

Members of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society chapter at the Quad-Cities Campus are writing PTK Posts for their 2021 College Project. College Projects are a way for PTK chapters to engage and give back to their colleges.



The goal of PTK Posts is for Quad-Cities Campus PTK members to share student stories and information to help current and prospective BHC students be successful and happy with their college experience.

Welcome to our first post, where C. Blaise Kinto, PTK vice president of fellowship, shares his story and talks about how he got involved with student life at Black Hawk College!

## A little about me



**Name:** C. Blaise Kinto

**Hometown:** Togo, West Africa

**Program:** Computer Information Technology - Network Administration Associate in Applied Science

**BHC activities:** Phi Theta Kappa, ESL Mentors & Mentees Program, Student Government Association (SGA) and Math Club

My name is C. Blaise Kinto. I moved from Togo, a small country in West Africa, to the United States in October 2016. My native language is Ewe, but I went to school to learn English. I thought I knew English until I got to the United States and the reality of having trouble understanding and speaking it hit me in the face.

## Black Hawk College education

Once I was in East Moline, I knew I needed to study English to become fluent. Because of the low-level English that I had, I got started with the Adult Education ESL program in 2017. The teachers at the BHC Outreach Center, especially Linda Steele, helped me to achieve my dream of being fluent in English within one year.

In 2018, I went through the Academic ESL program and improved my English speaking, reading, grammar, and listening skills with the help of all the ESL teachers at Black Hawk College Quad-Cities Campus.

Then I went on to earn my Associate in Applied Science degree in Computer Information Technology - Network Administration. My dedication and commitment resulted in a Student Commitment to Excellence Award and earning scholarships, for which I am very grateful.

## No excuses: getting past fear

I was 24 when I moved to the United States, so I was used to speaking my native tongue and a little bit of French. My uncle would always tell me this quote: "He who wants to do something will find a way, but he who does not want to do anything finds excuses."

This is a reality that has hit me every time I give excuses about why I cannot do something. I know we are busy and have many things in our lives, but if this is our only excuse all the time, then we are not trying hard enough.

I am a social butterfly and love talking to people and spreading positivity and light, which is love, everywhere I can. Just like any other international student out there who is struggling to speak a foreign language, I could have kept myself from getting involved because of how scary using English was. However, I knew the only way I could break through that fear was to adapt and take bold action.

In 2018, I applied for a work-study job, which requires me to speak English only. I took on this job knowing that the only way to improve is to accept change and learn. I learned a lot speaking English at work every day even though I had times where I had to spell what I was trying to say. It was a great experience, and I will be forever grateful to Mike Meleg and Glynis Lowery for the opportunity.

## How I got involved

In 2018, I joined the ESL Mentors & Mentees Program to improve my English. I got paired with a mentor, Jason Madden, who taught me a lot, not just about English, but about anything I asked about. He has continued to help me throughout the years.

Being in Mentors & Mentees was one of my best experiences at Black Hawk College. As an international student, sometimes we tend to isolate ourselves because we feel like we do not fit in with native English speaker students. Being in Mentors & Mentees, I felt I was around family. We are from different countries, but we relate together through our cultures and traditions. Though we had to communicate in English, it felt more natural than speaking with native English speakers because we weren't afraid of making mistakes.

Through speaking English one-on-one with my mentor, I gained confidence to do it at a higher level. With the confidence I gained, Mentors & Mentees advisor Loredana Cooper trusted me enough to allow me to do a PowerPoint presentation at program events. I had to speak not only in front of international students who struggle with English just like me, but also in front of native speakers.

## Becoming a leader

In 2019, I joined Black Hawk College Student Government Association (SGA), where I had to step up higher and gain higher confidence. In the 2019-2020 academic year, I was a senator, and learned a lot by listening to my fellow senators and the co-advisors Jana Koch and Sara Dye. While I was in SGA I had the privilege to be in many different leadership trainings and situations which have made me a better leader. I was also a part of the Math Club in 2019.



In the 2020-2021 academic year, not only was I in ESL Mentors & Mentees and SGA, but I became an officer in the Phi Theta Kappa chapter at Black Hawk. While doing so, I was a full-time student, working 30 to 35 hours a week, committed to Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Mississippi Valley, and leading a prayer group through BHC Intervarsity.

I want to serve because that is what leaders do. I do not want to serve at one place, but as many places that I can.

Through PTK, I had an opportunity to vote for international PTK officers and realize all it takes for anyone to do anything is willingness and dedication. Also through PTK, I had an opportunity to make induction speeches, and many other things.

While at Black Hawk, I earned the Illinois Community College Faculty Association Scholarship, where I was one of the seven students chosen; Student Commitment to Excellence Award; 2020 National Coca-Cola Leaders of Promise; and many other scholarships.

In 2020, I started an internship in the information technology field. One of the most memorable things in my interview was when the employer told me how proud he was of me doing so much volunteer work in the small amount of time that I have been in the country. Because I learned many leadership skills through my volunteering and by getting involved, I always have answers for employers when they ask me questions about my leadership and volunteerism.

I know it can be hard and difficult, but I urge you to find time to get involved, be a leader, and create lifetime connections and friendships. Take the time to become a leader now, so your future employer will know they can trust you with that position.

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*Phi Theta Kappa is the largest honor society for two-year college students. Black Hawk College has a PTK chapter at each campus. The honor society focuses on leadership, fellowship, service and scholarship. Our members lead the chapter each year, hold meetings and activities to help students build a network with other students, participate together in service opportunities on campus and in the community, and are recognized for their high academic success. PTK has many scholarship opportunities for members, whether they are transferring to another college or joining the workforce after BHC. For more information about PTK, visit [www.ptk.org](http://www.ptk.org) or email our Quad-Cities Campus Chapter Advisor [Nicole Banks](#).*

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