SPOTLIGHT: Bergen’s 2014 Valedictorian

I was born and raised in Venezuela, a rich poor country with an abundance of violence. After graduating from high school in July, 2011, I decided to choose a new country, new school and new language since my country’s social crisis devastated its quality of life, including my city of Caracas, which is rated as one of the most dangerous cities in the world. I moved to New Jersey a little over two years ago to pursue better academic opportunities and a better future.

I opted to attend Bergen Community College because it was a financially smart option. I was not sure a community college was going to fulfill my academic standards but what I discovered changed my perspective of education. I found “differences.” I learned to respect these differences and to get fascinated by different life stories.

At BCC I decided to complement my academic pursuits by getting involved with my school and community, fulfilling my desire of challenge and interaction. Taking Honors classes has allowed me to experience high level sciences and humanities courses and interact with talented faculty members, as well as it has motivated me to get involved with leadership positions.

I started as a tutor during my first semester at BCC. I have worked with many tutees a week, 20 hours a week. After numerous appointments and study groups, I have learned that behind tutoring numbers, lies the opportunity for developing my own interpersonal and communicational skills. I am honored to say I was selected for the 2014 Students’ Choice Award in recognition to my dedication to the Henry & Edith Cerullo Learning Assistance Center.

Also, I joined the STEM Student Union because I was interested in their innovative projects. Last summer I participated in the STEM Internships as part of the vertical wind turbine team. For over a month, the team built the base and main structure of a seven feet tall wind turbine. We finished and tested the model on top of a car, simulating the wind impact. The excitement I felt was unique and made me realize engineering is my career path. I was mentally and physically strong enough to work confidently in a manufacturing lab full of...
men. I realized engineering does not have a gender.

I decided to get more involved at STEM and lead the Drafting Skills Team. STEM allowed me to learn from experienced faculty mentors and to interact with new members, experiencing a similar job environment to my perspective as a future engineering job.

In addition, I was the Phi Theta Kappa, Alpha Epsilon Phi Chapter, 2013-2014 Vice President of Leadership. This position allowed me to inspire others to achieve academic excellence and give back to our community.

Lastly, I was a math ambassador of our Math Club, where I had the opportunity to interact with other clubs at school and national math organizations as well as to participate in competitions.

In my spare time I enjoy balancing my scientific coursework with one of my life passions, Flamenco dancing. I had fifteen years of flamenco instruction focused on discipline, virtue that I have used in every aspect of my life. Through flamenco, I learned the secret to success and the set of values that I now stand for: to have the required knowledge, to feel passionate about it and to sweat of effort to achieve goals. This semester I had the opportunity of performing in the School of Honors dinner on April 7th and in the Student Center, celebrating Diversity Day, on April 23rd.

Neither of my parents has more than a high school education, which has motivated me to work hard and challenge myself. I am grateful to have my mother’s support and my brother as a role model to follow. I have learned to be humble, and to approach present opportunities shooting for the stars with my feet in the ground.

I am honored to say I was selected as the Bergen Community College class of 2014 valedictorian. This award represents recognition not only to my hard work at school, but also to a life of academic perseverance and dedication, as well as a motivation to keep working hard to succeed. More than with words, I believe in inspiring with my actions and leading by example. It is only by serving as role models ourselves that we encourage others to follow a similar path.

After graduation, my goal is to transfer to a 4-year highly selective school. I want an excellent preparation for succeeding as a Biomedical Engineer, a degree that I have fallen in love with, since it combines my scientific interest with my passion to develop new technologies to contribute to society.

I am proud to be a BCC student ambassador. I am grateful for being recognized by foundations that have invested in my education goals, with the financial support of transfer scholarships. I am thankful to the Adam Feigenbaum Scholarship Award, the Hispanic Business Council Foundation that selected me as a 2014 PSEG Scholar, and to the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation that selected me as one of 85 Undergraduate scholars selected among thousands of applicants nationwide. I am one step closer to achieving my academic goals thanks to the fact that these foundations believe in my potential to make the best interest out of their investments. I proudly represent Bergen Community College as an institution that has provided me with academic excellence, fellowship quality, faculty support, and an outstanding opportunity of serving my community. I am honored to say “I am a BCC graduate.”
Optional Practical Training (OPT)
Any student that is interested in working off campus needs to attend a workshop (see Workshop Schedule) on OPT.

Electronic I-94
Any student traveling recently should print our their electronic I-94.

Graduating this Summer 2014?
Any student graduating this may will have a 60 day grace period from the last day of classes (May 13, 2014). The grace period give additional time to transfer to another U.S. institution, apply for the post completion OPT benefit, or return home.

Maintaining Status
Information on how to maintain F-1 student status can be found on the International Student website. There is a video in several language that goes over maintaining status.

Travel Signatures
Any student traveling outside the U.S. and plans to return to Bergen, must obtain a travel signature from the International Counselor. Signatures are valid for one year from the date it was issued. Those traveling during Summer Break should obtain their travel signatures NOW. Bring your I-20 to the ISC and your International Counselor will sign off on it. There is no need to make an appointment.

I-20 Extensions
It’s time to check your program end date on the I-20. If it’s about to expire, you need to apply for an extension. The I-20 extension packet is on the website.

Academic Reminders

Special Alert: Developmental Math courses have changed and now align with your major. There are now two different math tracks, MAT 040 for liberal arts majors and MAT 048 for science majors.

Thinking about changing your major?
Students are strongly encouraged to make an appointment with their International Counselor to discuss a potential change of major.
Congratulations to all students for completing this term and to those graduating!

Relax and enjoy your summer break!

In addition, the ISA Club will resume their weekly meetings in the Fall.

Special Announcement: Always keep your personal belongings with you at all times. Do not leave your personal belongings unattended. In addition, the ISC recommends that you only keep copies of your passport with you when you are on campus. All original documents should be kept in a safe place.

International Student Center Update

- Have suggestions on how the ISC can better serve you? Drop a note in the ISC suggestion box. It’s right inside the office. There is no need to write down your name.
- Program evaluations are being mailed out to all currently enrolled F-1 students within the next couple of weeks. If you have any questions about your program evaluation, please visit the office.
- The International Student Center will be open during the Summer term.
- Summer workshop schedule will be available beginning of June.