursuing my Econ bachelor's degree to work at the World Bank where I think I would continue to contribute to communities around the world.



EMBEDDED ACADEMIC COACHING FOR COURSE SUCCESS

HOST FACULTY, COACH, AND STUDENT SURVEY INSIGHTS



4.75/5

Students' overall satisfaction with embedded academic coaching



5+ sessions

38% of students met with a coach more than 5 times outside of class



76%

Students who had weekly or bi-weekly in-class coaching



4.2/5

Host faculty overall satisfaction with embedded academic coaching



[My Coach] is excellent! She helped us to understand more concepts easily. She also provides many sessions for students based on the student's convenient times.



Really great coach with amazing insight into problems that students have. Strives to help the student and works with them to better understand the concepts.

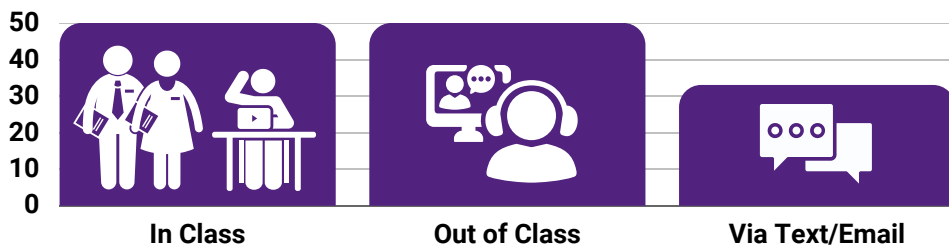


[Coaching] seems to provide an extra "nudge" for students who want to succeed but don't have a good starting point from which to do so.



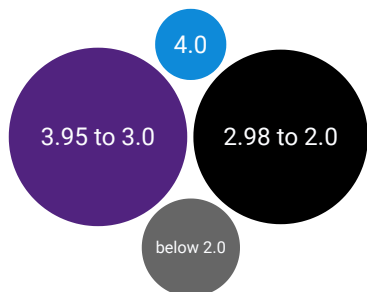
Having an additional content expert available is priceless for an instructor who is juggling dozens of students at a time.

How Students & Coaches Connect



PERSONAL ACADEMIC COACHING FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS

STUDENT SUCCESS SNAPSHOTS



87.5%

Percent of students working with personal academic coaches since 2016 with a cumulative 2.0 GPA or above, maintaining good academic standing and access to financial aid



Having a coach has a positive effect on me because my coach and I not only talk about bookwork, but also some issues that goes to help in my studies.



852

Students working with a personal academic coach in FY23, ATPA's largest group yet



[My Coach] is the best. She always responds to my text and calms me down with a positive attitude and I think she push me to be better for success!!

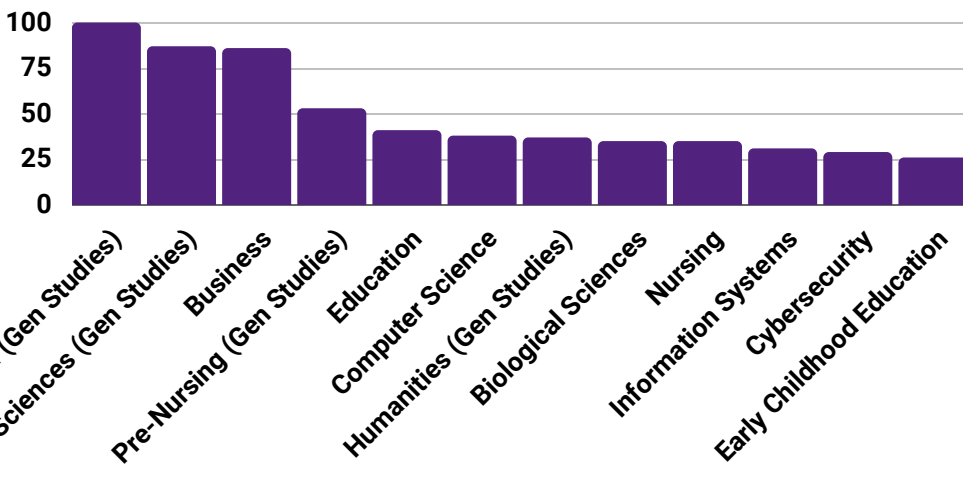
77.5%

Course pass rate for students working with a personal academic coach



The resources and the suggestions that she provided have helped me tremendously. I really appreciate everything that she has done for me so far.

Top 12 Student Majors Supported



I always leave my meetings with my coach feeling better than when I come in. Whenever I am feeling overwhelmed she is always [...] helping me come up with a plan.



COMING SOON



ATPA Student Learning Community

New in FY24

- Self-paced academic workshops with action plans
- GroupMe student chat
- Monthly Learning Community Hour coaching conversations

Fall 2023 Coaches Institute

When: August 25th

Where: Virtual & Rockville Science Center 152

New Coaches: 10am-12pm

All Coaches: 12-3pm

Fall 2023 Part-Time Faculty Conference

When: August 19th

Where: Germantown BE 151/52

Why: Stipend for attending

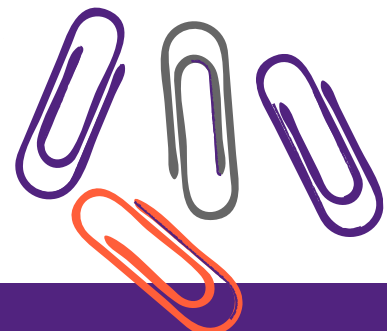
ATPA Breakout Session:

Culturally responsive coaching relationships are foundational to forming safe learning environments where students can thrive academically, socially, emotionally, and as whole beings.

Coaching Community Monthly Seminars

SAVE THE DATE

- Thursday, September 28th
- Wednesday, October 25th
- Tuesday, November 28th





GOAL ORIENTED!

FROM 1.50 TO 3.40! PIUS KITENGIE SCORES AS MC STUDENT AND SPORTS MANAGER

Meet Pius Kitengie, a driven and determined student who raised his GPA to a 3.40, became a manager for MC's soccer team, and discovered a passion for videography, thanks to academic coaches and staff mentors at MC.

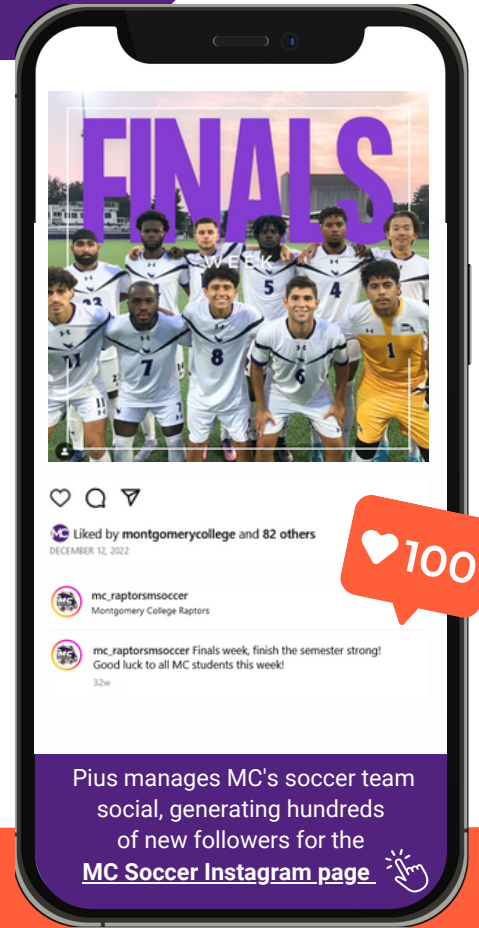
Pius grew up in South Africa with his older brother, future MC soccer standout Joseph Kitengie. Pius received his F1 visa approval one joyful Tuesday and was on a flight to the U.S. the following Saturday. However, when Pius arrived to the College in the spring of 2022, he found himself struggling to adjust to a new academic environment: ***"When I got to the U.S. the house I was supposed to move into wasn't ready, I couldn't even unpack my bags because the old tenant was still there. I was already behind in school and COVID made it so hard to catch up. I didn't have any connections and I wasn't very social. Finally, I moved into a new house and got situated. When I saw my 1.50 that first semester, I was so disappointed in myself, because I knew I was way way better than 1.50."***

Then, ATPA reached out to offer Pius support.

Intrigued by an ATPA email, Pius joined a Zoom session and discovered the invaluable academic coaching offered at no cost to students. With a newfound support system and a burning desire to succeed, he set his sights on achieving a 4.0 GPA the next semester. Working hard with his academic coach Sandy Menzies, achieve he did. When Pius reflects on what helped him realize his full academic potential, he shares, ***"Connection was the biggest thing I changed that improved: professors, coaches, friends."***

Beyond the classroom, Pius embraced an opportunity to serve as a team manager for MC's soccer team, leading to a life-changing experience: ***"Coach asked if I could take a video for Instagram, so I asked if I could be the team's social media guy."*** Pius saved to buy an iPhone so he could capture high quality photos and videos, and soon found a passion for it: ***"I changed my major to video production. I love making connections with the people I film; everyone has a story and I get to travel to all these new places and capture that story."***

In the future, Pius plans to transfer to a 4-year institution, but for now, he takes everything in stride and hopes to return home someday to reunite and give back to his community in South Africa.



Pius manages MC's soccer team social, generating hundreds of new followers for the [MC Soccer Instagram page](#)



"The ATPA program is not like a regular academic coaching program, it's very personal, it's like family. They really help. The coaches have your best interest at heart. Sign up for it!"

[Check Out Pius Kitengie's Portfolio](#)

Coaching Spotlight: Equitable & Inclusive Coaching Team



Marie Arthus



Susan Booth



Vincent Briley



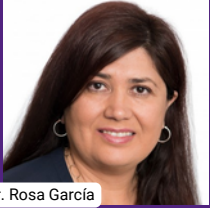
Smitha Darisipudi



Dr. Khady Diene



Juan Esparza-Trujillo



Dr. Rosa García



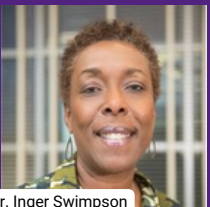
Damon Hillman, J.D.



Jane Smith



Leah Tedla



Dr. Inger Swimpson



Dr. Chernet Weldeab

All **E.Y.E.S.** on the **PROMISE** *Equity Yields Excellence for Students*

The Achieving the Promise Academy aims to positively impact student persistence, completion of educational plans, and timely graduation/transfer, especially for students who have been historically marginalized and underserved in higher education. But what does achieving the promise look like? Academic success and well-being for each and every student.

That promise guides ATPA's Equitable & Inclusive Coaching Team, which provides coach-led outreach at community events, tailored workshops for students, listening sessions to gather student feedback, and collaboration with areas like Counseling & Advising, Workforce Development & Continuing Education, the Office of Community Engagement, and the Office of Student Life, all in support of MC's Equity and Inclusion Roadmap for Success.

Working in targeted sub-teams, coaches are helping ATPA better reach and support specific student populations, recognizing the unique experiences, needs, and contributions of those students. With all eyes on equity and inclusion, ATPA is helping students develop agency, become more connected to College resources, and foster a greater sense of belonging in the classroom and among their peers.

WE SEE YOU and are committed to achieving the **PROMISE**.

With thanks to supporters and partners of ATPA's Equitable & Inclusive Coaching Team including Karlyvette Acevedo, Hamrawit Tesfa, Eniola Olowofoyeku, Financial Aid, the Pre-Transfer Academy, the HSI Taskforce, Combat2College, the AANAPI Planning Group, PACEI, and many more.



Tabling at the Empower Community Weekend to foster connections with East African communities



Coach Hon Lam & Student Senator Ayesha Adnan hosting an Immigrants Chat Circle

We've got your back



MC ACHIEVING THE PROMISE ACADEMY
MONTGOMERY COLLEGE



Students celebrating their achievements with coaches at ATPA's End-of-Year Celebration



ATPA representing at Student Life's International Education Festival