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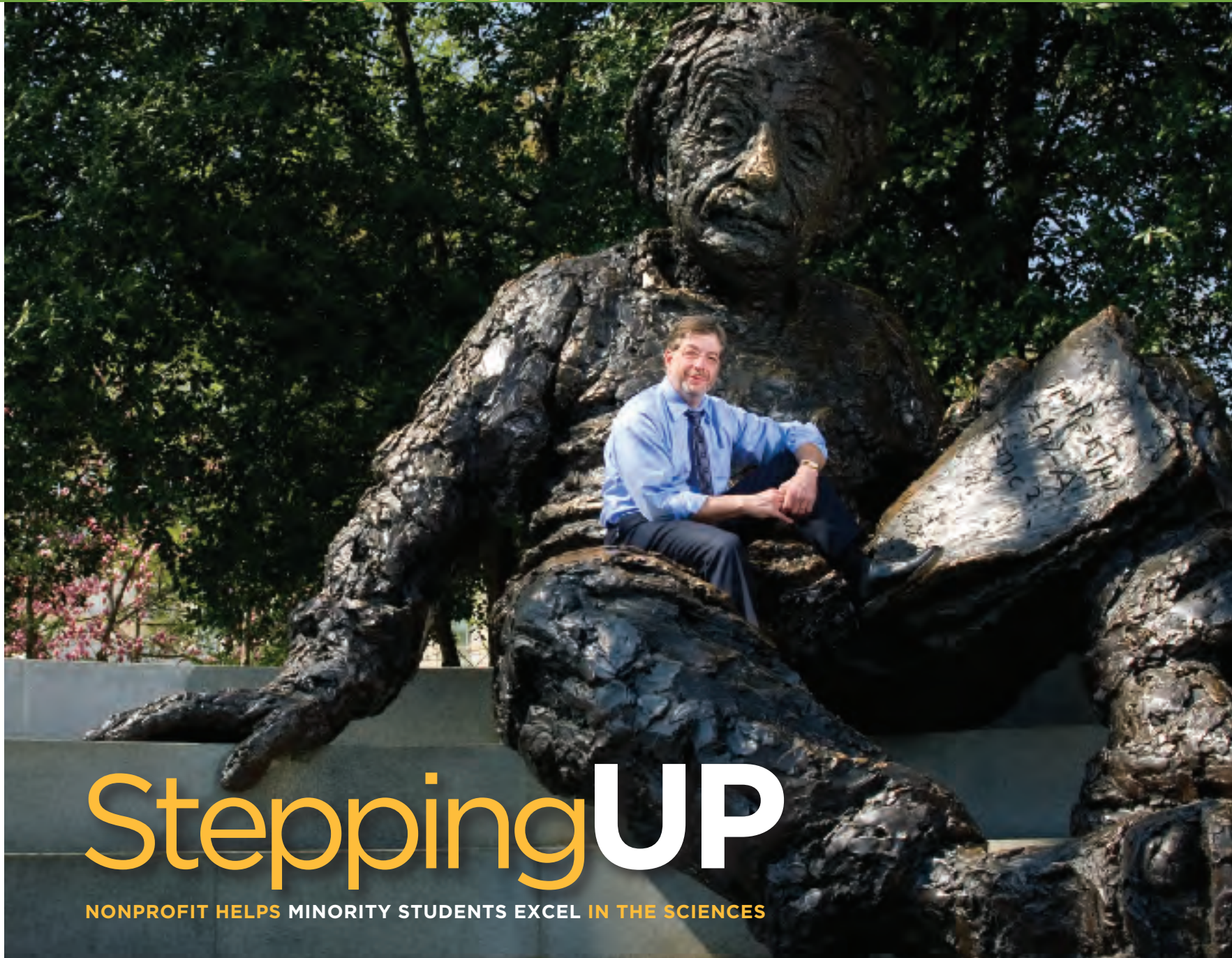
Is Main Street
Too Big To Fail?

summer 11



MATTHEW WEINBERG (BS '79, MSIA '83)

out of the office



SteppingUP

NONPROFIT HELPS MINORITY STUDENTS EXCEL IN THE SCIENCES

Ashly McClure, an A-student and high-school track star from Baltimore, arrived at college as excited about studying biology as running the 400-meter hurdles.

But during her second semester at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, she struggled with the dual demands of academics and athletics. Panicked and alone, she asked herself, “How am I ever going to do this?”

Instead of giving up, she turned to an innovative program that supports minority college students created by Matthew Weinberg (BS '79, MSIA '83). Weinberg founded the nonprofit Building Science Technology Education Partnerships – or Building STEPS – to address the population of minorities enrolled in the sciences and to also bring diversity to his consulting firm, The Weinberg Group.



“I believe individuals have a **PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY** to make the world a better place.”

The idea was born in 1995 when Weinberg looked around the firm’s Washington office and was bothered that his employees were all like him: white. For Weinberg, it raised the question: How could his team examine every possible angle of a complex problem when they shared the same cultural background?

“At GSIA, we learned how to think differently from the rest of the world,” Weinberg said. “A consulting firm works off the concept of diversity of opinion.”

But Building STEPS is far more than a recruitment tool. The program offers life-changing opportunities to young people when the odds are stacked against them.

Consider the transformation of Victor, the son of Nigerian immigrants, “He lived in a downtrodden part of Baltimore,” Weinberg recalled. “Now he is at John Hopkins University studying biomedical engineering, having never known there was such a thing.”

Though McClure graduated third in her high school class, she found herself unprepared for the rigors of a college science program.

“We didn’t get AP courses until my senior year in high school,” she said.

Debra Hettleman, executive director of Building STEPS, connected McClure with a tutor and study groups. She also paired the struggling freshman with an upperclassman mentor from the program. McClure received a PalmPilot, which she used to schedule study sessions between track practices and all-day meets.

Now a B-student, McClure is confident again. After graduation, she hopes to win admission to medical school and become a rehabilitation physician.

A study by the Education Trust found that about 40 percent of African American, Native American and Latino college students earn a bachelor’s degree within six years, compared to 60 percent of white students. Building STEPS helps promising students from seven urban high schools beat those odds.

Some 94 percent of Building STEPS participants go on to college, and of these, 80 percent graduate.

Each September, the program accepts about 80 juniors with a GPA of 3.0 or higher and an interest in science. “They all want to be doctors or nurses or vets,” Hettleman said. Monthly seminars expose them to other careers such as toxicology and epidemiology.

“We are giving kids from poorer neighborhoods the chance to explore careers in science. Through our program, we provide the resources that allow them to succeed and grow.”

Between junior and senior year, students explore their career interests as paid summer interns earning \$10 an hour. If the employer does not pay, Building STEPS subsidizes the salary. Once high school seniors identify a tentative career path, the organization guides them through the application process. Since 85 percent of the program’s students are first-generation college students, simply applying can be an intimidating task.

To make up for these challenges, Building STEPS buses the students to college fairs.

“It gives high school seniors and juniors something to look forward to,” said Malcolm Broadnax, 19, a freshman at Stevenson University in Baltimore.

The two-person staff also helps students apply for financial aid. Since 1995, Building STEPS’ participants have received \$3 million in scholarships.

With help from the program, McClure tracked down scholarships and is free of the financial worries that forced some of her friends to drop out of college. She is grateful the staff of Building STEPS is in her corner.

“They told me, ‘We are always here for you, even if you just need a place to vent.’”