

April is Community College Month and we wanted to take the time to celebrate some of our incredible alumni.

National Community College Month started in 1986 as a way to spread awareness for community, technical and junior colleges that provided another option for students looking for higher education.

My name is Bryan Goman and I graduated from Black Hawk College in 2014. I started in our Marketing Department last September and I wondered how many more alumni now worked for the college. I was surprised to find out there are many former BHC students who are now BHC employees. Each one has their own story of how community college impacted their lives.

Vashti Berry



Vashti Berry spends her days helping new students find their home at the East Campus. For her, Black Hawk College has been her home since she can remember. “My experiences at Black Hawk College started in the womb. Literally. My mother, Kathy Tingleaf, worked for BHC for almost 45 years. Some of my fondest memories from childhood were of the times as a tiny toddler, I joined my mom at work” Berry says.

Berry says she not only finished her education with zero debt but she attributes that and her academic success to starting at a community college. “By having so many positive personal and professional experiences I can share with all students during advising appointments and orientation sessions, promotes our BHC culture - a culture of fairness, caring, lifelong learning and support,” she says.

Alicia Esposito



Alicia Esposito is an instructor in the Physical Therapist Assistant program at the Quad-Cities Campus, the very same program she graduated from in 2008. “I was kind of always stepping my foot back in here, checking it out and staying involved in the program,” Esposito says. After she graduated, she came back a few times to substitute teach. Now she is happy to be able to shape the next generation of students through Black Hawk College.

“If you don’t know what you want to do, come to a community college and dip into all these courses and not end up with a lot of debt. It’s easier to just take individual courses here and see what you are interested in,” Esposito says.

Rebekah Irish



Rebekah Irish is an assistant professor of equestrian science at the East Campus. She began her academic career at Black Hawk College after hearing about the program while living in California. “I chose to leave sunny California and make the move to Galva, Illinois, to further my academic education,” she says.

While working on her associate degree, she also competed on the IHSA Western Equestrian Team and the Horse Judging Team.

Irish says that it was her experience at Black Hawk College that led to her pursuing a career in teaching. “When you are engaged and your curiosity is piqued, the hands-on, real-world education experience at Black Hawk College will offer you opportunities to increase your communication skills, improve problem-solving, harden your resolve to persevere, and grow in leadership skills,” she says.

“Donna Irvin, one of my coaches and instructors during my student years at the East Campus, showed me that kind of personal attention and affirmation along with plenty of challenge,” Irish says. “That personal care and aspiration made Black Hawk College a place I wanted to return to so I could continue the tradition and return the favor.”

Kole Shuda



Kole Shuda works at the Quad-Cities Campus in the Advising Center, but before that, he was a music student and member of Phi Theta Kappa honor society. He not only discovered what he wanted to do for the future while attending Black Hawk College, he also met his wife when they were BHC students. Lauren Shuda now works in the Career Services Center, in the same building as her husband. “I would have never guessed in a million years that this place would become such a huge milestone part of my life,” he says.

“You really get a chance to interact with people of all different ages at a community college. I think this really helped prepare me more for the workplace. You can come here and figure out what you want to do,” he says. “You may change your mind two or three times but that is what a community college is about. The environment welcomes the idea of you being a work in progress.”

Carrieann Smith



Carriann Smith started the Quad-Cities Campus over 20 years ago and now works in Adult Education at the BHC Outreach Center in East Moline. Smith says she found her passion as a student at the college.

“The moment I knew I wanted to work in an educational setting was after starting out as a student worker working in the Foundation Office,” Smith says. “With the experience and knowledge I was gaining, along with the friends that I had made, it became clear to me that I loved working here and really wanted to start my career at Black Hawk.

“For those who are unsure about college, starting off at a community college is the right choice. So much more affordable, local, and more one-on-one time with professors. Personal assistance is so important to have when starting off at a college,” she says.

“To me, an associate degree is just as important as a bachelor’s. I am a perfect example of how BHC can help improve a person’s career opportunity and growth,” Smith says.

Black Hawk College impacts students in many different ways. The main takeaway I had from these former students turned employees is how Black Hawk College shaped their future. It helped them find their passion, find their purpose and most importantly, gave them the opportunity to grow.

If you are interested in learning more about Black Hawk College programs, [contact an advisor](#) or call 309-796-5100 for the Quad-Cities Campus or 309-854-1709 for the East Campus.

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