At Black Hawk College you will find a diverse student body. In any given class you may find a student who grew up 10 minutes from campus and another who grew up in a different country. This is why Black Hawk College has continued to expand resources for international students. The Multicultural Entrepreneurial Center, or MEC, is a big part of that.

Many international students will tell you that the MEC helped guide them through their time on campus. Not only does it allow them to interact with other international students on a regular basis, it creates a network for them once they move on.

Meet Christian and Afley

Christian Manzi and Afley Barnabas are international students who recently had the chance to transfer to continue their education. Manzi is from Rwanda and Barnabas is from Ethiopia. Both have different stories when it comes to how they got to Black Hawk College but both have similar stories when it comes to why they were successful while they were here.



Afley Barnabas (left) and Christian Manzi (right) pictured with Becca Wynes at a farewell party.

Manzi decided to enroll at Black Hawk College because his father's friend had a daughter who graduated from BHC. He moved to the United States in December 2020 and began classes in the Spring 2021.

Manzi was heavily involved in campus activities during his time at Black Hawk College. He served as the vice president of service for the Phi Theta Kappa honor society chapter at the Quad-Cities Campus. He also was a member of Sigma Kappa Delta English honor society, the National Society of Leadership and Success, the International Student Association and the Student Government Association.

"I want to challenge the students to get involved and actively make use of what the school and the community has for them. If you do, I promise you will come out of Black Hawk College better than you came in," Manzi said.

Barnabas had a different journey to Black Hawk College. He came to the United States because of the Tigray War happening in Ethiopia. He chose to live in the Quad Cities because his mom had lived here for 15 years.

"After graduating from high school in 2020, I spent the last two years not being able to do much due to the war but after I was able to process my immigration papers I was able to come here in March," he said.

What will they remember most about BHC?

When asked about their time spent at Black Hawk College, they both spoke about the impact faculty and staff had on their success. "I really liked all of my classes. History and economics were some of my favorites," Barnabas said.


Afley and Christian with other members of the MEC during a celebration.

For Manzi, he says his time at Black Hawk College has had the most impact on his life. “These past two years have been the biggest in terms of growth in many aspects of my life,” Manzi said.

Barnabas earned 31 credit hours in just 10 months. He mostly took eight-week classes to get himself into a position to transfer to a university. He said the classes were primarily online so he had to stay focused to do well.

“I spent a lot of time in the library and making sure I had my calendar planned out or assignments,” he said.

Barnabas finished the fall semester by accepting an invitation to Phi Theta Kappa honor society. Students must maintain a GPA of 3.5 or higher while taking at least 12 credit hours to be accepted.

Looking to the future

Both men are looking to the future to continue to grow themselves professionally and personally.

Barnabas is now taking classes at the University of Iowa where is hoping to pursue a degree

in finance.

“I didn’t want to go to college strictly for a job. The education I get, the pride I get from saying I am a graduate is another thing I am proud of,” he said.

Manzi transferred to Amherst College in Massachusetts where he will study computer science.



“Most students find it hard to believe they can easily transfer to a four-year institution, especially one that is out-of-state, but it’s possible and I’m glad that it has motivated other students to aim higher and overcome their limiting expectations,” Manzi said.

“I believe BHC’s curriculum and college environment if put to good use, can make students better, not just academically,” he said.

It is always bittersweet to see students like Barnabas and Manzi leave Black Hawk College because of the impact they have had on the campus.

“We will miss their kindness and their hard work. Although we cannot replace them, we are happy to see them succeed in their new chapter in life!” said Loredana Cooper, multicultural entrepreneurial advisor.

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