

Media Advisory

TO: ASSIGNMENT EDITORS/NEWS DIRECTORS

WHAT: 27 students will celebrate their accomplishments in the Humanities 101 program this past semester at their Celebration of Learning.

PHOTO OPP: Humanities 101 students, professors and supporters speaking about the program. Student's receiving their certificates of completion. Saila Davis will be available for interviews / photos if wanted.

WHERE: Fr. Michael J. McGivney Hall

St. Mary's University campus | 14500 Bannister Way SE, just off Macleod Trail South

Plenty of free parking

WHEN: Saturday, April 18, 2014 | 6:00pm Dinner | 6:45pm Academic & Procession Ceremony

Why: The Humanities 101 Celebration of Learning is an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments and successes of the students in this semester's program. One student in particular stood out this semester for overcoming her barriers to education and igniting a passion for learning.

At the age of 18, Saila Davis couldn't visualize a future for herself.

The recent high school graduate was working as a nanny. Battling depression – a condition she says first showed up when she was eight years old – Saila felt paralyzed by a past marked with family dysfunction and abuse.

When she first heard about Humanities 101 at St. Mary's University, she was too shy to submit an application form. When she finally did, she was astounded that the coordinator offered to meet her after-hours to accommodate her work schedule.

That gesture was her first taste of the welcoming environment Humanities 101 creates for non-traditional learners who have experienced poverty, abuse or homelessness. It was enough to encourage her to embark on a learning journey that she says has changed her life.

"I've come such a long way since entering the program," Saila said. "Before, I was never capable of stepping back from a situation and looking at all the possibilities. I would get in a lot of arguments with my family, but now I have the ability to step back for just a minute and change my words.

"I am now capable of looking at my past life and saying, 'Yes, I went through all those terrible things, but that's not who I am'."

Saila says three things have contributed to her transformation: the non-judgmental atmosphere at St. Mary's, the content of the Humanities 101 courses, and the passion of the instructors.

"Everyone in the program welcomes you and makes you feel at home," she said. "The university itself makes you feel like you are wanted and they work hard to take away all the obstacles. Humanities 101 has sparked my inner passion for learning."

The rich and challenging content of the program, featuring writers ranging from Viktor E. Frankl to Sharon Riis and Matthew Arnold, helped Saila understand that literature – and life – is not all that it seems on the surface.

"Every text that we studied sparked our creativity and had a way of healing," she said. "I don't think the program is actually intended to heal us, but it does give us the opportunity to heal ourselves.

“Humanities 101 has a very gentle way of reaching out to you and saying, ‘Take down your walls’.”

During the Winter 2015 term, classes were taught by lead instructor Heidi Grogan, program director Dr. Tara Hyland-Russell, history professor Dr. Norman Knowles and music professor Malcolm Edwards. As Saira watched these professors in action, she slowly realized that she, too, will be a teacher someday.

“When the professors are teaching us, they are just being themselves and they just shine,” she said. “When I become an elementary teacher, I want to be just like them. I want to be confident in my own skin and I want my students to be intrigued. I had lost all hope, but I have my dreams again. Humanities 101 allows you to see a future for yourself.”



SAILA DAVIS IN CLASS

ABOUT HUMANITIES 101

The Humanities 101 program brings free, university-level courses to people who have experienced barriers to learning such as poverty, experience with violence, addiction, homelessness, and interruptions to prior education. Courses are rooted in the humanities and include English Literature, History, Philosophy, Art History, Music and Cultural Studies. Since March 2013, many students have taken part in the program and report improvements to quality of life for themselves and their families. Participants have improved their skills and capacities, with graduates of the program pursuing further formal education, employment, and volunteer opportunities.

The program costs a minimum of \$56,000 per term to run and is funded entirely by private donations and fundraising efforts. Students accepted into the program enjoy full coverage of program costs, including tuition, books, hot and nutritious meals before class, assistance with travel to and from class, childcare, instructors’ fees and administrative costs. The greater student body at St. Mary’s University has shown incredible support for the program, having raised over \$13,000.00 through student-led initiatives in 2013 alone. This generosity, in addition to the warm and inclusive spirit on campus, is greatly appreciated by the Humanities 101 students, faculty, staff and volunteers, as this program is most certainly a labour of love by, and for, us all.

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