Reflections from a First College Graduate — Pat Duffy

As an older student with a great deal of career and life experiences and wanting to pursue a degree in another field of interest, Pat Duffy began her academic career in First College. The First College program provided a place for Pat to be creative in obtaining her degree.

Pat is very involved in the community; in addition to her academic studies, she volunteers 70 or more hours a month for organizations benefiting the elderly including Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly, Lutheran Social Services, Loaves and Fishes and Habitat for Humanity.

That passion for assisting the elderly lead Pat to design her individualized degree program around leadership service, health, and spirituality. When she began the program in the fall of 2006, she transferred credits from a variety of institutions into her degree program. She creatively used theory seminars, internships, independent studies, and courses to complete her degree, including the course Perspectives: Educational Philosophy and Planning. Her self-designed program goals include directing a center for the elderly where they are cared for holistically in a family-type environment rather than an institutional setting.

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First College Student’s Academic Journey — Koffi Gozo

Being a lawyer has been Koffi Gozo’s dream since his early childhood days in Togo West Africa. However, Koffi faced many challenges. His legal training from Togo was not recognized by the American Educational system. Despite being able to speak seven different languages, he also needed to master learning English. Koffi needed a higher educational institution that could help him achieve his dream.

He found such a place at Metropolitan State University’s First College. When Koffi decided to return to school in the fall of 2006, he was searching for a program that would fit his educational goals and needs plus resemble his
After nearly 40 years at Metropolitan State University, Professor Bob Fox (full story on page 3) retired last spring. When I met Bob the first time twenty years ago, he impressed me as being someone I could instantly get along with. Some of you will remember, as I do the ponytail, thoughtful conversation, an intriguing sense of curiosity, and a bunch of wine pictures in his office. Oh, he also had a whole lot of pictures that he had taken with presidents and other people of national and international significance. He was not the least bit shy to tell you that he has been a member of the United States Olympic Committee for a good part of his life which has taken him to every continent on the planet except Africa. Bob will be inducted into the U.S. Table Tennis Hall of Fame at the Olympic Festival this fall.

My colleagues who have had the good fortune of working with Bob Fox will agree with me that one cannot help but admire him for so many things—for his warm and yet quick-witted and humorous personality, his intellectual depth, his very steady compassion and empathy toward others regardless of their circumstances, his wisdom and endless curiosity about a wide variety of subjects, and, of course, his uncompromising commitment to student-centeredness. Bob’s deep appreciation and respect for all people has made Metropolitan State University a better institution.

Bob left his lucrative legal profession because he had a deep commitment to changing the nature of higher education. In his own words, “Metropolitan State University is a child of the 60s... Therefore, Metropolitan State University came into existence as a critique of higher education.” Bob and his colleagues wanted to change system of higher education because they were not too happy the way most of the higher educational institutions treated students and presented the curriculum.

In his many years of teaching at Metropolitan State University, Bob has not only embodied the activism of the time that brought him to Metropolitan State but also the idealism which fueled his burning desire to create, in the words of the founding president, David Sweet, “a university for those who have no university.” In turn, Bob and his colleagues of the time were innovators and pioneers in the world of higher education where definitions of “success” favor traditional paradigms. I am so grateful to Bob and his colleagues who dared to challenge the status quo and took us all to a place where we hadn’t been before, and creating a university which remains one of the most innovative of the 20th century.

Dr. Daniel Abebe is the dean of First College and teaches First College’s Self-directed Learning Theory Seminar.
Metropolitan State Founding Faculty Retires; His Legacy and Vision Remain in First College

Professor Emeritus Bob Fox, the guiding force behind the institution, retired after this spring semester with more than 40 years of dedicated service to the university. Fox is one of the founding faculty members whose pioneering spirit built the foundation for what is now known as Metropolitan State University: a premier urban university that serves the underserved populations in the metropolitan area. What the university embodies today bears the mark of something he formulated through his vision, passion and hard work.

Along with a handful of founding faculty and staff, he held the primary responsibility for developing academic, financial, personnel, and administrative policies and procedures, student services, and university programs and curriculum. As a lawyer and assistant to the president, Fox played a key role in codifying early policies and procedures. While interviewing for the job with David Sweet, the founding president, Fox called every day to check on the status of his interview until President Sweet caved in and offered him the job; “I think he gave me the job so he didn’t have to hear from me again,” Bob recalls.

In the early pioneering days Metropolitan State had a few formal classes, a broad range of learning opportunities that included lots of internships, and assessment of prior learning. Assessment of knowledge gained through prior life and work experience became the hallmark of a Metropolitan State degree in part to Bob’s visionary, forward-thinking, rebellious spirit. He sees learning not solely absorbed in a traditional classroom setting.

Bob came to the university with a commitment to change higher education and promote an educational system that was student-centered and adult focused. He advocates for students’ abilities and for their responsibility and authority over their own education.

Bob’s legacy and vision remain in First College sustaining the core values of the university — empowering students to self-design interdisciplinary, broad liberal arts degrees to meet their personal, educational and career goals.

Bob Fox’s presence reaches beyond the academic world. For his efforts on behalf of the U.S. Olympic Table Tennis Team which Bob has lead through four Olympic games, Bob was voted into the United States Table Tennis Hall of Fame. Congratulations, Bob!
West African educational background.

Navigating through the curriculum maze of various programs such as Political Science, Criminal Justice, Computer Forensics Science, he found First College as his final destination to complete his academic journey because (among other reasons) First College took into consideration the value of his prior degree.

While attending a Metropolitan State writing course, his instructor also knew French which enabled her to mentor him through the course showing him how to manipulate his native language into English. This effort speaks to the quality of the educational experience students receive at Metropolitan State.

Koffi’s long-range plans include going on to law school after graduating from Metropolitan State this coming December. He is graduating with a Bachelor of Arts Degree with a focus in Pre-Law: Legal Institutions, Political Systems and Criminal Justice. He is thankful for First College providing him the ability to self-design his degree according to his own educational goals and aspirations.

Previously to landing in First College, he describes his educational experience as a rudderless ship taking a list of prescribed course work and jumping from program to program until he was correctly steered into First College. He will also graduate two years earlier than he originally anticipated because in First College he was able to take his numerous credits and self-design them into a cohesive interdisciplinary, well-balanced liberal arts degree which will help him attain his dream.

Koffi currently serves as work-study student in First College.

“The Perspectives course allowed me to review all of my experiences, examine the specifics of what I want my new knowledge to be, and take responsibility for and have authority over my own education,” she says. “The theory seminars allowed me to focus more in-depth on knowledge I desired to build on, the independent studies allowed me to be creative in obtaining new knowledge, and the internships provided me with hands-on experiences with the older population.”

Pat received the Outstanding Student Award and graduated with honors in 2008 from Metropolitan State University. She wants to pursue a master’s degree in the area of leadership service, health, and spirituality. “The Individualized Bachelor of Arts degree program was the right choice for me. I am deeply grateful to the entire First College faculty and staff who supported me through this accomplishment.”
Mary Kirk Authors Book on Digital Divide
Reprint from Catalyst, Sept. 29, 2008
Vol. 38 No. 6

The explosion in information technology has triggered a concurrent boom in access to digital information globally. At least that’s evident for most white males. But that’s not been so apparent for women and people of color. Why that gap occurs and what can be done about it are at the heart of a new book authored by Mary Kirk, Ph.D., Metropolitan State University First College professor in Individualized, Interdisciplinary and Lifelong Learning Department. Her book, published last September by GI Global, Hershey, Penn., is titled, "Gender and Information Technology: Moving Beyond Access to Co-Create Global Partnership."

Mary notes that the digital revolution is sparking a major cultural shift. But since women and people of color remain underrepresented as technology developers, users and beneficiaries, they have less say in the direction of that shift. “As I have learned more and watched the growth of information technology globally, I became increasingly concerned about the gap between the haves and have-nots worldwide,” said Mary, whose doctoral studies focused on women and computing. “Technology has the potential to close those gaps or contribute to widening them. I wrote this book with the hope of contributing to the former.”

Welcome New-incoming First College Students!

On behalf of First College, we would like to welcome new students who have chosen to embark on their Individualized Bachelor of Arts degree in First College.

As you start taking responsibility for and authority over your education, we wish you the best in designing a degree program which will meet your personal, educational and career goals.

First College faculty and staff are here to assist you through this academic journey. Please contact us if you have any questions or need assistance.
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First College Forms
New Student Organization

Can you identify with any of these questions:

• Are you a student that did not find your academic pursuits in traditional channels of learning?

• Are you returning to college after many years in the workforce?

• Are you yearning for a challenge and want to challenge the status quo?

• Do you want to be part of a community of people that respects your individuality and demands a credible viable learning program?

• Do you want to feel supported in your decisions and academic journey?

Then you are a student who should join the First College Student Organization.

This newly-formed organization understands that you are a student who did not find your academic pursuits in traditional channels of learning; and, you will be surrounded by other like-minded students who want to take authority over and responsibility for their own education.

The First College Student Organization meeting dates are the second Thursday of every month (meeting locations to be announced). If you are interested in joining the First College Student organization, please contact Danisa Farley, student organization president at farleyda@go.metrostate.edu.

First College Welcomes Sheila Kunkle

Sheila Kunkle is the newest faculty member in First College joining the ranks of resident faculty. Reflecting on her first year as a First College faculty member, she has this to say:

"After being here at Metropolitan State for a year, I can say that what has impressed me the most is the rich and varied experiences of our adult students and the commitment they have to finish their degree. What also impresses me is the dedication of the First College staff, advisors and faculty who all work hard to keep the original intent of the college’s mission alive.

In these uncertain economic times when budgets are tight, students are looking to higher education to give them not only job security but also opportunities. In First College, we offer them personal growth and development as well. There’s nowhere I’d rather be than in the company of students who are excited to learn about their world and have an impact on it, and in my First College classes, I’m happy to report that I’ve been rewarded with this experience.”

Sheila comes to Metropolitan State University from Vermont College where she was a professor of liberal studies in their adult degree program. In addition, Kunkle taught film analysis classes for the University of Vermont.

During Sheila’s dissertation research on the subject of Russian National Identity, she spent a year living in Moscow in 1993 where she directed a student exchange program for the Chicago Institute of European Studies.

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Jonathan Franke, Graduate Assistant

Jonathan Franke has been working as a graduate assistant in First College over the past year. Jonathan recently earned his M.S. in Technical Communication from Metropolitan State. In his role as a graduate assistant, Jonathan oversees First College’s Web site, creates brochures, forms, and serves as editorial and technical assistant for First College’s newsletter.

Jonathan has a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Minnesota. He has spent the better part of the last fifteen years in the IT world problem solving computer software, hardware, network, and Web application problems for customers of Fortune 500 companies.

"With my journalism education and my IT background, I thought Technical Communication was natural area for me to move into," Jonathan says.

"I was looking for an internship to help me gain some experience in my new field when the opportunity to take a graduate assistant post at First College came up," Jonathan continues. "It has worked out great. Dean Daniel Abebe and his First College team have given me the opportunity to apply my learning in areas I am interested in. I appreciate this opportunity and look forward to my remaining time at First College."

First College appreciates Jonathan’s contributions and also looks forward to our remaining time together.

Sheila’s educational background is in political science and she has 18 scholarly articles to her credit in various journals on interdisciplinary themes of psychoanalysis, culture and film analyses in publications such as American Imago, International Journal of Lacan Studies, Zizek Studies, Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture of Society, and Paradoxa. She has also co-edited a collection entitled Lacan and Contemporary Film Analysis, (Other Press, 2004).

Shelia’s brings this wealth of interdisciplinary background to First College where she will teach a variety of courses while advancing her scholarship. During her tenure in First College, she plans to advance experiential learning, work with the assessment of prior learning, and engage in the exploration of pedagogical perspectives and instructional methods of student-centered learning. Shelia’s creative, eclectic background, scholarly achievements, and her contributions to the growth and development of students makes her a valuable asset in First College.

Interested in an Individualized Degree?

Contact First College at

651-793-1783

or

fc.info@metrostate.edu
About First College

Since 1971, Metropolitan State University students have designed individualized degree programs that meet their educational and personal goals. Today, First College: Individualized and Interdisciplinary studies is the academic home for most students developing an interdisciplinary Bachelor of Arts Degrees where courses and other learning opportunities range across the university’s colleges and curriculum. Students may develop a focus based on broad general themes or topics of interest. Examples include: Finance and Economic History; Social Justice and Community Activism; Multimedia Systems and Design; Creativity; Women and Nature; Women and Sciences; Latino Culture and Community Education; and Sign Language Interpreting and the Performing Arts.

Mission Statement

First College promotes reflection on what it means to be an educated person and encourages students to be self-directed lifelong learners who can use diverse learning approaches and settings. The college fosters students’ success in their individualized learning goals and challenges students to academic integrity and excellence. We welcome students from a variety of backgrounds and help students build on their previous knowledge from life, work and education to create individualized programs that meet their specific learning goals.

First College offers quality individualized and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning and the assessment of learning. Guided by founder David Sweet’s principle that students should have primary responsibility for and authority over their educational planning and implementation, faculty and staff work collaboratively to create a supportive environment that helps students meet their learning goals.