ACT 101 Student Earns Top Honor

By Mary Dowd, B.A.
Administrative Assistant

How many of us remember going into a new experience with some uncertainties and trepidations? Jennifer Iacurci, an ACT 101 junior, recalls those first feelings about coming to Duquesne and the five-week summer program. A Fox Chapel High School graduate, in the Class of 2000, Jennifer chose Duquesne because it was close to home, and she wanted to stay in Pittsburgh.

Jennifer heard good things about Duquesne. But, she says, “It was hard to come, since it was my last summer at home. At first it was scary, since I did not know what I was coming into and what people I would be with for a month. But after I got here and got to know the people, and because everyone at the Learning Skills Center helped me, it was easier having the experience with others who were in the same boat.”

About the five-week summer program, Jennifer said, “It prepared me more to come to school; I made many friends; I became familiar with Duquesne’s campus and it just made the transition of coming to college easier.” The courses that helped her the most she said were study skills, and math.

With this summer experience under her belt, Jennifer went on to become an elementary education major. This comes naturally to her and is not surprising. For the past two years, she has worked as a nanny for a family with four children and at a fitness club in the nursery. When Jennifer has time, she volunteers with Big Brothers and Big Sisters.

She has received numerous awards during the two years she has been at Duquesne. The ACT 101 program has awarded her for improvement, achievement and effort. Last year she was runner-up for ACT 101 Student of the Year. This year, Jennifer became Spiritan Student of the Year.

Regarding her future plans, Jennifer would like to be a first grade teacher and school counselor. She plans to enroll in a graduate program for counseling.

Jennifer attributes her success to the ACT 101 program. “The program gave me more confidence, more determination to finish things and helped me to push forward no matter what obstacle I faced. It’s helped me improve my academic skills. It’s good to know that when you need help, you can go to the Learning Skills Center and someone will be there to help you.”

An ACT 101 Achiever

By Uhuru Hotep, Ed.D., Associate Director

Nilenia Cordero is a young lady on the move. An alumnus of Philadelphia’s Academy of Notre Dame DeNamur, Nilenia is now a junior majoring in sociology with a concentration in criminal justice. While at Notre Dame, she played varsity tennis, earned a blue belt in Tai-Kwon-Do, belonged to the Dance Club and served as the publicist for the Multicultural Club.

Nilenia was introduced to Duquesne at a college fair. She then visited the campus twice, once in 1998 and again in 1999, before deciding to apply for admission. She was accepted and enrolled in June 2000 in ACT 101’s college prep summer program.

Nilenia excelled in the summer program, earning both high marks and numerous awards. A recipient of the Laval Scholarship, Nilenia describes Duquesne as a “family.” She feels “very comfortable” here as a student.

Regarding the ACT 101 program, Nilenia states: “This program has been a big part of my success. It helped me make the necessary adjustments.”

She attends Mass on campus or on special days visits Mount Ararat Baptist Church. Community service is very important to Nilenia. Since coming to Pittsburgh, she has assisted the organizing committee of The Great Race, taught self-defense and etiquette for the Girl Scouts, served food and cleaned tables at Myriam House for Women, and picked up litter along the Elijah Trail. Her major volunteer activity now is serving as the vice president of the Duquesne chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

Nilenia offered these words of advice to ACT 101 students: “Never dwell on your failures, or give up, because there is so much more to your education than failure. Look at your mistakes as an example of how you can do better. Always have your mind set on success.”

After graduation, Nilenia plans to return to the Philadelphia area and either attend law school or join the FBI.
ASKING FOR HELP ... BUILDING COMMUNITY

by Sherry Goldman, M.M.
Assistant Director for Academic Services

There’s a wonderful folksong written by Tom Hunter called “Rock Me to Sleep,” which anyone who has tried to “go it alone” can relate. To quote some of my favorite lines:

“I’ve never been too good at asking
I’m more apt to do it alone
And it’s strange how a lot of us think
something’s wrong
If we can’t do it all on our own…

And when you need help
It’s hardest to ask…

But… I’m tired of trying to figure things out
And I’m tired of being so strong.”

How many of you were taught that it was a sign of weakness to rely on others, or not only to ask for help, but simply to need it in the first place? Our American culture, where independence is prized and rewarded, is especially guilty of sending this message.

A former co-worker and counselor here at the Michael P. Weber Learning Skills Center once shared with me her experience of living in Japan. In America, she said, we are taught to believe we are born dependent and must learn how to become independent… But in Japan—she said that the culture teaches that we are born independent and must learn to become dependent. What an unusual way to look at it! But, so true… We have to be socialized properly to make relationships, to give and receive, and to build community.

I, myself, did not learn this valuable lesson until I was 46 years old. Even today, as much as I enjoy teamwork, as much as I enjoy giving help and do not think badly of those who need it, as much as I appreciate receiving help—and I do ask for it—, I must struggle to shake off the nagging tape in my head that tells me I’m “not supposed to need it”.

You too might struggle with this. After all, isn’t college a time when you are supposed to be developing your independence? But giving and receiving help and building a supportive community is what Act 101 is all about.

Ask for help! We’re here for you. I wish there had been a program like that when I was in school. Maybe I wouldn’t have had to wait until I was 46 to appreciate the joy of community.


OBSTACLES

Contributed by Sherry Goldman
Assistant Director for Academic Services

“Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goals.”
— Henry Ford

Did you ever hear the definition of procrastination-getting ready to get ready? Many people spend their lives getting ready to live their lives. This is a mistake.

Here’s some great advice from Alfred D. Souza . . .

“For a long time it had seemed to me that life was about to begin-real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, or a debt to be paid. Then life would begin.

At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life.”

In other words, “This is it!”

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IT’S NOT IN THE MECHANICS
TECHNIQUE IS HOW YOU LEARN,
NOT WHAT YOU LEARN

By Martin Sivitz, M.M.

In my youthful record-collecting days, I was especially fond of solo piano music. I’d get recordings of Beethoven, Bach, or Chopin and compare how different pianists would approach the same piece. Amazingly, there were myriad differences in tone, articulation, and tempo.

A particular favorite of mine was Artur Schnabel (1882-1951), a famous teacher who published his own edition of the 32 Beethoven piano sonatas. He also performed and recorded them all, in the 1930’s and 1940’s. I had the complete set of recordings.

Schnabel’s Beethoven was incommensurate (though perhaps writ large for these days) but his technique could be shaky at times, particularly on intricate passages. The most notorious example was the fugue of the Hammerklavier Sonata.

But Schnabel had a sublime conception of the music that transcended exactness on a digital (in those days, that meant fingers) level. I once heard someone say that he made the music breathe and that he played even the silences between the notes. The slow passages were time-stopping.

Maybe he didn’t practice enough, but in some sense perhaps he learned what he had to do to make music, then kept what he needed and put aside the rest.

Today we live in a flashy age of media techniques: the sound byte and compulsion to attach cinematic images to music (MTV).

How different to cast aside the artifice and simply let the music speak for itself.

That’s really what the end product of learning is all about, isn’t it? You crack the books and do the exercises. But when you become a lawyer, a teacher, doctor, or businessman, don’t you hope to be more than just a set of academic studies? As I was once told, “Take the notes off the pages and make them sing!”

As a professional (and in life), you want to be the best you can be. Part of it means not being afraid to make mistakes, to use your instincts and take risks, to set aside some of what you’ve learned and just create. That’s being in the moment, not just living by rote.

Or simply playing the notes.

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INVESTING IN YOURSELF

Contributed by Sherry Goldman, M.M.
Assistant Director for Academic Services

The Delicate Art of Fire Prevention

Do you ever feel like you spend so much time putting out fires that you have no time left for fire prevention? Or, have you ever been too busy driving around to stop and get gas? I’ll bet you can relate. What happens is that the “urgent” things (like a raging fire) get attended to, but the “important” things (like learning how to prevent the fire in the first place) are at the bottom of the list and often omitted for lack of time.

I have discovered an extremely effective way to get to the really important, vital things first. It’s one simple concept that I have carried with me and used religiously since I first learned it. The following three steps will help you implement it and make it work for you.

List the top, most important 5 to 6 roles that you play in your life. Sample roles might be: Spouse, parent, business owner, manager, student, writer, community volunteer, friend, family member, brother, artist, teacher, mentor. You also will have one additional role automatically given to you. I will call it “Steward of Myself.” Each and every Sunday (or convenient day before the start of your work week) sit down and ask yourself the following question about each role: “During this next

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week, what is the single most important thing I could do in my role as ______________ that would have the greatest positive impact on my life?

When you come up with the activities or actions, actually schedule them in your calendar for the week. Put them in FIRST before the fires begin!

Let me give you a few examples. For next week, in my role as “family member”, I wrote, “schedule lunch with my brother.” Then, on Monday morning at 9 a.m. in my planner I wrote, “Call Rocky for lunch.” (Note: This would be a really easy one to continually put off. Why? Because I could rationalize it by saying, Oh! I can always have lunch with Rocky. I need to take care of X first. “And let’s put it this way, I have NO guarantees that Rocky will always be around. And if something bad happened to him, I don’t believe I’d be thinking, “So glad I did everything else and didn’t get around to having lunch with him.”

In my role as “speaker” I wrote: “read and research one hour per day for five days for my upcoming keynote conference in Las Vegas.” Then I found the one hour each day in my planner and actually blocked off the time.

In my role as “Steward of Myself”, I decided that the most important thing I could do next week that would have the greatest positive impact was to walk 30 minutes 3 times. Again, I then blocked off the time in my planner so it would be right there when I looked at my schedule each day. Again, taking care of yourself always seems to get relegated to the bottom of the list, doesn’t it? And let’s look at it this way: Spending time recovering from illness or disease is, metaphorically, putting out a fire. Scheduling time to exercise, practice spiritual disciplines and eat well is fire prevention.

So, in the moment of choice, couldn’t I just opt out and NOT do what I wrote down? Sure. But the interesting thing is that it is much easier to say “no” to other things when you can honestly say, “This is what is truly important to me. This is a first thing. I decided that it is, and I am choosing to live in alignment with my values.”

So, let’s do the math. Let’s say that you wrote down only seven high value, truly important actions each week, and that you only actually accomplished four of them. Four times 50 weeks would be 200 high impact, vital actions in one year.

Question: could accomplishing those 200 things substantially improve the quality of your life? I believe you would agree that they could. Fire prevention. A delicate art that you can master.

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Linda Larsen helps individuals and companies get unstuck, have more fun and be more productive. She is an international speaker, trial consultant and author of the book, True Power, and the best selling audio program, 12 Secrets to High Self-Esteem.