Caitlin (Ronayne) Carey ’12: From GCC to Ph.D.

Caitlin Carey, left, with her sister, Brianna Ronayne, at their 2012 graduation from GCC.

Caitlin Carey ’12, was waiting for Amy Proietti, Coordinator of Financial Aid at GCC, to arrive last year at a conference on issues related to homeless college students sponsored by UMass Boston. At one of the information tables staffed by Caitlin, Amy was greeted with “I’m so excited someone from GCC is here – I saw your name on the registration list and hoped I would meet you!”

Caitlin went on to share all of the ways GCC prepared her to be a successful student. She fondly remembers classes with Professors Bryan Adams (Science) and Thom Simmons (Economics.) She reiterated several times how her classes at GCC and professors at GCC were better than any she has had since, which is certainly a strong statement in light of the levels of education she went on to attain.

Caitlin, a Public Policy Doctoral Student/Research Assistant at the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies Center for Social Policy at UMass Boston, has traveled a long way since she first enrolled at GCC with “the odds stacked against” her to the successful life helping those in need that she has carved out for herself.

As a second year doctoral student, she is a mixed-methods researcher interested in issues of poverty and inequality in the United States, including homelessness and housing policies as well as public assistance benefits and social services. Some of Caitlin's specific research interests include LGBTQ+ homelessness prevention, anti-homeless ordinances in American cities, barriers to accessing public assistance benefits, the need for more safe havens in the U.S. and opportunities for bottom-up policy making in the area of homelessness.

After graduating from Amherst High School, Caitlin originally enrolled at a 4-year college, but it was not a good fit for her, academically or socially. She knew immediately that she was at the right place when she arrived at GCC, and began her studies in earnest. She graduated with an Associate of Arts in Environmental Science and Natural Resources in 2012, coincidentally the same year as her sister, Brianna Ronayne. Both followed in their mother’s footsteps – Kathie Terry was a first generation GCC student who graduated in 2000 with an Associates in Business Administration.

Caitlin's educational journey went on to include receiving a Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration in 2015 from Southern New Hampshire University, where she graduated with a 4.0 GPA. From there, she began a combined Master's/Doctoral Program in Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, where she will receive her Master of Science in Public Policy this year and anticipates her Doctorate degree in 2020. She has also received recognition as a scholar with several awards and admittance into three honor societies.

Caitlin worked with two organizations that relate to her field of study. She interned at the UMass Boston Office of Urban and Off-Campus Support services, where she conducted research and reviewed and recommended improvements on intake processes. Prior to that, she worked at a homeless shelter in Maine where she provided both indirect and direct services to homeless women. It was that exposure to the challenging array of bureaucratic, advocacy and administrative work required to help those who struggle with homelessness informed the educational path she now travels.
From the President

GCC students were invited to participate in an essay writing contest this semester with the opportunity to win $1,000 credit towards their tuition and fees. The theme was “How do GCC’s General Education Abilities prepare students to be active, engaged citizens in the 21st century?”

GCC’s General Education Abilities consist of ten areas of skills and knowledge that we feel are essential components of a useful, quality education. They would be little more than words on paper if each ability were not applied to real life. Writers were encouraged to relate specific General Education Abilities to their experiences in school, the workplace, their communities, or democracy at large. All ten abilities can be found at: www.gcc.mass.edu/about/principles-of-education/general-education-abilities

It gives me great pleasure to announce that Kim Waters’ essay “Powering the Pioneer Valley through Education” has been selected as this year’s top choice and to share it with you:

Powering the Pioneer Valley through Education
By GCC Student Kim Waters

Strengthening our community is the vision here at GCC. With this clarity the GCC Assembly came together to draft the “General Education Abilities,” competencies that the college wants for its students to develop for lifelong learning. These abilities include important soft skills like communication, ethics, and critical thinking skills. Last year, the college conducted a local survey to determine what job skills employers in the area look for in new hires. Sure enough, businesses seek employees with proficiency in these areas as well as other aptitudes stressed in GCC’s curriculum. In 2017, these capabilities guide us in everything from helping our communities thrive at the local level, to being actively engaged in a quickly changing political atmosphere.

GCC’s General Education Abilities emphasize the appreciation of diverse and individual perspectives. Western Massachusetts is an interesting meld of people of different backgrounds. The Pioneer Valley draws people from New York City and Boston seeking the rural life, while other families here have spent many generations in the same towns. This mix can result in a clash of perspectives and values. However, GCC also prepares us to solve problems collaboratively. When too many people of a similar perspective weigh in, it creates an echo chamber. Decisions made under these circumstances have a chance of compromising someone with no voice in the matter. When we work together as a community of people of differing viewpoints, we have a better chance of enacting solutions that benefit us all.

GCC teaches us to reason and act ethically. This is such a powerful skill to wield when facing up against fear-based politics. When the city council of Northampton unanimously chose to become a sanctuary city, they did so through the application of reasoning and ethics. In a statement to the Daily Hampshire Gazette, City Council President William H. Dwight stated “Northampton is not going to suffer as a result of this saber rattling. We can only suffer if we go back on our commitment to protect all citizens and residents”. This is the type of community action that GCC prepares us for in teaching students to demonstrate civic knowledge and engagement.

In the same vein of knowledge and reason, GCC coaches us to use quantitative concepts and processes, as well as locating, evaluating, and using various sources of information. In my English Composition course, we were taught how to locate facts among a sea of opinions. This is particularly important for two reasons. First, the internet can mislead as much as it can inform. Here in the twenty-first century, anything we could ever want to know is a quick google-search away. But it takes a critical eye to sift through information and locate truth. Secondly, we have seen a recent shift in mainstream media from investigative journalism to bipartisan reporting with no critical filter. It is solely up to the viewer to see through intentional framing, or to string together dry facts to build a story. Educators at GCC work hard to give students the ability to evaluate and translate the information we receive.

GCC’s General Education Abilities communicate the importance of being able to apply, integrate, and synthesize learning. The college does this through its Workforce Development program and various workshops based around the community’s needs. Many of GCC’s instructors are selected from surrounding communities and have extensive experience in their areas of expertise. Students of Sustainable Agriculture and Green Energy can learn hands-on in the college’s greenhouse. Outdoor Leadership students hone their skills on the river or the climbing wall. This school offers learning that is truly unique to our community.

In addition to hand-on learning, GCC teaches us to communicate in various modes and media. I am one of the many students here that has come back to college in my adult life. While recent high-school graduates are more comfortable using online learning platforms, students like myself may have never completed an assignment online. A good portion of the classes at GCC use a mix of classroom learning and online assignments. This has served as a benefit for me because I am learning to use programs that employers might automatically expect me to know. GCC is helping to close the gap between my technological experience and what will be expected of me in a constantly updating workforce.

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GREENFIELD — Abou Sarr’s wife wanted to pursue her doctorate in education in the United States, but leaving Senegal, he had to figure out what to do with his own career. “What’s your plan?” he recalls people asking him. “I’m going to learn English and pick up a trade,” he’d say.

A friend in the West African nation told him to go to Greenfield Community College. You can get a great education there, he told Sarr. So Sarr went to GCC, graduating in 2013 with his associate degree. While in school, he learned English and pursued a career in engineering.

As a newly registered alumnus, he spoke to a couple of dozen people at the college’s downtown center on Main Street Thursday for the kickoff to the annual public campaign for the GCC Foundation. The foundation looks to raise $180,670 as the fiscal year draws to an end, during the public portion of its campaign to complement the money raised so far to help the school reach its overall $800,000 goal.

Campaign co-chairs and others spoke at the breakfast as well. Nicole Fahey, a 2002 graduate and current counselor for substance abuse and mental health at the Franklin County House of Corrections, spoke about the resources the college offers to the community, including programs for inmates to help them pursue a degree.

Lorna Peterson, who served as the executive director of Five Colleges Inc. for nearly two decades and is a lifetime member of the college’s foundation board, spoke about the value of the school and her pride in being connected to GCC. “When people ask me what have you been doing since you retired, I tell them, ‘Oh, the most gratifying thing. I’ve been on the board of Greenfield Community College,’” Peterson said.

The student speakers, recent alumnus Sarr and current student Johanna Hoogendyk, shared why they believe the college has played an instrumental role in their lives and spoke of their mentors along the way.

“I have no doubt in my mind that GCC was there to build that foundation for me, changing my life,” Sarr said. His mentor during his years at the college was longtime educator, Kit Carpenter, who teaches English to students of other first languages. At the end of the school year, Carpenter will be retiring after 25 years. “There’s no message more important than building community,” Carpenter said. “Part of that process is educating folks who are anxious to learn.”

Accompanying Sarr was student speaker Hoogendyk, who spoke similarly about what she has been able to accomplish at the school. She first graduated in 2010 from Greenfield Community College with an associate degree in the liberal arts, before transferring to Mount Holyoke College and majoring in history.

Hoogendyk wanted to pursue a lifelong passion in art, so she decided to take a couple of art classes at the community college. Soon after, she was encouraged to enroll and explore her talents in painting.

“At GCC, you arrive and you don’t feel you’re worth it, but they tell you you’re worth it,” Hoogendyk said. After finishing the school year, Hoogendyk will be moving to New York City for graduate school.

Greenfield Community College President Bob Pura told those in attendance how the school gives people who normally wouldn’t have the opportunity to pursue their dreams a chance to achieve them. He focused on increased spending taken away from education and infrastructure in this country since 1980, and how the college has been doing what it can to help the local community overcome difficulties of pursuing the proverbial “American Dream.”
Perhaps my favorite General Education Ability, GCC encourages us to explore the natural and physical world. It is difficult to absorb and apply information from the inside of a classroom alone. When we venture out into our communities and beyond, we are able to put a face to things we’ve only thus imagined. Speaking with a recent immigrant may soften our attitude towards other newcomers. Having a flood wash out our favorite swimming hole might inspire us to join the fight against climate change. Often our experiences can ignite our will to act. This leads to GCC’s final point: To think creatively and critically. If we want to be a part of change, we must be able to problem-solve. Critical thinking can help us to evaluate circumstances, while creativity can lead us to possible solutions. GCC is such an ideal place to foster these skills being that it is such an out-of-the-box institution. The passion and creativity of this school’s faculty helps to foster the same in its students.

GCC’s General Education Abilities morph classroom learning into something that will continue throughout the lives of students. Through education, Greenfield Community College improves the communities surrounding it. Graduates use their knowledge of sustainability to power and feed the Pioneer Valley. Nurses and Emergency Medical Technicians from GCC treat their neighbors at Baystate Franklin Medical Center. Training in ethics and engagement prepare GCC students to take the lead in community involvement. These skills will only continue to improve the function of our region, as well as extend opportunity to those living here in Western Massachusetts.

Four GCC students in the Business Department’s Entrepreneurial Program were recognized at the recent Grinspoon Entrepreneurship Initiative Awards Banquet. These GCC students are doing more than dream about running a business, they’re doing it! And, thanks to the Harold Grinspoon Foundation Entrepreneurship Initiative Awards, they have some extra cash to help make those businesses succeed.

Each year, the Grinspoon Entrepreneurship Initiative Advisory Committee selects student entrepreneurs from several Western Massachusetts colleges to receive financial awards and honors the winners at a banquet held at the Log Cabin in Holyoke. On April 26, students showcased their businesses and delivered elevator pitches to a panel of business leaders and owners.

Congratulations to the following GCC students:
- Maya Kazinskas, Orange
- Sara Orellana, Holyoke
- Gina Roy, Leyden
- Thomas “Lex” Rudel, Hadley

and their Club Advisor Michelle Barthelemy for their award winning work!

Joining the students and their Advisor for the evening were GCC’s President Bob Pura; Chief Academic & Student Affairs Officer Catherine Seaver; Dean of Business, Information Technology, Social Sciences & Professional Studies Kathy Vranos; Executive Director of Resource Development Regina Curtis and local Entrepreneur Michael Garfield-Wright of Chunks of Energy.
GCC Alums featured in “40 Under 40” Awards

By JOSEPH BEDNAR, Senior Writer; BusinessWest. Reprinted with permission.
Gala celebration set for June 22 at the Log Cabin, Holyoke

**Michelle Dwyer - President and CEO, Franklin First Federal Credit Union; Age 34**

Working with a job-placement center, she was matched to a temporary teller position at Franklin First Federal Credit Union. Nine years later, in 2016, her business card read ‘president and CEO.’ “As I worked my way up, I was lucky to have people who were very supportive, and the timing was good with people retiring, giving me opportunities to learn and move forward,” she explained.

In her current role, Dwyer oversees an institution with 7,000 members, 18 employees, and more than $50 million in assets. But she sees her most important role as connecting the credit union with the community and building relationships with Franklin County residents and businesses.

To that end, she has increased the credit union’s involvement in a variety of community activities, including sponsorship of events and organizations like Greenfield’s Movies in the Park series, the Clarkdale Cider Run for CISA, the Fire Bird 5k benefiting addiction-prevention efforts, and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Franklin County, just to name a few. It’s a spirit of giving back she has strived to cultivate at Franklin First Federal by encouraging fund-raising and volunteerism.

“A lot of it comes from when I was little; I always tried to go volunteer and help people,” Dwyer said, adding that, as she got older, “I had big dreams about creating these big programs, but reality and finances set in. Now I’m in a position where I can go out and make an impact. It’s a huge opportunity for me.

“It goes along with the credit-union spirit of going out and helping people,” she went on. “Credit unions started when a group of farmers helped each other, or a group of business owners helped each other. Obviously, we want to make money, but it gets rolled back in to help our customers.”

While she enjoys the various aspects of her role, Dwyer is still a bit shocked at how rapidly it came about. “It was a very quick progression in 10 years,” she said. “But it’s so gratifying. I wouldn’t have chosen my path any differently.”

**Megan Holl Shaw - Owner and Instructor, MEGAdance; Age 32**

Megan Shaw has been passionate about dance and fitness all her life, so, about eight years ago, she started teaching Zumba. Noticing that her classes at the YMCA were always packed, she took a leap in 2012 and launched her own fitness business, MEGAdance — which she characterizes as a “high-energy dance party workout” — from a small church basement, starting with only eight students. But it grew quickly by word of mouth, and today, she’s moved to much larger facilities in Greenfield, where her classes typically draw 40 to 50 people.

“MEGAdance is a place where people of all ages, sizes, backgrounds, and fitness abilities work out, dance, and have fun without fear of judgment,” she told BusinessWest. “I strive to create a positive environment where everyone is celebrated, supported, and encouraged to be themselves and express their own rhythm in class and in life.”

Shaw said her classes are a judgment-free zone for women and men of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. “I love that women in their 70s come to my class; it’s very inspiring. And I strive to create a positive environment where everyone is supported and encouraged to be themselves. We are a fit family.”

It’s also a business that gives back to the community, offering free classes in low-income communities, schools, nursing homes, and at the Center for Human Development, and holding fund-raisers to support the New England Learning Center for Women in Transition, Shriners Hospitals for Children, Community Action, and most recently, the Peruvian Red Cross to help flood victims.

Shaw, who speaks Spanish fluently, is especially fond of Peru after spending the past two summers there, participating in internships that promote sustainable agriculture and working with indigenous communities.

“Because I come from a humble background and understand the struggle to live with few resources, I feel strongly about supporting the community,” she said, both in Peru and in her own backyard. To be able to do that while sharing her passion for dance, well, that’s just gravy.

“The goal in my professional life is nothing short of breaking the status quo and transforming my community through dance fitness, community building, and radical self-acceptance,” she noted, adding that seeing lives change for the better is only half the story. “It’s reciprocal,” she said. “They change my life, too.”
Dr. Allen J. Davis Scholarship for Climate Change Activism at GCC

Regina Curtis, GCC Executive Director of Resource Development & GCC Foundation, was very pleased when she got the call from Allen Davis, former Executive Director of the GCC Foundation, with the news that he would like to create a scholarship for GCC students. Davis’ many years of service with the Foundation gave him a front row seat to seeing the impact that access to education has on students. The scholarship gave him the opportunity to connect the goal of changing student lives with his interest in helping address the compelling issue of climate change.

The Dr. Allen J. Davis Scholarship for Climate Change Activism was established for Greenfield Community College students who have a demonstrated dedication to the work of reducing global warming and climate change for all life on the planet, thereby creating a more just, peaceful and sustainable world.

Davis holds a strong belief that global warming and climate changes around the world are the most important challenge facing all life on earth. As a consequence, he wanted to encourage and support students who dedicate their lives to protecting and saving the awesome creatures with whom we share the planet.

To work as a climate activist is, he believes, to help prevent or reduce the cataclysmic meteorological changes that harm the planet by threatening endangered species and negatively impacting the lives of millions of the poorest and most vulnerable of our fellow citizens around the world.

Davis was motivated to do this work by the arrival of his 70th birthday in December. While working on the important matters this milestone brought to the forefront, such as updating his will, he decided to direct money to GCC through bequest as part of his planned giving strategy. This will eventually create a permanently endowed fund at the GCC Foundation that will generate sufficient income each year to award a scholarship to students. While discussing the type of scholarship this would be and who would be eligible to apply, he also elected to donate enough each year to award a scholarship to a GCC student, beginning now.

After making that decision last fall to create and directly fund an annual scholarship, until its eventual funding by bequest in his will, Davis then found himself doubling his donation this spring. While serving as a member of the scholarship review committee with faculty from GCC’s Environmental Studies program, he read the 18 applications submitted and was so impressed by the quality and commitment of those students that he decided to increase his gift so the College could offer two scholarships, rather than just one.

Davis wants to make an impact on changing student lives and preserving the planet now, while he is still living and can enjoy seeing how his direct contributions make a difference in the world, noting, “It is fun to plan for the distribution of my estate later and be generous today!”

If you would like information on how you can change lives at GCC, please contact Regina Curtis at 413-775-1426 or at curtis@gcc.mass.edu

Inaugural Trivia Night a Success

The GCC Foundation held its first Trivia Night competition on Cinco de Mayo (May 5th) this year. It was a great evening of laughter, excellent trivia challenges and Mexican-themed snacks that raised funds in support of GCC students. Special thanks to our sponsors First Franklin Credit Union, Mesa Verde and Quality Cleaning, and to Hope & Olive, MagPie and Pierce Bros. Coffee for the donated prizes. Watch for our next Trivia Night in November!
Please contact us at 413-775-1600 for information about Foundation events in the community, the annual campaign, planned giving opportunities and the alumni association. Send a message to rifanburgN@gcc.mass.edu if you are not on our email list.

Office of the GCC Foundation and Alumni Affairs

Behind the scenes…

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Please support GCC students: www.gcc.mass.edu/give

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GCC Alum on Facebook

Todd Goulston ’15 of Amherst took advantage of the ability of social media to stay connected to his alma mater. The Engineering Science major, who will soon graduate from UMass School of Engineering, posted the following message to GCC’s Facebook page:

“GCC is an awesome school and a great place. I’m an alumni from the Engineering Department and, when I graduate with my Bachelor’s Degree and enter the workforce, I will be making my donation to help support future GCC students in the Math and Engineering Departments!”

GCC Alum on Facebook

Todd Goulston, pictured here with his mother, Piedy Goulston, following his GCC Graduation in 2015

Join the Alumni Association!

Membership is FREE.

Did you attend GCC? We value your connection to the college. As a member of the Alumni Association, you can participate in many ways and we welcome your involvement at all levels.

Join now @ www.gcc.mass.edu/alumni
Joe and Marie Bete visit the College’s Channing & Marie Bete Veterans Center

Veteran students and staff joined GCC President Bob Pura (center) in welcoming Marie and Joe Bete (front right) for a visit to the College’s Channing & Marie Bete Veterans Center in May. GCC Veterans Certifying Officer Holly Lovelace (left) and Veterans Center Coordinator Chris Demars (second from left) and several Veteran students talked about issues that returning veterans who decide to enroll in higher education encounter and what supports are available at GCC and in the community to help navigate the process.

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