Brendan O’Malley and Jared Wong: Spiritan Division Students of the Year

By Uhuru Hotep and Jeff Meader

Brendan O’Malley and Jared Wong are the 2008-09 Spiritan Division Students of the Year. Brendan O’Malley is a third-year business student from Philadelphia majoring in both marketing and entrepreneurship. Following in the footsteps of an older brother, O’Malley joined the Spiritan Division during the summer of 2005 and quickly distinguished himself as a leader. For the past three seasons, he has played defensive end for the Duquesne Dukes football team. Regarding the Spiritan Division, O’Malley says, “The Division helped me to grow from boyhood into manhood and stand on my own two feet. The Division also helped me to recognize and refine my special talents. It’s like a second family for me.”

As student of the year, O’Malley plans to organize Spiritan students to raise funds for the African Well Fund, a foundation that works to bring clean drinking water to rural African villages. “They are always there no matter what.”

Jared Wong is a third-year psychology major from Bethel Park, Pennsylvania, who attended Bethel Park High School and chose Duquesne University because it was a prestigious school where he felt that he had a chance to get a great education. Concerning the Spiritan Division, Wong says, “If it wasn’t for the Spiritan Division, I wouldn’t be in the position I am in today. They helped me out so much dealing with school and my personal life. They are always there no matter what.”

As student of the year, Wong plans to reach out to Spiritan students through specialized activities. He also works as a motivational speaker and wants to start a program at Duquesne to help students struggling with drug abuse.

Michael Salopek

Awarded Weber Scholarship

By Martin Sivitz

Spiritan Division freshman Michael Salopek’s initial reaction to his acceptance into the Division’s 2007 Summer Semester was different from many. Instead of dismay over spending five weeks of his summer at school, he remembers being quite happy. And his positive attitude has paid off. He has received the Michael P. Weber Scholarship for Academic Excellence Award.

It was a difficult path. “I struggled in high school,” he said. Part of it was social—most people he knew went to Canevi and he went to Seton-LaSalle in Mt. Lebanon. Academically, it was hard too, and he had to stop playing football after his sophomore year because of an injury.

The Summer Semester gave him an opportunity to improve his social life by making new and lasting friends and providing him an edge of familiarity with the campus, something he appreciated. “I was excited to get into Duquesne because I always wanted to come here,” he said. In fact, a Duquesne connection runs in his family. His father attended Duquesne and was a Tamburitzan. Michael himself played upright bass in the Junior Tamburitzans, a feeder group for the Tammaritzans.

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While Michael is an accounting major, he has a passion for recording music in his home studio, a continuation of his dad’s work. “I have business cards and customers,” he said. “I record bands and singers.” Michael would like to maintain his Pittsburgh roots after he graduates and find an accounting job there. He looks forward to maintaining his avocation: “Music will be my big hobby.”
Standing as a hallmark of Duquesne's dedication to education for the mind, the heart, and the spirit, named for the Spiritan congregation and endowed by alumnus, Dr. Robert Gassin and his wife, Dr. Patricia Gassin, the Spiritan Division of Academic Programs specializes in helping students of varying backgrounds develop their full potential as students and citizens of the world. The Division's performance-tested system of personal guidance and learning assistance supports the student's transition from high school diploma to college degree.

The Spiritan Division helps freshmen and other students new to Duquesne maximize their chances of college success. While there are many factors that will impact that success, chief among them is a solid transition to college life. Successful college transitions are made when the student:

• Adapts to new learning environments and new learning situations.
• Understands the role of personal responsibility in college, career, and life success.
• Refines the academic skills necessary for college success—reading, writing, editing and critical thinking.
• Relies on high-quality academic support such as tutoring, counseling and other interventions should problems arise.

The Spiritan Division of Academic Programs operates on a cohort model. While the Division is a summer enrichment program, the Spiritan Core courses are taught by University faculty hand-picked by the Division because of their commitment to the Division’s approach to student development. The Spiritan Division student's transition from high school to college begins with a summer semester during which the student is registered for Core English 101, University 101, Research and Information Skills, and Academic Strategies. The student returns to campus for the fall semester with a University transcript showing six earned credits and with an armful of friendships developed during the summer semester.

The academic year continues this development through coursework, academic advisement, tutoring when needed, and counseling. It culminates with an end-of-year review during which assessment of academic and affective growth is discussed with the student. Assuming all Division requirements are completed and all prerequisites for the intended major are satisfied, the student transfers to the college or one of the schools to pursue that major. Otherwise, the student is retained in the Division until all requirements and/or prerequisites are met.

That many Division students have gone on to complete their degrees at Duquesne or elsewhere—and some have pursued or are pursuing graduate degrees—attests to the soundness of our approach to academic and affective development. Obviously, the transitions Spiritan Division students make during this first-year lays the foundation for their progress toward their degree.

Our work is intended to help the student selected for admission to the Division accept personal responsibility for academic success or failure. Their success is our success.