

ALECIA WARREN-BARNES – November 2014

DSPS Student Thanks Mother and Merritt As She Makes Plans to Become a Doctor



Alecia Warren-Barnes was born hearing impaired, and the disability increased as she got older. But thanks to the support of her “amazing” mother early on and now to Merritt faculty and staff, she is planning to become a doctor. Of course she’s done some hard work herself along the way.

Using a combination of Real-Time Captioning equipment (operated by Lee McCarthy) and other services arranged for by Disabled Services Coordinator Ron Nelson.

Says instructor Nancy Rauch: “Alecia is dedicated, conscientious, and has outstanding grades in my anatomy/physiology course.” Prof. Rauch was so impressed that she encouraged Alecia to apply to UC Berkeley’s Bridges Program which could lead to an MD/Ph.D. program at Harvard.

Alecia is grateful for Merritt’s contributions to her success. “The staff and equipment from DSPS has made all the difference in my success, and my instructors have really allowed me to excel,” says Alecia. “I am thankful to be surrounded by people who want me to succeed.”

Q&A with Alecia Warren-Barnes

Alecia Warren-Barnes was interviewed by Susan May, editor of The Merritt Connection.

Where are you from and where did you go to school previously?

I was raised in a beautiful little California town called Lompoc. I have lived in Oakland for close to three years, and I’m proud to call Oakland home. I decided to return to school after the industry that I worked for many years slowly lost ground to technology and the internet.

How and when did you become hearing impaired?

I was born hearing impaired but gradually began to lose my hearing as I got older. I no longer recognize speech in my right ear, due to an assault.

How much of a struggle has it been getting an education?

The struggle to get an education was a surprise. California is one of the few states that really make college more affordable, but unfortunately there can be a lot of hoops. It is so important to know what your rights are, ask a lot of questions, and don’t be afraid to ask more than once. I believe in the saying, “If it is important enough, you will find a way; if not, you’ll find an excuse.”

Do you have supportive family members?

I have an amazing and very supportive family and friends, who have encouraged me every step of the way. My mother has always taught me the value of hard work. She never allowed me to use my hearing impairment as an excuse. Her philosophy was always that “Things in life are not always fair, but you use those things that you do have, you work harder, and the same success that others achieve will be sweeter for you, because even though you

struggled, you overcame. Get up, put the work in, and never tell anyone you CAN'T do ANYTHING you set your mind to achieve. If YOU believe you CAN, you WILL. I'm very fortunate to have such an amazing mom.

Why did you come to Merritt College?

I came to Merritt because I liked the campus and because it just felt right.

Had you heard about Merritt's Disability Services Program?

I found out about the captioning option through the organization DCARA. I took a shot by asking Ron Nelson if having a real time captioner could happen for me, and I am happy to say, he supported me 100%, and made it happen. I can't say enough positive things about him. His support has made all the difference in my success with Merritt. Ron Nelson and the entire support group at DSPS have been extremely instrumental and accommodating. I am very fortunate to have the belief and support of such an amazing group of folks.

What equipment and assistance does the Disability Services Program provide you with?

I am provided with a real-time captioner (Lee McCarthy, pictured left) who types as my professor's lectures. I also have access to all of the services provided by the program, which include the amazing staff, and early registration, which is very helpful.



Do you belong to any organizations or clubs at or outside of Merritt?

Yes, I am the Vice President of Membership with Phi Theta Kappa, and I'm also a recipient of the Rising Scholars Voices Program through the Peralta Colleges Foundation. I also currently volunteer with the Courageous Women's Association, which helps victims of domestic violence and homelessness. In addition, I serve as the Social Media Coordinator for the Oakland Teen Empowerment Scholarship Pageant, an organization founded by Paula Welsh and Celebrity Chef Nikki Shaw, who is the wife of Denver Nuggets Coach Brian Shaw. This organization was founded to address the issue of teen sex trafficking and prostitution in Oakland. Our goal is to empower teen girls with the knowledge that they need to avoid becoming victims and also to provide scholarships to encourage these girls to go to college. All girls are mentored by successful business women in the Oakland Community. Our first pageant was a success, with our winner now attending Berkeley City College.

What is your career goal?

My career is heading down an amazing path in science. I started with the Nutrition and Dietetics program, but recently, opportunities in the Medical Research field have opened up. I recently applied for the NIH Bridge to Baccalaureate program at U C Berkeley, thanks to my amazing Professor, Nancy Rauch. My ultimate goal is to obtain my MD/PhD and come back to the community of Oakland to give back, so that other students can succeed

How is Merritt College helping you reach that goal?

Merritt is a supportive environment and that has helped me in many ways. I feel that I am surrounded by people who truly want to see me succeed.

Have your instructors been supportive?

Yes, and especially my amazing biology instructor Nancy Rauch. One thing that I believe wholeheartedly is that, "When the student is ready, the teacher appears." Her teaching style allowed me to really excel in a very challenging course. Her support and encouragement, along with the recommendation to apply to the bridge program with UC Berkeley, which includes a paid internship with a research facility, is a dream opportunity that I would not have known about. Great instructors recognize the potential in their students and guide those students to opportunities.

When will you graduate from Merritt and what is your major?

I should complete all of my prerequisites and additional science and math requirements by 2016.

Do you think that your disability will get in the way at all of your education or your future goals?

For many years, I struggled with being labeled disabled, because I never wanted to feel sorry for myself. The ability to hear is very important, and through the help of the Department of Rehabilitation and my wonderful counselor, Julie Ford, I realized that there is no shame in using the services that are available to empower me. I believe that no matter the disability, anyone can succeed, when given the right tools, support, and encouragement. It's up to me to make the most of the gifts that I have been given, and honestly, my belief has grown. I started just thinking that I'd

get an AS in Nutrition, but because of the amazing support that I have received, I know that I can achieve whatever I set my mind to achieve. The sky is the limit, you only have to believe. And today, I truly believe!

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Comments from Alecia's biology instructor Nancy Rauch:

Alecia has been in my class since the start of this semester.. I've not had a hearing-impaired student in my class before, but thanks to the work of Ron Nelson's office, I've not really had to make any special provisions for her. She is extremely conscientious and dedicated, and her grades are outstanding. She is a high A student, and this has been consistent through all the exams and lab reports we've had this semester.

I noticed Alecia's huge interest in one of the topics of the class and thought that she would be ideal for the Bridges program that our department co-chair, Jennifer Shanoski, has been trying to recruit for. This program is for targeted minorities to encourage and assist them to become biomedical researchers, so I connected her with Jennifer.



Although Alecia talked about getting an M.D., I suggested to her that she consider an M.D./Ph.D. program which Harvard offers because I was so impressed by her fascination with motor proteins which would be ideally suited for research. Even though we didn't cover this topic in class, she was so interested when she saw it mentioned in a textbook, that she looked it up, found videos, sent them to me, and was just radiant and exuberant about this subject, which concerns a type of protein called a motor protein, a protein that uses energy (ATP) to change shape and move along a track, almost like walking along it. This was so infectious to me that when I happened to wander into a gift shop that sold among other things, prints (paintings) for children, one of the pictures for sale had a cartoon character that looked a lot like a motor protein. So I took a picture of it and sent it to her!"