From COD to Feeding the World

Engineering alumna Josie Suter uses her robotics skills to advance food sustainability
Helping students be successful requires a creative and comprehensive approach that includes experiences inside and outside the classroom.

What may surprise people is the scope of opportunities at College of DuPage. In some cases, these opportunities are not available to students at four-year institutions until they are juniors and seniors.

In this issue of Engage, explore just a few of the many ways that students can immerse themselves in both academics and campus life. These include hands-on labs, field experiences, leadership programs and even academic research, all of which provide valuable skills that students will use in their careers and lives.

The College also helps students before they enroll and after they leave the institution. Programs like dual credit give high school students a jump-start on their college education, while transfer agreements create a smooth path toward a bachelor’s degree and other educational credentials.

This is all in addition to our passionate faculty and the quality of their instruction, which have long been a trademark of the College. As you read this issue, discover the many ways that COD prepares students for success.

### Budget-in-Brief
The annual budget process at College of DuPage is a comprehensive undertaking that includes meetings with every department on campus to identify and prioritize needs. This allows us to determine how to allocate the funding we receive from local taxes, tuition and the state in order to benefit our students and the community.

While the College’s budget is hundreds of pages in length, the Budget-in-Brief presents an easy-to-understand snapshot of our financial plan. I invite you to review this document and other financial reports at cod.edu/financials.

—Dr. Brian W. Caputo is president of College of DuPage.
For the Community...

Dual Credit Accelerates Pathways to College

Juan Gallegos enrolled in two no cost, dual credit courses—culinary and accounting—offered by College of DuPage at his high school.

Photo by Press Photography Network/special to College of DuPage.

“Enterling college with six credits under my belt decreased the time it took me to complete my college degree,” he said. “I also saved nearly $1,000 in course and textbook fees because dual credit classes are offered at no cost.”

While high school students have many options to get a head start on their college career, COD’s Dual Credit program allows them to enroll in select courses at their high schools and earn both high school and college credit. Classes are taught at partner high schools during the regular school day by high school teachers who also are approved as dual credit instructors by COD.

Dual credit courses that are part of the Illinois Articulation Initiative are transferable for college credit to more than 100 participating colleges and universities in Illinois.

COD Manager of Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment Lisa Haegele said the program, which serves more than two dozen high schools in DuPage County, offers benefits in addition to saving money on tuition and earning a degree more quickly.

“These higher-level classes help students dig deeper into subjects that interest them, including general education and career and technical educational classes,” she said. “It also can ease the transition between high school and college and develop the academic skills of problem solving and time management needed in college.”

To further expand opportunities for students like Gallegos, COD signed a memorandum of understanding with Glenbard District 87 administrators that provides students at all four Glenbard high schools access to dual credit opportunities. Haegele said the agreement strengthens the ties between COD, high schools and educational leaders in the community while providing students with crucial experience as they enter college.

“This memorandum—the first of its kind between the College and a local high school district—demonstrates our commitment to student success and service to the larger COD community,” she said. “The agreement not only enhances and strengthens the College’s Dual Credit program, it also expands dual credit opportunities for students at Glenbard high schools.”

To learn more about the Dual Credit program, visit cod.edu/dual-credit or call (630) 942-2880.
Heading out into an empty farm field with a robot in tow, College of DuPage alumna Josie Suter looks like the star of a futuristic movie about colonizing another planet.

But this is no movie. In reality, Suter is dedicated to using the latest technology in order to improve life on this planet.

Because of her background in engineering and robotics, expertise she began developing at COD, Suter landed a prime job with EarthSense, an agricultural robotics startup. The new role fits her sense of responsibility for the future by enabling her to design robots that are helping to advance food sustainability.

“I am thrilled to take on this role,” she said. “I’ve always been passionate about sustainability. We are not treating the earth well enough to support life here forever, and sustainability in agriculture needs further exploration and development. This job enables me to work on projects that could help our food supply and make a positive impact on the world.”

Graduating last spring with a Bachelor of Science in Engineering from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Suter is both dedicated to her work and exceedingly humble about her exceptional achievements. Noting the excellence Suter showed while a student at COD, Professor of Physics Tom Carter said he expects great things as she moves forward in her career.

“I’m not surprised about Josie’s success, considering the technical and leadership skills she demonstrated here at COD as the president of the Engineering and Technology Club.”

—Tom Carter, Professor of Physics

Suter’s cheerful personality and enthusiasm mask her laser-focused dedication and a robust work ethic. She excelled as a student at COD by maintaining a near perfect grade-point average and enjoying the opportunities provided for leadership and experience beyond the classroom. She served as president of the ETC, assisted with the Engineering Olympics for high school students, and participated in projects such as the Midwest Robotics Design Competition held at UIUC and the Robotic Mining Competition at NASA.

Through the ETC, she organized monthly speakers and developed an eight-week robotics pilot course under the Physics program so members could gain additional experience in the machine shop while building robots for the spring competitions. Under her leadership, the ETC instituted a new initiative that presented a series of hands-on events to homeschooled students.

“People don’t always associate engineering with creativity, but it is a creative field, whether you are problem-solving by thinking in new ways or combining technical skills with your imagination in a robotics lab,” she said.

Engineering seemed like an obvious career for Suter. Her interest in creativity and making things was inspired by her father, who shared stories with her about his work as a mechanical engineer. However, never having taken an engineering class, she was still unsure of whether this was the right choice.

COD’s Engineering Pathways program, which guarantees admission to qualifying students interested in transferring to UIUC’s Grainger College of Engineering, provided the opportunity she was hoping to find.

“COD offered me the ability to explore options at a much lower cost than if I had started at a four-year institution,” she said. “As it turned out, engineering was a great choice and I love the path I’ve chosen.”

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(continued on page 5)
Clockwise from top: Josie Suter (left) and her COD teammates work on their robot for the Robotic Mining Competition at NASA; she speaks with local high school students during a Women in STEM event at COD; Suter celebrates her graduation from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with her father, an Illini engineering alumnus.
The rigor of the courses at COD also prepared me to succeed academically once I transferred. That solid foundation made the transition to UIUC easier and less overwhelming."

students. She served as treasurer for COD’s chapter of the Society of Women Engineers and taught basic engineering principles to students ranging from kindergarten to ninth grade through COD’s Continuing Education Department.

She also learned about leadership through COD’s then president, Dr. Ann Rondeau.

“Dr. Rondeau was such a great role model. She was very generous with her time and is definitely a leader I look up to. She’s down to earth and very competent. While she had the ability to command a room with ease, she was consciously unintimidating.”

Taking advantage of COD’s relationships with regional STEM institutions, Suter completed an internship at Argonne National Laboratory and impressed her employer so much, they invited her to stay through a co-op program.

Earning her Associate in Engineering Science degree, Suter was named one of the College’s outstanding graduate finalists in 2018 and received the Benjamin P. Hyink Student Leader of the Year Award from the College’s Office of Student Life.

She said the combination of academics and her many leadership activities at COD has been crucial to her continued success.

“My experiences taught me how to lead and be a good member of a well-functioning team,” she said. “I learned about working with people, which was especially helpful at UIUC because we had a lot of team projects to complete.

“The rigor of the courses at COD also prepared me to succeed academically once I transferred. That solid foundation made the transition to UIUC easier and less overwhelming. COD’s faculty gave students the equipment and space to explore our interests. I learned about manufacturing through guided experience and, as a result, I’m not afraid to pick up a tool. Working on projects in COD’s machine shop and gaining hands-on experience helped me better understand how things work.”

As a student at UIUC, Suter continued to excel and demonstrate her dedication to making an impact on her community. She and two other COD alumni designed assistive devices for people with disabilities, for which she won the MechSe Student Outreach Award.

Suter is thrilled that her internship at EarthSense has turned into a permanent position, and she looks forward to what the future will bring. She credits COD and her experiences in the ETC with inspiring her resulting career path in robotics.

“I never had an interest in robotics before COD and I probably wouldn’t have done robotics if I had started as a freshman somewhere else,” she said. “Being part of the ETC and working on the robotics competition projects really broadened my horizons and opened doors to so many opportunities. Being involved in manufacturing the robots got me into product design, which has become a passion of mine. I wouldn’t have explored those opportunities anywhere else.”
Photo of Bridget Kingston
by Press Photography
Network/special to
College of DuPage
While attending College of DuPage, Bridget Kingston knew she wanted to study English and earn an Associate in Arts degree. But she was unsure of her next steps after graduating.

Then Kingston learned about COD’s transfer agreement with Columbia College that includes nearly 20 degree programs. This meant she could earn 75 transferable credits at COD to save money on tuition costs and receive guaranteed admission into Columbia to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. In addition, she was eligible for several transfer scholarships.

“I was feeling lost and overwhelmed, but at the exact right moment, I was handed a roadmap,” Kingston said. “COD gave me a path to follow to get me closer to landing my dream job as an English teacher, and I received so much support and guidance from my COD counselors and professors. Each bump I’ve experienced along the way has led me to Columbia’s front steps, and I owe every last ounce of that to COD.”

Kingston took advantage of a traditional 2+2 transfer agreement, which is one of many ways that COD helps students smoothly transfer as they continue to pursue their academic goals. With a wide variety of partnerships, COD has guaranteed admission agreements and transfer or articulation agreements with almost 50 institutions of higher learning for nearly 200 degree programs. In all, 22 COD associate degree programs feed into 14 bachelor’s degrees.

COD Articulation and Partnerships Coordinator Courtney Hatcher said that many of these agreements go beyond just accepting credits toward a degree.

“In some cases, completion of an associate degree at College of DuPage entitles a student to reduced tuition rates or special scholarships, guaranteed entry to exclusive programs, or a greater number of credits accepted for transfer into a specific bachelor’s degree program,” she said. “We never want students to lose momentum, so we are always looking for ways to add value to our students through agreements we set.”

With a commitment to diversity and inclusion, COD recently signed articulation agreements with two prominent historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs): Florida A&M University and Kentucky State University (KSU). Students who complete a transfer-level associate degree can begin at either university with junior standing.

COD Interim Associate Vice President of Academic Partnerships and Learning Resources Tamara McClain said that these are the first partnerships of their kind for COD.

“By joining institutional forces with two prominent HBCUs, we have the opportunity to encourage successful educational and economic outcomes for all student populations,” she said.

In addition to new partnerships with Florida A&M and KSU, COD recently signed a 3+1 Technology and Engineering Education bachelor’s degree agreement with Valley City State University (VCSU) in North Dakota, through which students can earn a teaching degree and a STEM certification. This is the latest 3+1 agreement at COD, in which students complete three years of classes at COD and one year through the partner institution on COD’s campus at a reduced cost.

COD Associate Professor of Teacher Preparation April Zawlocki said the agreement with VCSU, through which students complete their final year virtually, provides a new and revolutionary way to earn a teaching degree.

“This agreement is groundbreaking because it provides access to education for future technology and engineering educators who would not be able to pursue a teaching degree due to finances or location,” she said.

Always looking to expand partnerships to help students complete their bachelor’s degrees, Hatcher said COD is currently finalizing a transfer partnership for nearly a dozen degree programs with a nearby four-year institution.

“Our goal is to have multiple transfer agreements with four-year institutions for every degree program offered at COD,” she said. “We want to give all of our students the best options possible and create a seamless transfer process so they can reach their educational goals.”
College of DuPage’s Architecture program has earned a glowing reputation and industry respect for many reasons, including its high-quality lab experiences and seamless transfer process.

With a core curriculum designed to transfer, the program offers three associate in applied science degrees—Pre-Architecture Technology, Architectural Technology-CADD and Construction Management—as well as four certificate options.

“Our two-year Pre-Architecture transfer degree provides students an equivalent studio-based education that is comparable to our university counterparts,” said Professor Mark Pearson, who has taught full-time at COD since 2004 after working for several Chicago architectural companies, including Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

Like Pearson, Professor Jane Ostergaard has been a fixture in COD classrooms for many years after working as an architect in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Chicago, part of that time as the principal of her own firm. She noted the program’s studio spaces complement the academic and transfer opportunities.

“The spaces, which are large, bright and relatively new, are unique among community colleges,” Ostergaard said.

One exciting use for the studio space is the Architectural Design Build summer studio course, a hands-on opportunity for students to explore space and the built environment through the design and construction of a creative structure.

“Students think through making,” said Pearson, who teaches the course. “They solve problems through drawing and in the shop. They consider the poetic and the tectonic simultaneously and have deep conversations about real issues. The end result is an unparalleled learning experience for our future architects.”

Each project is designed, built and assembled on campus by students and supported by grants from the College of DuPage Foundation. They include the Umbra 82 Project, which is next to the McAninch Arts Center, and the Prairie Pavilion, which is located by the Russell R. Kirt Prairie. In 2017, Umbra 82 received a Distinguished Project Merit Award from the American Institute of Architects Northeast Illinois Chapter.

Pearson said the next Design Build studio course is planned for summer 2022.

“We will partner with the COD Fuel Pantry and Garden to design and build a tool storage shed,” he said. “Students and faculty from the Food Security Initiative...
Learning in an Inclusive Community

Jairo Ortega credits College of DuPage’s faculty and the hands-on experience he gained for his success as a registered and licensed architect.

“The COD faculty and staff do a phenomenal job of creating an inclusive community where thoughts and ideas are freely expressed and encouraged between students and faculty,” said Ortega, a project manager for Walsh Construction. “It was clear that my COD transfer peers and myself had an advantage over our four-year college colleagues. We had more lab exposure to digital design and presentation.”

Ortega earned his Pre-Architecture Technology degree before transferring to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and then to the Illinois Institute of Technology. While at COD, he participated in daylong charrettes—collaborative sessions where participants draft solutions to relevant design problems—hosted by the COD Architecture Club.

His first charrette explored the idea of adding a student center to campus before the Student Services Center (SSC) was built.

“I remember suggesting a coffee shop and lounge that was central to the campus and open for everyone to converge,” he said. “The judges must have liked our idea, and our team ultimately won the charrette competition.”

Later that year, professors nominated Ortega to participate in an advisory panel to provide student insight and perspective into the design of the SSC. He points to his involvement in the charrettes and being a member of the COD Architecture Advisory Committee as great learning experiences and his greatest contribution to COD to date.

“When I finally had a chance to tour the completed student center, I was really impressed by the end result,” he said. “It is a real honor to have participated in its design.”

will serve as the client. As with the previous project, this collaboration will include the Village of Glen Ellyn, the COD Facilities Department and COD’s natural restoration and preservation areas.”

In addition, Ostergaard said the Architecture program partners with the College’s Field and Experiential Learning/Study Abroad/Global Education program to give students other distinctive learning alternatives.

“In the past, we have taken trips to Europe focusing on France and Italy, and we are currently planning a trip to the Netherlands next summer to study sustainability initiatives,” she said. “We are proud to offer COD students hands-on experiences that their counterparts at transfer schools often don’t receive until their upper-class years.”

Pictured above left to right: Students attend a critique in Professor Mark Pearson’s Architectural Design II class; the College’s Technical Education Center is home to the Architecture program; in 2018, students work on the Prairie Pavilion, a project they also designed that is located by the Russell R. Kirt Prairie; COD alumnus Jairo Ortega stands in front of the Joliet Transportation Center, on which he served as an architect for its renovation.

“It was clear that my COD transfer peers and myself had an advantage over our four-year college colleagues. We had more lab exposure to digital design and presentation.”

—Jairo Ortega, COD alumnus and a registered and licensed architect
Thomas Jor-El Hardy had an idea—a really good idea—that sprang from seemingly unrelated sources. Among his inspirations was “Pipe Dreams,” a short film shot on an iPhone in Kenya by a College of DuPage student. Another was a video his young daughter watched about a typical elementary school day in Japan. And there were the entertaining Reddit livestreams he stumbled upon online that showed people cooking dishes, playing games, watching TV—living their lives, wherever they may be.

It didn’t take long for the COD biology professor with a Ph.D. from Howard University to realize he might be on to something big, which led to the creation of the Global Insights Video Exchange.

“My thought was we could do this in education and make an overall experience where students connect their experiences to concepts in their classes,” explained Hardy, a Connecticut native and son of educators who joined the COD Biology faculty in 2015. “We could make it valuable to the curriculum to enhance their learning beyond the borders of DuPage County and Illinois.”

Drawing from his own involvement with COD’s Africa and Africa Diaspora Committee, which provides opportunities to engage the campus community in issues regarding various African countries, and the Community College Initiative program, which brings international students to campus, Hardy collaborated with colleagues from both areas and across disciplines to launch the pilot project in spring 2021. International students from five African countries—Egypt, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa—were on board and ready to participate virtually from their homelands.

Leading by example, Hardy planned to connect his Environmental Biology students with a former COD international student from Ghana to share her insights and expertise in water management. Unfortunately, she became ill and was unable to participate.

“The bigger goal, the bigger picture for this project was never for it to just be about my course. It was always to involve multiple courses, because this is a diverse committee initiative,” said Hardy, who taught four courses in three modalities, including virtual, internet and Learning Communities, during the fall semester. “Actually, it turned out much better because we ended up working with Dr. Lisa Higgins, and she put it to great use.”

Hardy called Higgins, professor of English and the director of COD’s Honors Program, the “star” of the first Global Insights Video Exchange. She included multiple international students to work with her Honors English class doing research about African countries.

“In my mind, I was even having trouble with how to do that, how to structure a global exchange with English as a topic, but she came up with a really great way of doing that,” he said.

Hardy hopes the Global Insights Video Exchange will grow with the full return to campus and as more faculty get involved. For Hardy, the possibilities are exciting, whether the program focus is business, cosmetology, sociology, justice studies and, yes, biology.

“We could have our prairie expert, Remic Ensweiler, give a tour of prairie plants and someone elsewhere could talk about the savannah,” said Hardy, adding that he has reached out to colleagues at other institutions to partner with COD to expand the program. “I believe that this project has great potential. I think there are some really wonderful things that could come out of it.”

The biggest benefactors are the students, according to Hardy.

“At a community college, one of our jobs, I believe, is to expose students to a variety of ideas so that they can better figure out their own paths.”

—Thomas Jor-El Hardy, Associate Professor of Biology

“A Classroom Without Borders

Biology professor collaborates with colleagues to expand virtual global learning

At a community college, one of our jobs, I believe, is to expose students to a variety of ideas so that they can better figure out their own paths.”

—Thomas Jor-El Hardy, Associate Professor of Biology
COD Associate Professor of Biology Thomas Jor-El Hardy collaborated with colleagues to launch the Global Insights Video Exchange in spring 2021. (Photo by Art Carrillo/special to College of DuPage)
10 Ways to Boost Your Success
COD provides opportunities outside the classroom to help students excel inside the classroom

Consider chasing a tornado through the great plains to learn more about meteorology. Or participate in a program that builds future leaders. Or serve an internship at a national lab.

Experiences outside of the classroom make an enormous impact on student learning, said College of DuPage Provost Mark Curtis-Chávez.

“One misconception about a community college is that students show up, attend class and go home,” he said. “We want our students to get involved and offer a diverse variety of opportunities that extend beyond the classroom walls. They can directly relate to a program or complement the academic experience.”

Student-Athletes Pursue Their ‘A’ Game
For Jaylyn Grant, lessons learned on the basketball court easily translated to her life as a pre-med student.

Tenacity, discipline and balance are her key takeaways from playing and serving as captain of the Chaparral’s women’s basketball team.

“Playing sports at College of DuPage allowed me to establish lasting relationships with advisers, coaches and other athletes. It also allowed me to have a support group that held me accountable for maintaining good grades.”

Ryan Kaiser, director of Athletics and Recreational Programs, said setting goals and attaining success are key components of a college athlete’s education. Adding activities outside of classroom discussions and homework means there are more areas of life that must be balanced.

“Participation in Chaparral athletics develops the student-athlete from a holistic approach while focusing on areas of importance, which include academic, athletic, personal, physical and mental success,” he said. “We have the support staff and willingness to meet the student-athlete where they are and help guide them to ensure success is attainable.”

For Grant, her experience also prepared her for success in a summer research program. Leaving home for the first time, Grant joined college and university graduate students in a 10-week internship at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus in Denver, where, as part of the Graduate Experience for Multicultural Students, she took part in research opportunities in the areas of heart, lung and blood diseases.

“We were all from different backgrounds, we were all from underrepresented cultures, but we had a common goal—to build a skill set and accept challenges,” she said.

Now at Eastern Illinois University, Grant knows her time both in the classroom and on the court at COD prepared her well.

“Once I immersed myself, it became very clear to me that I made a great choice in attending COD.”
Academic Teams Turn Learning Into Action

After taking engineering and coding classes at College of DuPage, Gabe Wozniak was eager to get hands-on experience and dive deeper into the field.

He got involved with the College’s Robotics Team, an offshoot of the Engineering and Technology Club, and quickly worked his way up to team captain.

“I joined the Robotics Team knowing very little, but in a short amount of time I felt like an expert,” he said. “What really captivated me about robotics was the physical nature of the work. With robotics, no longer is code just text on a screen but a real and physical force. It plays a part in a tangible system that moves and lives and does things that we can see with our own eyes. That to me is surreal.”

For the past several years, the College’s Robotics Team was one of only a handful of community colleges invited to participate in the NASA Robotic Mining Competition held at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

“We are a small but mighty force,” Wozniak said.

All academic divisions at COD have opportunities for students eager to gain practical experience outside the classroom. Programs with students who regularly compete on local, regional or national levels include Architecture, Horticulture, Interior Design, Math, Radiology and Speech Communication.

COD Assistant Provost for Instruction Lisa Stock said academic teams are student-led with guidance and mentorship from COD faculty members who are experts in their fields.

“Academic teams are designed to empower students to take ownership of their own and their peers’ learning through a student accountability system and structures for peer support,” she said. “There are a wide range of opportunities for students to extend their knowledge outside the classroom.”

A Place to Connect, Grow and Have Fun

From the beginning of her educational journey at College of DuPage, Abby Loberg (above, left) has been involved with Best Buddies, a club that is dedicated to helping students with intellectual disabilities make friends and get involved in the COD community.

“I have a learning disability myself, so I know what it is like to struggle, and I want to help these students in any way possible,” she said. “This club has taught me so much about how to work with students with disabilities and how to be an effective mentor and leader.”

From Best Buddies to the Black Student Alliance to Hands Up, American Sign Language Club, more than 50 clubs and organizations provide students a connection to academic programs, topical interests, social interaction and a connection with other students.

COD Student Club Specialist Jelymar Mejia said that participating in a student club or organization outside of the classroom enhances students’ personal growth and sense of belonging on campus.

“Extracurricular involvement gives students opportunities to improve their leadership and interpersonal skills while also increasing their self-confidence,” she said. “Students are able to explore various topics from academics to cultural and faith groups to social interests, thereby leading to a better understanding of their own abilities, talents and career goals.”
Off the Beaten Prairie Path

One of the largest biology labs in the state is just beyond the doors of the Health and Science Center.

The College of DuPage natural areas are an evolving ecosystem and offer a rare learning experience. From wetlands and wildflowers to honey and healing herbs, the more than 40 acres of natural areas literally buzz with life, offering a pre-suburban landscape restored for generations to enjoy.

Students can often be found in this natural environment, whether during a class or as volunteers sustaining the areas by collecting valuable native seeds, removing invasive small trees and propagating native perennials.

“Prairie volunteers and student aides get valuable experience in natural areas management and restoration,” said Remic Ensweiler, COD outdoor lab and prairie manager. “Not only do students gain precious experience, but many leave with certifications that can help them in the job market. Others go on to earn related degrees.”

It’s All About the Chase

Jacob Fischer knew he had found a career while chasing down a tornado on the wide-open plains of Kansas.

“It was everything I had hoped for, filled with dramatic, photogenic storms almost every day and at least five tornadoes,” said Fischer, then a College of DuPage sophomore. “We went from Kansas to New Mexico, almost to the Rio Grande and back up to eastern Colorado.”

Whether chasing down a storm, marveling at the Aurora Borealis in Alaska or immersing yourself in a new language and culture, COD’s Field and Experiential Learning, Study Abroad and Global Education program creates opportunities that are hard to duplicate in a classroom or textbook, said Sue Kerby, coordinator of Study Abroad.

“These skills are highly valued professionally but hard to describe in a job interview,” she said. “Studying at the University of Tennessee Forensic Anthropology Research Center with our Justice Studies faculty or traveling the Great Plains storm chasing with our Meteorology faculty are experiences that enhance students’ professional skills while building their portfolio of achievements.”

Fischer, a former engineering major, was hooked on meteorology after taking his first class at COD and then completed almost every meteorology class offered. Now at Northern Illinois University, he plans on a job in forecasting, either for the National Weather Service or the private sector.

It was his fieldwork that sealed his career choice. “I’m so thankful that COD offered the opportunity to actually chase storms, and the most lasting lesson I learned was just how different it is from what’s shown in the media. Movies and TV portray chasing as near-constant action, which could not be further from the truth. In reality, the vast majority of our time is spent forecasting. The actual chasing usually makes up a very small, albeit rewarding, portion of the average chase day.”
Internships Offer Career Skills

While providing volunteer tech support for a nonprofit, Lashawna Harris met women who could code and knew she wanted to be part of that.

“I didn’t know about coding when I was young. I just knew someday I wanted to work in a lab,” she explained.

Harris (above) decided to return to school and chose College of DuPage, earning high honors along the way and a STEM Student Success Scholarship, funded through the National Science Foundation. She also looked outside the classroom and took advantage of an internship at Argonne National Laboratory, which added to her career-readiness.

“The best thing about the internship was doing the hands-on work,” she said. “It was great to take the knowledge I had gained at COD and apply it in a professional setting, which prepared me for my future education and career.”

Krystina LaSorsa, interim manager of COD’s Career Services Center, works with local employers to create partnerships for internship opportunities that are available to every COD student.

“Internships provide students the ability to picture themselves entering the workforce in that industry, allowing them to build their professional network and gain relevant work experience,” she said.

Work experience and female role models are the reasons Harris is close to achieving her baccalaureate degree in computer science through COD’s 3+1 program with Lewis University. But this is just the start of something much bigger.

The internship reminded Harris of her own early experiences looking for role models in computer careers. In her spare time, she is developing a coding curriculum for disadvantaged students ages 8 to 15.

“I designed a Saturday lunch-and-learn coding class for disadvantaged girls. A lot of the students depend on school lunches, so teaching small group classes on Saturdays and providing lunch could be a first step toward a career and out of poverty.”

Building Tomorrow’s Leaders

Sean Figuray was uncertain of what to study when he began taking classes at College of DuPage. But he knew that gaining leadership skills would be applicable in any career field.

He learned about the College’s Living Leadership Program and is now taking advantage of all that the program has to offer.

“Getting to practice and learn amongst talented and like-minded peers is perfect for fostering my own personal growth,” he said.

Offered through the Office of Student Life, the Living Leadership Program is designed for students interested in building leadership skills and confidence while actively participating in COD’s vibrant campus community. The free non-transcript certificate program focuses on developing students into active and positive change-makers, said Coordinator of Student Life Stephanie Quirk.

“The program taught me that being a leader isn’t about any label or title, it’s about how you live your life every single day.”

—Sean Figuray, COD student and Living Leadership Program member

“Through the program, students learn about servant leadership, ethical leadership, articulating a vision and developing a personal leadership philosophy through practical skill development workshops, classes, volunteer opportunities and involvement in campus life,” she said.

Figuray is already seeing the program’s positive impact on all aspects of his life.

“The program taught me that being a leader isn’t about any label or title, it’s about how you live your life every single day. Once I grew into this outlook, I became a better student, a productive community member and an efficient communicator. This will be invaluable as I move forward in my educational journey.”
Student Publications Showcase Talents

While working as editor-in-chief of COD’s literary journal *Prairie Light Review*, Jolie Vega realized her passion for journalism.

“Gaining this amount of experience before I’ve even gone to graduate school is huge,” she said. “The focus on student leadership and participation really allows everyone to utilize their talents and explore their interests. Employers value experience just as much as a degree, so getting the opportunity to build my resume with tangible writing, editing and managing experience is an enormous advantage. The practical experience really allows you to get a feel for the field and learn the ropes in a welcoming environment.”

“The focus on student leadership and participation really allows everyone to utilize their talents and explore their interests.”

—Jolie Vega, editor-in-chief of COD’s literary journal *Prairie Light Review*

In addition to *Prairie Light Review*, students have multiple opportunities to get their work published at COD, including the student-run newspaper *The Courier*; *ESSAI*: The College of DuPage Anthology of Academic Writing Across the Curriculum; *COD in Lingua*, a foreign language journal; and a journal dedicated to German-speaking students.

Liberal Arts Dean Robyn Schiffman said that working on a publication at COD allows students to actively participate as industry professionals.

“The opportunities for publication within Liberal Arts pre-professionalizes students because they can get involved in all aspects of production, from creative decision making, editing and copy editing to layout and design,” she said. “Students learn to work in a team environment toward a product they can be proud of while actively developing critical thinking skills.”

Academic Research Provides Career-Defining Results

While on the path to finding herself, Sharon Grimm (above) found her passion and career while working on an academic research project in her *Intro to Anthropology* course with College of DuPage Anthropology Professor Derrick Willis, Ph.D.

“The opportunity I had to help create a research proposal, collect data, conduct interviews, analyze results and present findings at an international academic conference is almost unbelievable. Most students don’t get the chance to be part of research projects at this level until they are working on their master’s degrees.”

Assistant Provost of Instruction Lisa Stock works with deans and faculty to provide an array of research opportunities to students.

“We have rich offerings that allow students to take part in academic research,” she said. “There are national labs in our district with which we have close relationships. Faculty members also create research opportunities that allow students to co-author articles with them. Many of our faculty members have their own research with amazing connections and bring that to the classroom.”

The Honors Program plays a key role in providing students an opportunity to conduct research and present at both the state and national levels. While not all students can attend international conferences, the COD Library created the annual Student Research Symposium, where students who have completed research projects in any program can present their work.

Grimm’s opportunity led to a presentation at the Society for Applied Anthropology in Vancouver. Even faced with the fear of public speaking, she found that being engaged and passionate about her research made it easy to present.

Now working as a research assistant for one of the top hospitals in the country, Grimm reflects on her time at COD and its impact on her success.

“The opportunities afforded at COD are unlike any school that I have attended, before or since. I would not be where I am today without my mentor, team and community at COD.”
Engage | cod.edu/engage

From 2018: Student Zlatka Sekiya displays both her photographs and newspaper dresses at the Wings Student Art Gallery. (Press Photography Network/Special to College of DuPage)

But Wait—There’s More, Artistically Speaking!

While a previous Engage focused on the arts, it would be remiss not to mention the comprehensive scope of arts offerings at College of DuPage, which are second to none, according to Provost Mark Curtis-Chávez.

“In addition to College Theater, dance and the many student musical ensembles, we have two art galleries devoted to student work—Wings Student Art Gallery and Techcetera Design Gallery, the latter a unique space for technology, media and design students to display their work," he said.

From 2018: Student Zlatka Sekiya displays both her photographs and newspaper dresses at the Wings Student Art Gallery. (Press Photography Network/Special to College of DuPage)

Community Partners in Learning

Juan Rhodes saw a playful child through his lens while taking photos near Chicago’s Field Museum.

“I had the opportunity to show Charlotte not as a child with challenges but as a normal, happy child. I just captured Charlotte being herself.”

Rhodes and other members of Miles Boone’s Visual Storytelling class at College of DuPage spent the spring getting to know their subjects and their families, thanks to a partnership between COD’s Photography program and Easterseals DuPage and Fox Valley. For more than 20 years, the annual collaboration has raised awareness and funds to support children with disabilities and their families. It also serves as an exceptional learning experience for COD photography students.

The collaboration is one example of how COD partners with community agencies and nonprofit organizations to build students’ skills and knowledge through service and volunteerism. Whether it is the Interior Design program working with community organizations like Canopy to design new spaces or the Justice Studies program educating youth at the Illinois Youth Center Warrenville, these shared experiences result in more than assignments and grades, said Boone.

“Our project not only benefits Easterseals, which uses the photographs to decorate their facilities and in marketing, but it also provides a unique, real-world opportunity for the COD student photographers. The cause could not be more worthy.”

Getting any 4-year-old to sit still for a photo is difficult, but photography student Chris Howes found the experience delightfully challenging.

“It was more than a photo shoot,” he said about working with Wesley. “It gave his mom and family a chance to share his disability and what he faces each day, as well as the good work being done through Easterseals.”

Photography student Chris Howes (left) and his Easterseals subject, Wesley (above).
A Classroom Without Borders

College of DuPage Associate Professor of Biology Thomas Jor-El Hardy thinks globally when preparing his curriculum. See page 10 for more about his work.