

AUGUST 2013 *By Will Farior, with Cindi May, Project Director of the REACH Program at College of Charleston and Gail Farior, Will's mom*

I am a junior at the College of Charleston in the REACH Program. Going to college is something I have wanted to do for a very long time. Some people ask me why I wanted to go to college, and for me that answer was easy: I wanted to have a job, have a life, have friends. At the College of Charleston, I have lots of friends—some of them have disabilities and some don't. I have taken more than 10 different classes, have had the chance to experience lots of jobs, and have tried to figure out what I want to do. I have also learned about my disability, how to explain it to others, and how to rely on my strengths.

It was not always easy for me. I have Asperger's, and I learn differently. In the past I had trouble making friends. I used to talk too much or too long, and I didn't know how to take turns or listen to other people.

What helps me at the College of Charleston? The main thing is taking regular college classes. These have included Introduction to Business, Public Speaking, Psychology, Digital Media, Graphic Novel, and Intro to Education. I study hard in each of my classes. I really like the projects, as they give me a chance to get out and use what I know and to work with other students.

But the class that made the biggest difference for me was an Interpersonal Communication class with Dr. Deb McGee. Dr. McGee explained and broke down the various parts of communication, so that I could better understand body language and facial expressions. I learned how to stay on one topic when I speak with other people. Dr. Deb also helped me understand people from different backgrounds so that I could do well in lots of different situations. For example, I have one friend who likes me to get to the point right away; he does not like long-winded



Will Farior, in his dorm room at College of Charleston

conversations or much detail. Now, when I talk with him, I try to keep it simple and straightforward.

Before college, I had learned some communication strategies, like letting others take turns leading the conversation. But in college I can put all of those skills into practice and use them in real social situations. When I am in class, I know when to let other people talk. I don't hog the conversation or take over the whole class. Now I try to listen to others and absorb the information they are sharing and then decide when it's my turn to speak.

With more confidence in my communication skills, I decided to pledge Alpha Kappa Psi, a business fraternity. While I was pledging, I had to learn information about the founder of the fraternity. I also learned how to "sell myself in an elevator"—that is, to describe myself succinctly and clearly, like you would if you were introducing yourself to someone and only had a few moments to do so. I learned how to explain my strengths and goals in a very short period of time

and to let other people know who I am and what I want to do. I also learned to cut to the chase, not ramble on. I now know how to listen to people and take feedback from others without being so hard on myself.

Another thing I have learned is that it is very important to understand the person you are talking to. For example, I have one friend who really likes to joke around. I am more serious and direct most of the time. I had to learn that I shouldn't always take everything he says so seriously. He often uses sarcasm, and at first it was hard to know when he was being sarcastic. I have also learned how to let him know when the joking and sarcasm have gone too far without hurting his feelings.

Before college, my friends were mostly my family. The other students at school didn't seem to "get" me and sometimes were mean to me. I had trouble with my emotions and making friends. I didn't know how to rely on my strengths. I didn't want a label. I didn't want to be pinned down by my disability. Now I have learned to talk about my disability and to use my strengths to express myself. I am very comfortable with myself. The students here seem to recognize my differences but are accepting of them.

My new communication skills have also helped me professionally. At work, I try to stay on point and keep conversations relevant. I have had several paid internships at the College of Charleston. I have worked in the Admissions Office and in the "Charleston 40," a group of students who give tours to students who might want to

come to the college. I recently got the position of Clyde the Cougar (our mascot), and I get to be the Cougar at lots of sporting events. I also worked at the YWCA and helped coordinate an event for Martin Luther King Day. Last semester I worked in the public relations department of a hospital, and this semester I will work for a non-profit.

When I came to college, I thought I wanted to be a teacher, but as I explored that option I realized I was not going to earn all the credentials needed to teach in the public schools. I talked with different people on campus to explore career options that fit with my interests and abilities.

I considered a variety of careers including business, but decided on Communications as my major. It helps me with interpersonal stuff, understanding myself, and growing professionally.

I really want to help other people who have Asperger's,

and I know I can. I definitely want to assist others who want to go on to college. And someday I want to be able to help my own children understand the world

"I have also learned about my disability, how to explain it to others, and how to rely on my strengths."



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