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Reaching Out to Youth

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Student dynamo accepts challenge

Despite bouts of homesickness and financial stress, Dendere blossomed: Political science professor Dawn Nowacki, whose research projects Dendere has worked on, witnessed a transformation from “this kind of tentative, confused and really lonely person when she got here. She has come so far in her intellectual development and had these incredible experiences.”

One of those was Dendere’s internship last summer at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Ga. She researched four nations: Palestine, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and Ghana, and the African Union, for the Center’s democracy program, which includes elections monitoring.

“I met people who talked about things I love to talk about — international relations and politics. We had intense conversations,” Dendere says.

And yes, she met former President Jimmy Carter. She visited his home in Plains, Ga., and also met wife Rosalynn, whom she describes as surprisingly funny.

Dendere was one of two interns, out of 32 in the program, chosen to make a presentation before the Center’s Board of Trustees. Later, during a photo session, Carter pointed her out, declaring: “She’s going to be a president someday.”

“I wouldn’t put it past her,” Nowacki says. “I remember thinking, when Chipo first told me, in our very first conversation, that she wanted to be president of Zimbabwe, that this was unrealistic and somewhat arrogant, and that perhaps she was not serious. She assured me that she was quite serious, and over the course of the next year, as I got to know her and observe her talents, I could see that this goal is actually quite realistic and attainable for her. I told her I want to be part of her government.”

For now, Dendere has a more modest goal as student leader: “I want to get students on campus involved and really knowing what’s going on.” She also wants to increase the visibility of student government.

As for her future, Dendere is applying to graduate schools, hoping to pursue a Ph.D. in comparative politics. Roommate Sharoon Tan ’07 admires Dendere’s tenaciousness. “Chipo proves anything is possible if we are determined enough,” she says.

Adds Nowacki, “Working with someone like Chipo is what makes it worthwhile to be a professor. Such students keep us going!”

— Beth Rogers Thompson

Reaching out to youth

You might say that Gabriel Del Rayo ’08 is straddling two different worlds.

Whether he’s encouraging players on the soccer field or dispensing advice, counsel and sometimes punishment through the juvenile justice system, Del Rayo is serving local youth.

Sandwiched between classes to complete his business major and Spanish minor at Linfield and his work as an assistant soccer coach at McMinnville High School, Del Rayo also finds time to work as a juvenile probation assistant in the Yamhill County Juvenile Department.

He began as a translator assisting with local Latino youths who found themselves on the wrong side of the law. As his responsibilities increased, the job evolved into an internship for credit at Linfield. He spent last summer working full time under the supervision of Dana Carelle, probation officer.

Del Rayo’s duties include talking to parents, filing paperwork, conducting probation visits, taking young people to court and treatment programs, and administering drug tests. He’s even learned how to present in court, which he calls “nerve-wracking.” In some cases, he has had to help cuff kids and take them back to detention. The crimes range from misdemeanors to felonies and may include criminal mischief, harassment and sex abuse; the majority are drug related.

The work has been both rewarding and eye-opening.

“The interesting thing is that there is nothing normal about this work,” said Del Rayo, whose own strong family and parental support kept him out of trouble.

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