Early college graduate teaches at RCC

Editor’s note: For the past 11 years, 100 Randolph County School System students per year have been accepted into Randolph Early College High School, where they could earn both a high school diploma and an associate degree upon graduation. Today, our Focus continues with a graduate of the inaugural Class of 2010 sharing her early college experience.

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ASHEBORO — Walking onto a college campus on her first day of high school was an unforgettable experience for Victoria Luther Davis, who was among the inaugural graduating class at the Randolph Early College High School (RECHS).

WELCOME

BACK — Randolph Early College High School 2010 graduate Victoria Luther Davis now teaches RECHS students college-level English courses in her position as English instructor at Randolph Community College.

At the age of 14, in 2006, she began taking college courses on the RCC campus alongside college students. Four years later, she and many of her RECHS classmates graduated with both a high school diploma and an associate degree.

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“The faculty and staff at RCC were very welcoming,” Davis said. “It definitely required us to mature pretty quickly.”

She recalls it being a unique experience that felt like being thrown into the deep end. “It was definitely an adjustment.”

While it was intimidating, it was an adjustment she and her fellow classmates were motivated to make. “For many of us, there was an awareness of how lucky we were.”

Challenges along the way
Not all of the 100 students accepted in 2006 were able to graduate in four years. “There were some of us who needed a little bit longer to earn both the diploma and the Associate of Arts degree,” Davis said.

RECHS offers a fifth-year option that allows students to remain in school up to one additional year to complete the diploma and degree requirements.

“That was really a great opportunity too, because I think that time management was ultimately one of the biggest challenges that we faced.”

The other significant challenge Davis encountered was needing to know or have a good idea regarding her end-goal. Some students come in with a clear picture of their goals and future educational and career plans. Some, like Davis, change their majors along the way.

There were plenty of supports in place to help students overcome challenges.

“As a whole, the program was really relationship driven,” Davis said.

RECHS offers a close-knit community of staff and students. Classes are smaller, everyone knows everyone, and help is there for the asking. Sometimes, help is offered before the asking, because teachers and administrators are acutely aware of student needs.

Incorporated into the RECHS program during Davis’ time as a student was a component called “house.” Today, it’s called “seminar.” During seminar class, students learn leadership skills and build relationships in a small-group setting. It gave Davis and her classmates the opportunity to freely share, and sometimes vent, about their experiences. It also provided the tools students needed to navigate college-level schedules and work.

Role reversed
After graduating from RECHS with an Associate of Arts and her high school diploma, Davis went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and then a Master’s of Education with an English cognate from Liberty University. She now teaches English at RCC, where RECHS students are enrolled in some of her classes.

“I’ve had several early college students and I have been able to mentor them to an extent and share with them that I understand how it is, because I was in their position.”

Davis also works with the RECHS liaison.

“I think it’s really great that we have the liaison position,” which she can utilize to bridge issues with RECHS students. When she was a student, the liaison — who at the time was Nancy Cross, the current director of RCSS Career and Technical Education — was integral to her success in the program. The liaison works with students, and RECHS and RCC staff to resolve issues and problem solve to ensure success.

“The early college program really gave us work ethic,” Davis said. “No matter where we ended up, I think that we have a truly transformed work ethic.”

Words of wisdom
From an early college graduate to applicants:

■ Don’t be intimidated by pre-conceived notions of early college programs; they’re for any student who wants the opportunity and is willing to work to achieve his or her goals.

■ Contrary to what you might think, early college high school students do not spend every waking hour studying. It is a well-rounded high school option.

■ Get involved in extracurricular activities that can provide a break from the rigors of college-level study. Even students at Randolph Early College High School can access community organizations as well as create clubs in areas of common interest.

■ Take care of yourself. Stress can be a big factor when taking on the responsibilities of the work and commitment required by an early college program. Pair the work with activities that make you happy to ensure you find and maintain balance.

■ Plan your time well, stay grounded and remain dedicated.

■ There will be times when you become overwhelmed, but don’t give up. All students feel this way at some time or another. Access support resources, get help when you need it, and lift and support each other through it. Utilize the fifth-year option, if needed.