

impact

MOVING FORWARD - GIVING BACK

Five recent alums share how Defiance College helped to prepare them for their futures

*By Michele Tinker,
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Whether it was a defining moment in class, a transformational experience off-campus, or the opportunity to grow in a new learning environment, alumni frequently share the impact that Defiance College had on their future. Defiance College Magazine recently heard from these young alumni just how the spirit of DC continues to help them make a difference in their careers and in their communities.



Todd and Shanna Wenninger and Kenna

TODD WENNINGER, '02, credits a DC service trip with planting the seeds for his future career. Todd is the missions director for Haiti at CSI (Christian Service International) Ministries, headquartered in Muncie, Indiana. CSI Ministries partners with established churches and organizations in national and international missions.

During his time at Defiance College, Todd was a Presidential Service Leader for three years, which had a great impact on his life.

“Having been a part of annual service trips to Washington, D.C. and New York City the previous two years, I was thrilled to participate in my first international mission in December of 2001. It was then that I - and 15 or so of my classmates and faculty members - travelled to Jamaica to serve with Christian Service International (CSI) Ministries,” Todd related. “My experience in Jamaica was so profound that I immediately made plans to return during my spring break in March of 2002. To say the least, I was deeply touched.”

Immediately following graduation, Todd worked at Enterprise and was involved in short-term mission trips through his

local church. He settled in Muncie and got married. A year later, Todd and Shanna had a baby boy, John, who, sadly, died of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). Through grieving and understanding what his faith was, Todd came to reconnect with CSI Ministries. In April 2010, he joined the staff as missions director for Haiti.

“I am thankful for the first time in my career to actually be living out my faith through my work,” said Todd. He calls his work challenging and fulfilling at the same time. In the past year, he has traveled to Haiti three times. “There is such great need in Haiti. It’s difficult to identify which needs demand the most priority.”

The Wenningers are now the parents of a little girl, Kenna. Shanna is finishing her doctorate in school psychology and working part-time with a facility that assists troubled kids. They have come to love the Muncie area and have just purchased their first house.

Todd summed up his DC experience: “I will forever be in debt to those staff and faculty members - and fellow classmates - that challenged and encouraged me in my service to others during those very impressionable years of my life.”

Impact

CAMILE TUCKER '07

Camile has the distinction of being DC's first International Student Scholarship recipient. This young woman from Jamaica had never left her island home before her trip to the states to attend Defiance College. Now she is a student at Hofstra University School of Law in New York.

Camile has just completed an internship at the legal department of New York City Administration for Children's Services which is charged with protecting New York City's children from abuse and neglect. The legal department works with the investigation and the prosecution of abuse and neglect cases, working in the best interest of the child.

This has been a great internship for Camile, involving her in all aspects of the department's work: interviewing case workers, filing complaints, and reviewing investigative reports. She has had experience interviewing witnesses and preparing them for trial, along with general research and preparing documents for discovery. "I am getting a lot of litigation experience, seeing things from start to finish," Camile reported. Although she is leaning towards family law, Camile is also interested in immigration, property and criminal law.

Even in high school, Camile had her heart set on being an attorney. "It's the only thing I've ever wanted to do," she said.

Coming into a strange country had its challenges, but Camile appreciated the great support system at Defiance, with her studies and helping her adjust culturally. As a service leader, she returned to Jamaica with a DC group to build a house for a family, and she traveled to New Orleans twice - before and after Hurricane Katrina. She remembers the shock she felt at seeing devastation and poverty at this level in the United States, but she felt she was better able to adjust to it than her peers, because of her exposure to poverty in Jamaica. Comparing the two trip locations, Camile told how, in Jamaica, you felt like you were truly accomplishing something, while in New Orleans, "the need was so huge, the difference we were making seemed so small."

What Camile feels she really learned at DC was how to give back. "There were so many opportunities to do this and it helped make me a better student and a better person," she believes. She plans to take what she learned at Defiance forward into her career and her personal life. "Whatever path I go on, I will always want to make a difference."



Camile Tucker

"Whatever path I go on, I will always want to make a difference."

Camile Tucker '07

"I'm looking forward to helping other students achieve their dreams, too."

Austin Kleman '10

AUSTIN KLEMAN '10 is currently attending Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine. Although he describes vet school as tough and challenging, he finished his first year with a 3.977 GPA after getting through several anatomy classes and two systems courses – neurobiology and endocrinology.

Austin is living right in the heart of Columbus now, which makes him miss the small-town feel of DC. "There are a lot more options (in Columbus) as to where to eat, where to shop, what to do – but it's not as personal," he explains, even at the vet school where he is in a class of 140 (and one of just 22 men in the class).

While at DC, Austin participated in service trips to Jamaica and Belize. He was asked about his Belize trip in his OSU interview for vet school. He thinks his unique experience there made an impact on the interviewers. "I honestly think that's why I got in. Both trips opened my eyes - even as far as the animals - their roles in the culture and how they are treated. It wasn't a tourist experience," Austin states.

Austin was also involved in Defiance College's Hench Autism Studies Program, working with students in the on-campus public classroom and acting as a mentor. This was another topic in his vet school interview. "They were pleasantly surprised that I wasn't just an animal person."

His involvement with the Hench Autism Studies Program was so positive, that for

the past three summers, Austin has returned to the DC campus to work at the summer autism camp, even turning down the chance for veterinary work this year to participate. At the camp, Austin worked as media director, helping students film and edit their own original films.

He is now on the Defiance College pre-vet advisory board, along with veterinarians from all around the country. The advisory board will work to make sure DC students are well prepared for admission to vet school. "I'm looking forward to helping other students achieve their dreams, too," Austin said.



Austin Kleman

Would you expect to find two Defiance College graduates working for the same organization in a far-flung location such as Kansas? The Kansas Bureau of Investigation can boast of having two Yellow Jackets in its employ, each making her way there on her own.

Originally from Springfield, Ohio, **JESSICA BANKS KAISER '05** joined KBI in February 2006. Her title is forensic scientist III and she works as a chemist in the KBI western satellite laboratory in Great Bend.

Jessica's primary responsibilities include analyzing controlled substances, looking for drugs and up-and-coming (designer) drugs such as synthetic marijuana. As a chemist, there is also the possibility to test for arson evidence and suspected methamphetamine lab items. Methamphetamine production has been a large problem in Kansas, but Jessica reports that strict enforcement is working to control the problem. As part of her position, she is often called by the several courts the KBI works with to testify on her findings.

While at Defiance, Jessica was involved with the Campus Activities Board and Student Senate. She credits these activities with helping her learn how to organize events and to be able to handle herself when speaking to groups of people. "That was a big help in feeling comfortable in interview situations," Jessica stated.

She was also involved in the DC Ecology Club, where they had a number of service hours to complete. "I brought that with me to where I work now," she added, referring to the worksite recycling program she started at the KBI's satellite lab.

Thinking back to all her time in Tenzer Hall, Jessica believes she received a great background in science. That solid foundation, along with her criminal justice classes, has made her comfortable in the KBI. "Now I can tell how forensic programs have developed when I sit in on interviews with prospective employees."

In June 2010, Jessica married Eric Kaiser, who works as manager of an oilfield parts distributor. She and Eric live in Great Bend, Kansas. "It's smaller than Defiance, and it has those Midwestern values that most of Ohio has. It's been so hot and so windy, I don't know if you ever get used to that, but it's not humid. My only complaint is I am very far from my family," she said.

Outside work, Jessica can frequently be found at the local gym where she teaches aerobics and just finished her personal trainer certification. Eric is very involved in recreational sports, and she spends a lot of time cheering him on as well.



Amanda Misencik



Jessica (Banks) Kaiser

AMANDA MISENCIK '07 is the second DC alumna working at the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, as a forensic scientist. The agency is under the auspices of the Attorney General, and Amanda began working there in November 2010. "I work in the biology section," Amanda explained, "and right now, I am finishing the initial portion of my training where I work on cases under the direction of another scientist." Once working on her own, Amanda will be screening cases for the presence of biological fluids and selecting samples to move on to DNA testing. Additionally, she started DNA training this fall.

As a service leader her four years at Defiance College, Amanda went on two trips to Biloxi, Mississippi, and one trip to Jamaica. The second trip to Biloxi was after Hurricane Katrina, where the students experienced firsthand the devastation the area sustained. In Jamaica, the service leaders built a house for a family, what she called an eye-opening experience. "Some people go on vacations to Jamaica. I was exposed to orphanages and areas of poverty. I have a different perception of the country," Amanda stated, adding that she credits these experiences for having a huge impact in forming who she is as a person today.

When she attended Virginia Commonwealth University for graduate studies, she found that Defiance College had prepared her well for graduate coursework. In studying for a career in forensic science, Amanda had already taken biochemistry, genetics and molecular biology at DC. She did not have to worry about fitting these courses, required for a position as a DNA examiner, into her graduate schedule. She also felt DC's senior capstone requirement helped her gain experience in presenting scientific results.

Originally from Willoughby, Ohio, she is often asked how she likes Kansas. Amanda has found it to be an adjustment, but she's learning her way around Topeka, and has gotten involved in the area: volunteering at an Iron Man Triathlon in Lawrence, joining the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Mo., and finding unique places to photograph, a favorite hobby.

She likes to tell people that Defiance College helped her prepare for taking a job in Kansas another way: "At DC, I was surrounded by farms and corn fields." ♦