

Housatonic

Community News

December 2010

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HCC VETERAN'S OASIS

Transition to school made safe, easy

In October, the General Federation of Women's Clubs of Connecticut generously outfitted Housatonic's Veteran's Oasis with everything it needs to make the center a home away from home for student vets on campus. Peek into this small, but comfortable, space and you will see a 40" flat screen television, a full size refrigerator, carpet, welcome mats, a coffee maker, a microwave oven, new artwork, and what Housatonic's Veteran's Representative, Ernest "EJ" Johnson, calls a "bottomless well of need-fulfilling items."

"They said, if I need anything to talk to them and they will send it over," EJ says appreciatively.

The Oasis opened in fall 2008 when EJ, working the Office of the Registrar, noticed that student vets often sought him out to help them get through their paperwork and to talk about their experiences in the military and on campus.

HCN: How many students visit the center daily?

EJ: Daily, about fifteen to sixteen minimum. As it gets closer to the beginning or end of the semester, it usually jumps up to about thirty people a day. It's always a mix—incoming veterans, current attending veterans with different issues that pop up, people from different veterans organizations coming to let me know how they can help me out, people from the Department of Labor, recruiters.

HCN: What other organizations offer support?

EJ: There is an "all vet network." They give you tons of material to work with. There's the Homeless for the Brave that want to come over and do classes. If they've got people over there, I tell them to send them over and I'll help them out. And if I've got people over here who are starting to lose their housing, I say go talk to them. The same thing with Connecticut Works.

HCN: What is a typical question or problem veterans face as they return to school?

EJ: A lot of them say "This is my first time coming back to school since I left high school. I'm worried that I'm going to be the oldest person in class and that I'm not going to be intelligent enough to keep pace with everybody else." Everybody is worried about that.

The military experience we have makes us that much more serious about being in the classroom. Multitasking is what the military is all about. You're never just going to do one thing but many things at once.



Ernest "EJ" Johnson
Housatonic's Veteran's Representative



The sign outside the Veteran's Oasis letting students know that EJ is there.

HCN: Tell me briefly about your own military service.

EJ: I was in the Army Corps, four years of active duty. I have been deployed twice—Iraq and Afghanistan. The military took me around the world. I've been to Kuwait, Germany, Austria, Czeck Republic, Ireland for a little bit, Italy, where I lived for a year and a half, roughly.

HCN: What were your reasons for joining the military?

EJ: I just wanted to do something different. I just needed to get some life experience.

When I was in high school everything was a breeze, and I didn't have to struggle too much. I wanted to see what the real word was like before I went to school because I said if I was going to come [to school] I wanted to make sure I'd mean it.

HCN: The Veteran's Oasis has become a home away from home for students.

EJ: It's a place of safety. The campus may have mistaken what this room was for. You've got the rooms in the new building (Beacon Hall) like the quiet rooms for study, and I guess [the community] thought this was one of those places. When they hear us getting kind of loud in here, they say "You might want to quiet down." But I explain to them that this is where we *can* be loud.

And it is also a place where they can just come and relax, watch TV, have a snack, and just enjoy the company of other vets. The camaraderie that we have is just completely different than what people in the "regular world" have.

HCN: How can faculty and staff be more helpful to student vets?

EJ: Patience. A lot of vets come back with Post Traumatic Stress issues. It's hard to acclimate. What you might perceive as me having an attitude might be me being very direct. Relax and listen.

How can we recognize veterans for their service?

EJ: Veterans Day off. I was invited to go talk to other schools; I wanted to march in the parade. Why not use Veterans Day as a furlough day so that everyone can have the day off.

"Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of man-- the balance-wheel of the social machinery."

Horace Mann



Juleen Moreno-Stewart (left), a second-year Biology/Pre-Med major, served in the U.S. Navy. Making the transition to home and school wasn't always easy, but she says EJ encouraged her to take small steps to get involved in school activities. Now she is a member of the Student Senate, Black Student Union and other clubs. She enjoys spending time in the Oasis because "It is a place where I feel safe. EJ especially understood me a lot and helped me reconnect with my life. We're a family here," she says.

HCC Criminal Justice may not be what they think

Students majoring in Criminal Justice are sometimes surprised to discover that police work is not as exciting as it seems on television. Those same students might also be surprised to learn that before becoming a college professor, working for the U.S. Attorney in New York, attending law school, and working with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Criminal Justice Program Coordinator, Samantha Mannion, also had to adjust her initial expectations of the field.

The Criminal Justice program, with over four hundred students enrolled, is one of the largest majors at Housatonic. Under the direction of Professor Samantha Mannion, the department continues to build on its steady growth, a 20% increase in enrollment over the past year. The Criminal Justice Club keeps the growing number of students engaged on campus and in the community through its yearlong rotation of community service activities—toy drives and food drives with the Bridgeport Police Department, Identikit for children, a Take Back the Night program, and public safety fair.

Professor Mannion says students are often drawn to the program by their personal connections. For example, some have come through the juvenile justice system and have been influenced by the police officer who “not only took them in, but took them under his wing and counseled them, and acted in *loco parentis* when their parents were not around.”

Others have been influenced by family or friends who have had criminal justice system contact. These students, she says, not only develop an interest in law enforcement but also an interest in criminal justice and some go on to law school.

In addition, there are economic motivations. “This is steady, guaranteed work,” she says. “Even in a bad economy the last thing to go is the police force because everybody has an eye out for public safety.”

The media is also a strong influence on students’ motivation to enter the field, and because of that influence, as a criminal justice educator, Prof. Mannion works against students’ false expectations of the profession. She laments “Television has not done us any favors,” alluding to programs such as those in the *CSI* franchise.

“People really wanted to hear what I wanted to say. I could see lights going off in their eyes.... I got such a rush from that.”



Samantha Mannion
Professor of Criminal Justice and Political Science
Coordinator, Criminal Justice Program

“They make it look glamorous. You have to explain to students that [real forensic professionals] don’t work on the streets. They don’t chase suspects. They don’t carry guns. They work in a lab and wear lab coats. That [forensics] really is a science major. Students need to like entomology, chemistry, physics.”

For every fifteen seconds of what students imagine as “running in slow motion” with the beat of a music soundtrack behind them, “there are four hours of desk work. There is a lot of reading and writing. All of the fundamental skills we teach as part of the general education requirements,” Mannion explains.

But what were Prof. Mannion’s own motivations for entering the field? “I had an obsession with *Charlie’s Angels* as a child” she confesses.

Such a popular influence did not go over well at home. Mannion’s father, for one, wanted her to go to college, not necessarily for professional training, but as a prelude to finding a suitable mate and starting a family. She was “headstrong” and continued to pursue law enforcement as a type of “rebellion” from her father’s traditional expectations.

The loss of her father while she was an undergraduate, Mannion said seemed to give her the freedom and resolve to continue the path she had started. With her mother’s support, she initially had her mind set on the FBI, but finding no assignments there that met her preference for field work, she accepted a field assignment with Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms instead.

Prof. Mannion says she “bounced around” law enforcement, “but everything I did was in the federal government.” Law school was not part of the plan. Based on the advice of someone who knew the potential her combination of professional training and education held—she had earned a bachelor’s degree in Political Science with an American History minor—she pursued a law degree. Once in law school she says, “I absolutely loved it.”

With law degree in hand, Mannion landed a position in the New York U.S. Attorney’s Office in Manhattan. She was one of the many attorneys who worked on the John Gotti case. “I experienced the courtroom process, how to argue in front of a judge. I really got a lot of experience,” she says gratified.

Teaching entered the picture as a means of balancing family life after having her first child. She started her career at Housatonic as an adjunct when the college was still located at the Barnum building.

About her foray into teaching she says, “It was like the best thing I had ever done.” Instead of speaking in a courtroom and being viewed as an antagonistic prosecutor or arguing with a judge, when speaking in front of students, she explained, “People really wanted to hear what I wanted to say. I could see lights going off in their eyes. It was a sudden rush. I got such a rush from that.”

Prof. Mannion says students’ motivations for entering the program have shifted over the years. Initially, many just wanted to earn the sixty or so credits generally needed to take a police officer’s exam, but today, they are more likely to use their community college experience to get hired along the way to earning a bachelor’s degree.

“There is a lot of reading and writing. All of the fundamental skills we teach as part of the general education requirements.”

Samantha Mannion on academic requirements of the Criminal Justice Program.

Also, over the years the discipline has grown more diverse. “I think it is more balanced. Considerably more balanced not only with women but minorities as well” she says. In general Prof. Mannion suggests these two groups are not often interested in entering the field. Women, in particular, she explains, sometimes express concerns about the danger involved in law enforcement or inconvenience of shift work while rearing a family. But there are those women who press on to work in what can be a “paternalistic environment.”

Prof. Mannion reflects humorously on her own early expectations in the field. “Your makeup, hair and white pants suit are not going to look beautiful when someone shoots at you.”

IN MEMORIAM



CT Post

Dr. Vincent S. Darnowski

President *Emeritus*
Housatonic Community College
1974-1996

Housatonic Community College's second president and the longest serving community college president in Connecticut, Dr. Vincent S. Darnowski, died on November 9, 2010. He was remembered fondly by Professor Barbara Richards with the following remarks at HCC's December Community Meeting.

I first came to the college in 1992, just four years before President Darnowski retired. At the opening meeting that year, President Darnowski stated that he had an open door policy, that we were always welcome to come and talk with him. I did talk with him several times and he was always friendly and welcoming. Then I went to ask him if it would be OK to start a Political Action Committee. At that time the state legislature was considering a proposal to merge the community colleges with the state universities and we were strongly opposed to that idea. Dr. Darnowski was enthusiastic about the idea of the committee and indicated that he would like to participate in it. He did come to the meetings and encouraged us in our work. We took busloads of students to Hartford to talk with legislators and it was a great experience. I appreciated his warmth and enthusiastic support of faculty initiatives.

Barbara Richards
Professor of Sociology

HIGHER EDUCATION UPDATE

Congratulations!

Phi Theta Kappa advisor, Irene Summers, announced that Celeste Roche will be published in the honor society's literary magazine, *Nota Bene*. Celeste's short story, "Guidelines for a First Date," was one of sixteen entries chosen from a field of 800. Celeste is the daughter of Maria Roche, Professor of English as a Second Language.

"Reinventing" the City Colleges of Chicago

In November Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago announced a "reinvention" of his city's 99-year old community college system, City Colleges of Chicago (CCC). The mayor hopes the changes will reshape the community college system preparing students for 21st century employment by "reinventing" eight key areas, Program portfolio review; Remediation; Adult Education; Student support and pathways; Faculty & Staff Development; Operational Excellence and Optimization; Technology; and Strategic Capital Planning and Investments). The CCC's chancellor, Cheryl Hyman, said "just sixteen percent of students transfer to a four year institution, and only 4-5% earn a bachelor's degree. The City Colleges loses more than half of its degree seeking students before completion of their first 15 credit hours." In part, the effort has received funding from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In a move to keep the community engaged, Chicagoans are encouraged to contribute ideas and monitor progress at www.ReinventingCCC.org.

"Gaming" the System

The Chronicle of Higher Education reported a study in which students sharing black and white heritage are more likely to identify as black when asked about their racial identity on college applications and financial aid forms. The *Chronicle* chose to describe the students' choice as "gaming" the system. The report, "Passing as Black" can be found in the *Social Psychology Quarterly* and is available online.

***Housatonic Community News* welcomes articles, photographs, announcements, and feedback. The deadline for the February 2011 issue is January 18, 2011.**

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HOUSATONIC COMMUNITY COLLEGE OPERATIONAL VALUES

INTEGRITY

Communicate openly, honestly and responsibly.
Make agreements and keep them.
Admit your mistakes.

RESPECT

Treat others as you wish to be treated.
Communicate directly, calmly and professionally.
Listen attentively.
Value different perspectives.

COMMUNITY MEMBER FOCUS

Ask questions to ensure understanding.
Make suggestions and recommendations.
Keep community members informed.
Acknowledge requests promptly.
Anticipate community member “wants.”
Treat others with respect and dignity.
Make continuous improvement.