

SHALENE MILLER



Honors Course:

- English Comp II
- Survey of American Lit to Civil War
- Survey of American Lit since Civil War
- Principles of Biology I
- World Civ from 1500

Graduated Fall 2021 with an Associates of Science - Liberal Arts and Sciences

Section 1 Community, Curiosity, Diversity

When I was first told I should join the honors program, I quickly dismissed the idea. I am not a traditional college student and there was no way I could commit so much time and effort to an honors program. I was already worried about keeping up with my classes. I am a full-time working mom and going to school was already a giant stress, I didn't want to take on more than I could handle. I told myself to not get my hopes and dreams too high and to just feel lucky if I completed an associate degree at all. The honors program is for the super school nerds who just love extra homework and live for projects, right? I didn't have time for that.

Thankfully people kept asking me to join and so I looked into what it would entail being an "honor student". When Sabrina Chesne reassured me that it was not a huge commitment to join and that often the honors classes are more fun because they are group-focused and not more homework-driven, I was sold. I was there to learn and I wanted to be in classes with other students who were going to take the assignment seriously as well. I wanted to be in an environment that expected my best and where I could be proud of the work I had done.

A perfect example was in my English Comp II class. We were given a group assignment to create a pamphlet on one of the works we were reading. We then were given a section of the pamphlet to write about a specific area of the author or writings. We combined all the elements and presented the pamphlet and gave a group presentation to another comp class and instructors. They were able to ask



questions and it gave us the opportunity to demonstrate what we had learned and engaged with them as we talked about the book. The group project was a great experience of working with others to present a professional presentation to a group of our peers and instructors. It was great to see other students take ownership of their part of the project and give just as much effort and dedication I had given.

Another project that I was privileged to be a part of during an honors course was learning how to extract DNA in Principles of Biology. The project was only offered to certain students and our honors class was among some of the lucky students. We extracted DNA from plants that we had gathered. The process was very intricate and extensive. There were many steps and if at any point a step was skipped or the instructions were not followed perfectly it would have ended the project as the results wouldn't have been accurate. I was very curious about the process because that was not anything I had ever done before in a science lab. I was fascinated with learning how to use the equipment. We were even trained how to use a micropipette to assist with adding the proper amount of liquid to the plant solution.

The project lasted over the next few weeks, every class period doing a few more steps leading to the completion of the experiment. When the day finally came and we were able to add liquid to the jelly pad that highlighted the DNA, we were amazed to see the results. We logged the data, and we were shocked that all of the visible data came from our ability to follow accurate directions and produce tangible scientific DNA. Being able to participate in that project is not something I will ever forget.

Another great aspect of the honors program is the service-learning projects that are put together for students to participate in. I was able to participate in one of the “cleaning up the

street” service projects and I was humbled to be able to gather trash along J street and see a visible difference that I could make in my community. I think it is easy to assume that one person could not make that much of a difference but as I walked along gathering bits of trash, I could stop and see the effects I was making. Then when we gathered to collect everyone's bags, it was amazing to see how much the group had collected. I loved being able to see not just the difference one person can make but even the greater difference we made by working together.



Being able to take time away and serve that day gave me a great perspective. It reminded me to stop and give back to the community I live in. I tend to get caught up in my daily routine, however, being able to step away and volunteer was refreshing. Serving in that way showed me that it doesn't have to be monumental, or lengthy. I was there for about an hour, but the impact of that hour lasted much longer.

Section 2 Preparation

I have learned many great things by being a part of the honors program. I have had great opportunities to work in groups with amazing students. I have learned many things from the

discussion I have had with them about the subjects we studied. I enjoyed listening to their perspective and seeing something from another person's point of view. Having the skill to allow others to share their ideas, not be threatened by opinions different than mine, and to learn to bring both ideas together is something I can take with me as I continue to grow as an adult.

The students I have worked with encouraged me to work my hardest and not limit myself because of my age or experiences. I have been challenged to think outside my box, to dig deeper, and not just take an event or subject at face value. Learning to follow the due diligence while learning about history and gathering both sides of the story has opened my eyes to events that have happened in our history I was never taught as a child. The ability to research, to explore all options is another handy tool I can use in my life. My Survey of American Literature class was especially one of those classes for me. We read slave narratives I never knew existed. We learned about the hanging of thirty-eight Native Americans ordered by Abraham Lincoln during the same week he signed the emancipation proclamation. I read the poetry of brilliant women who would have never been published if someone didn't take a chance on them, and many who never saw their work published in their lifetime. Reading the women's stories was uplifting to see they didn't settle for what others said they could or couldn't do. They made their own way and they didn't let society's stigmas stand in their way. Their life and experiences influenced me and showed me that I can stand out, make a change, and challenge the social stigma around me.

Section 3 Experience

I have had many impacting experiences while being a part of the honors program at NWACC. One experience that I think has had the longest-lasting effect on me was a project I did during my World Civ class. We were assigned to partner up with someone from the World Cuisine class that was meeting at Brightwater. The student from World Cuisine was supposed to pick a dumpling from somewhere in the world, get the recipe and make the dumpling. Those of us in the World Civ class had to write a report and a recipe card on the history of the dumpling that our partner chose. All of this was then presented for friends and family to come and sample the food and learn about the history.

My partner chose ricotta and spinach gnocchi with a pesto sauce originating in Italy as our dish and I researched the history of the gnocchi and why it was established. Doing the research for that project opened my eyes to how food changes cultures, how it is developed due to lack of resources or shifts in society. Learning about history and then being able to taste something that was invented hundreds of years before was absolutely transforming. So much so that I make gnocchi at home for my family. It was one of the most fun experiences I can think of while I have attended NWACC.

Section 4 Future Students

Dear future student, if I could at all impart any wisdom to you on this journey it would be these three things: Don't be afraid to try, ask any and all questions, and engage in conversation about the material. These are the things I have found that have guided my journey to a wonderful well-rounded experience.

When I say don't be afraid to try, I mean it. Don't take the easy road with your studies. Try your hardest, put in the extra effort, be proud of the work you turn in. I guarantee if you give your best, you will see that result. You will be able to look at the work you turned in and know you gave it your all. It is easy to do the bare minimum but avoid that urge. There is no pride in settling or skimming by. But the feeling you will get when you see the grade or get the feedback from your instructor on a job well done is so rewarding, don't miss out on that opportunity.

When I say ask any and all questions, I mean it. I have found in my lifetime people miss out because they didn't ask, or they wanted to but thought they would look stupid. I say to that, who cares. So what if you look stupid. Often though I have found that when I ask a question someone else had the same question, but they were too afraid to ask. Don't be that person. Be brave, be willing to stand out in the crowd. When I took the time to ask the "silly" questions, that was usually some of the best extra content to help with a project or a better answer to help with material I was understanding. Ask the questions, you can do it.

And when I say engage in conversation about the material, I mean it. I have learned so much from my fellow students about a book we were reading or a project we had to work on because they were willing to talk about how they understood it. I was fascinated to see something from a different perspective and that would have never happened if they didn't engage in the conversation with me about what we were learning. It is tempting to attend class, sit in the back and just get the participation grade, but what you have to say about the work is so beneficial to your fellow classmates. Your advice or opinion could be truly impacting, and it could help a struggling student understand the information all because you engaged in the conversation.



I will end with this; you will get out of this journey what you put into it. If you do half-hearted work, you most likely will feel half-hearted joy from it and it will show. But if you show up every day ready, prepared, and willing to do the work, you will see that pay off, you will feel that accomplishment and it will feel worth the sacrifices you make to get an education. Good luck to you as you strive to achieve a goal not everyone is able to achieve. God Bless