



2013 NEOA RISING STAR ~ Jane-Roberte Sampeur

Jane-Roberte Sampeur participated in TRIO-Student Support Services (SSS) at the University of Connecticut in 2002-2006. The SSS Director then was Dr. Bidya Ranjeet, who also nominated Ms. Sampeur for this award.

A great deal of my success today comes from the opportunities I was given and the skills I learned while at UConn, much of which would not have been possible without the SSS program. After being accepted to every other school I applied to, I remember feeling annoyed, upset and defeated at the suggestion that simply because I was a first generation college student, and first generation American, that I *needed* extra help. At that time

I had no idea the support and dedication it took to not just graduate from college, but to be successful in college.

The support and opportunities I received from the SSS program played an absolutely pivotal role in my success. I arrived at UConn knowing I wanted to be an attorney and with the support of SSS, I was able to reach this goal. I am currently a proud public defense attorney with The Legal Aid Society Kings County Office in Brooklyn, New York.

The counselors of SSS weren't simply concerned with me doing well academically, but they were genuinely interested in helping me attain my specific goals. Through an SSS counselor I was recommended to be an assistant to one of the pre-law advisory professors. It was through my work as this assistant that I met the dean of admissions at the law school I subsequently attended. For four years I literally worked, played, and lived much of my college experience with and through SSS and found opportunities for international travel and study abroad.

Having had a deep concern with racial disparities in education, as well as the resulting effects specifically on the Black community, I originally thought that I would pursue a career in traditional civil rights. In college I learned the facts and statistics of how many people are really affected by racist and elitist policies. It wasn't until I reached law school that I learned exactly how this system of oppression and racism is maintained. It was through this process that I came to see issues in criminal justice as the forefront of the modern civil rights movement, which has led to my current career path.

For my first three years of practice I worked on the prison island of Rikers defending individuals accused of parole violations. There really is nothing that can prepare you for seeing interview rooms and holding cells filled with men and women that remind you of your brothers, sisters, cousins, etc. People who could very easily be my family, and in the most stressful times of my practice, have actually been my family members.

In my current position as a criminal defense attorney, I live with the reality that I fight a constant losing battle. This system has perpetually proven to be stacked against the poor and people of color, communities that are most often one and the same. I am committed to advocating for the rights of those who have been rendered powerless through various forms of racism, oppression and lack of opportunity.

I would like to express my most sincere appreciation and gratitude for being considered for this award.