

COUNTING THE COST

After years of searching, freshman finally arrives at the place she BELONGs

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It was a month before “College Decision Day” and Shekinah Reese was between two schools.

She knew which one she wanted more. And this school — Elon University — had a tuition and fee value that was almost \$9,000 less expensive than its competition.

More important than low tuition costs, however, was the amount of financial aid each school could offer to subset the cost. When a private liberal arts school in New York offered Reese

DECISION TIME

Between Elon and a private liberal arts school in New York, Reese was awarded a combined scholarship and financial aid of over \$260,000 with outside scholarships.

But, this fall Reese will instead join Elon University’s incoming Class of 2021.

Accepting admittance to Elon

would guarantee the opportunity to study cinema and television arts, as well as dance, at which she’d geared her academic and extracurricular pursuits to all throughout high school. But a \$34,273 price tag — the cost of Elon tuition and fees — was firmly tied to Reese’s dreams of the future. And this price was nonnegotiable and considerably out of her reach.

An answer came Reese’s sophomore year at Woodbridge Senior High School in the form of a man named Kevin Jenkins, The College Place-Virginia director, whom she met at an Advanced Placement meeting at school. Jenkins works with high schools like Reese’s throughout Virginia, as well as community-based organizations, to provide presentations and workshops aimed at helping students and families plan for college.

“When assisting students through the admissions process, one of the things I do is help them ‘stick out’ and separate themselves from the pack,” Jenkins said.

Reese began meeting with Jenkins regularly at The College Place branch at Northern Virginia Community College. It was there that Reese received free college admissions and financial aid counselling, which she credits with making the opportunity for her to attend any private, out-

of-state institution a reality.

Reese’s mother, Danna Reese, was with her every step of the way.

“She helped me apply to so many colleges even though she was not sure if we could afford the ones out of state, especially since they didn’t fit in our price range,” Reese said.

Danna Reese believes a college degree is a critical to success.

“I have tried to teach Shekinah about the bigger world after high school, and that a path to a higher education is the key to open all your doors,” Danna Reese said.

After crafting over thirty college essays, taking SAT and ACT prep classes, preparing for mock interviews and filling out application after application, Reese was awarded \$3,200 in outside scholarships from the National Naval Officers Association, Washington, D.C. and Quantico chapters, and the Fairfax Library Foundation that could be applied to her Elon education. In the end, Reese was able to combine these scholarships with an awarded \$89,200 in scholarship money and financial aid from Elon for four-years, allowing Elon to contend with the other school’s \$168,000 offer.

Even with the proper tools and a healthy support system, not just anybody can turn academic guidance into over \$260,000, the combined scholarship and financial aid offered by both schools and outside scholarships.

Since the age of three, Reese has been formally training in dance, and throughout her young life could have been caught twirling as the “Nutcracker’s” Mouse Queen or heel-tapping through “Footloose.” Reese’s talents contributed largely to where she would apply for aid, and later, why she would choose Elon.

Reese will avoid the pain of wearing-in ballet slippers and tap shoes as she begins an Elon dance minor this fall. She’s graced the stage with jazz, ballet, tap, hip-hop and contemporary dance at both the Metropolitan School of the Arts — where she was a member of the Metropolitan



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHEKINAH REESE
Shekinah Reese turned down thousands of dollars in financial aid to attend Elon.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHEKINAH REESE
Shekinah Reese said she wants to use her gifts and talents to make a difference at Elon.



I’M BRINGING DIVERSITY TO A CAMPUS WHERE I AM THE MINORITY. I AM BRINGING MY TALENT AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE ARTISTRY OF DANCE. I AM BRINGING MY LEADERSHIP SKILLS TO SHARE WITH OTHER LEADERS.

SHEKINAH REESE
FRESHMAN

Youth Tap Ensemble — and in the Center for the Fine and Performing Arts dance program at Woodbridge Senior High School.

“My dream is to share my passion for dance with young people,” Reese said. “I want to give back and teach others what I have learned in the art of dance... A minor will help me acquire the skills and knowledge to tell stories through the art of dance and create documentaries.”

Reese will be able to pair dance with documentaries by complementing her minor with a major in cinema and television arts. Reese spent three weeks last summer at another prospective university learning about filming and editing, and from then on, her interests were piqued. The state-of-the-art School of Communications, as well as the opportunity to participate in study-USA in Los Angeles, further convinced Reese that Elon was the place for her. And, she knew she was the girl for the place.

“I’m bringing diversity to a campus where I am the minority,” Reese said. “I am bringing my talent and knowledge in the

artistry of dance. I am bringing my leadership skills to share with other leaders.”

Reese originally shared her story with the PotomacLocal.com, an online news outlet for Prince William and Stafford counties. Reese was disappointed by errors in the article, but happy her journey was made public.

With hopes of clearing up misinformation, as well as inspiring other young women who are considering applying to college, a first-person account of Reese’s story has been pitched by The College Place’s public relations firm, Glover Park Group, to national outlets including Seventeen, Refinery29 and Teen Vogue. This new piece will focus on the college application process, financial aid resources and the road to Reese’s success.

“My goal has been to teach Shekinah to make wise choices when no one is watching,” Danna Reese said. “Be the you that will make you a better person where you can make an impact in the world today. The future belongs to Shekinah and Elon is now a part of that journey.”