

News Release
Martin Community College – May 5, 2018



Pictured above are 14 of the 15 students who participated in MCC's annual GED® (High School Equivalency) graduation ceremony on May 3 in the MCC auditorium. Receiving their GED® diploma from left to right on the back row are; William Jones, Jonathan Avila, Anthony Rodriguez, William Green, Damon Shawhan, Radarryl Pugh, Christopher Canfield and Demetrius Faison. Seated on the front row are Ashley Gainor, Barbara Azuaje, Ashley James, Selena Sherrod, Danielle Thompson, and Brista Napier. Willie Davis, is not pictured but was in the ceremony. They were among 77 GED® graduates receiving their credential from MCC during the current academic year. Avila, Davis, Gainor, Jones, Shawhan and Sherrod are from Williamston. Canfield, Pugh, Rodriguez and Thompson reside in Robersonville. Azuaje and Napier live in Windsor and James is from Plymouth.

MCC Conducts 41st GED® Graduation

Martin Community College (MCC) celebrated its annual GED® graduation on May 3, in a ceremony held for a near-capacity audience in the MCC Auditorium. Family, friends, staff and faculty were on hand to cheer on the graduates and congratulate them on their achievement. MCC's GED® program is administered through the Basic Skills department in the Division of Continuing Education.

The graduates who chose to participate in the ceremony were; Jonathan Avila, Barbara Azuaje, Christopher Canfield, Willie Davis, Demetrius Faison, Ashley Gainor, William Green, Ashley James, William Jones, Brista Napier, Radarryl Pugh, Anthony Rodriguez, Damon Shawhan, Selena Sherrod and Danielle Thompson.

Not all of MCC's seventy-seven GED® graduates were able to attend the ceremony. Many of the graduates have obtained jobs or moved away since their successful completion of the program. Fifty-seven of the GED® graduates completed their course work and tests at the Bertie Correctional Institution (BCI) in Windsor.

After an invocation from MCC's Vice President Dr. Brian Busch, and a welcome from College President, Dr. Paul Hutchins, the audience was treated to a testimonial from Anthony Rodriguez. Rodriguez, a first generation American, gave his remarks in both English and Spanish to demonstrate his pride in both cultures.

Rodriguez shared how he felt overwhelmed in high school and decided, much to the dismay of his family and friends, to drop out in the 11th grade.

After many months of struggling with his inner demons, Rodriguez "was in his room alone and began to cry and pray," and came to the revelation, "It ends here – all of the negative thoughts and doubts about myself – I will put a stop to it." The next week he signed up for GED® classes and re-committed himself to making his parents proud and to being a good example for his three younger brothers.

Rodriguez noted that it wasn't easy to return to his education. "By that time I had started working in a heating and air company, getting off late and then studying for hours. It was stressful but, I was determined to do it and finish it. Giving up and saying 'I can't' wasn't an option for me anymore."

Rodriguez added, "If it wasn't for God, I wouldn't be who I am today or have made it this far. He's the one I owe it all to."

Now that Rodriguez has earned his GED®, he will return to MCC this fall and enter the Dental Assistant program. Once he completes this training, he plans to transfer to a university with a dental school and become a dentist. The audience gave Rodriguez a standing ovation at the end of his remarks.

The commencement address was given by Mr. Joe Phipps, a Basic Skill Instructor for MCC. "Mr. Joe" as he is fondly known by many of his students, began his remarks with the statement, "I am a proud GED® graduate."

Phipps noted that for a variety of reasons he dropped out of Jacksonville High School, but returned 15 years later, to accept a position as a faculty member. He was hired by the same principal who was there when he dropped out. Phipps offered this as an example as to why it is important to keep pushing forward and taking the next step. "It doesn't matter if your next step is the military or college, it's just important to keep moving forward. You simply can't afford to shut yourself off. You have to avoid the negative voices in your head."

Phipps went on to recognize several famous people who earned GED's. Jim Carrey, Christian Slater, 50 Cent, Eminem, Nicolas Cage, Michael J. Fox and Cyndi Lauper are just a few examples.

Charlotte Griffin, President of the MCC Foundation board, then announced the recipients of the Foundation scholarships for GED® graduates. William Jones, Selena Sherrod and Anthony Rodriguez were each awarded a \$500 scholarship to attend MCC in the 2018-2019 academic year. These scholarships were awarded based on essays written by the candidates and will assist them with their tuition and books as they become college students.

Jones is planning to pursue his lifelong desire for a career in law enforcement. Sherrod will begin MCC's Business Administration program this fall. She hopes to open her own community center for young people. Rodriguez, as noted in his testimonial, is planning to become a dentist.

Sherrod noted in her essay, "For a long time, my attitude was 'I have a job, I don't need a GED®.' I thought that any job would help me make it in life...Boy was I wrong. I had been settling."

Jones' essay highlighted how the loss of his job in October of 2017 jarred him into the reality that, "Finding a job in today's society is tough and it's even tougher without an education. There are many jobs you cannot even apply for without a high school diploma or a GED®."

Jones went on to describe how, "MCC was very encouraging, from testing all the way to graduation." He was able to earn his GED® quickly and already has a new job where there is room for advancement, great benefits and allows him to work day shifts Monday through Friday. Jones noted that he had never had a job like this. It has enabled him to spend more time with his family and make plans in advance.

In addition to the three essay-based scholarships, the Foundation also provides each of the GED® graduates with an MCC tuition scholarship for two curriculum classes (up to six credit hours) in the upcoming academic year.

Griffin reminded the graduates that everyone at MCC is very proud of them and that the Foundation's Board of Directors makes these scholarships available because, "we want you to be here and to be successful."

MCC President, Dr. Paul Hutchins, closed the ceremony with congratulatory remarks. He encouraged the graduates, "to be people of character, to pursue excellence and to serve others." He also told the graduates, "MCC is proud of you!"

The GED® was born of the US Military in 1942, when they asked the American Council on Education to develop a battery of tests to measure high school-level academic skills. These tests gave military personnel and veterans who had enrolled in the military before completing high school a way to demonstrate their knowledge. Passing these tests gave returning soldiers and sailors the academic credentials they needed to get civilian jobs and gain access to post-secondary education or training.

Over time the GED® has undergone major changes. In 1988, the test added essay writing and placed more emphasis on socially relevant topics and problem-solving skills. In 2002, the test was re-formatted to comply with more recent standards for high-school education. Most recently, in January of 2014, the GED® was moved to Pearson VUE, a proprietary computer-based testing platform. The current GED® test covers the following areas: Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies.

Potential GED® students may be intimidated by the testing fees of up to \$104 for the entire battery of tests. However, the leadership of Martin Community College has established funding to pay for the test fees of successful completers. Coupled with the MCC Foundation's tuition scholarships for all GED completers, there's really no reason a serious student cannot get back on track with their education and career development.

GED® credentials are very important. People with a high school credential earn roughly \$568,000 more during their lifetime than those without. MCC offers free GED® classes in Williamston, Windsor and Robersonville. For more information on the GED® program at MCC, call 252-789-0232 or email Nathan Mizell at nathan.mizell@martincc.edu. To make a tax deductible donation for MCC scholarships or GED® test fees, contact, Kismet Matthews at 252-789-0223 or kismet.matthews@martincc.edu.

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Pictured above right is Charlotte Griffin, President of the Martin Community College (MCC) Foundation Board of Directors, with the 2018 recipients of the Foundation's annual scholarships for MCC's GED® graduates. Pictured from left to right with Griffin are; Anthony Rodriguez, William Jones and Selena Sherrod. They were each awarded a \$500 scholarship based on essays they submitted. The Foundation is also making available to each of this year's GED® graduates a scholarship in the form of six credit hours of tuition at MCC in the upcoming academic year.



Joe Phipps, an MCC Basic Skills Instructor and a GED earner himself, gave the commencement speech during the 2018 GED graduation ceremony on May 3. Phipps went on to earn a B.A. from Pfeiffer College and an M.Ed. from Ohio University.