

“Going to college had been a dream of mine since I was a young girl,” said Allie Rohan. When Allie was in middle school, she talked to Dr. Butler, her school’s special education director. Allie told Dr. Butler that she wanted to go to college, and she wanted to be in an inclusive classroom with her friends.

With the support of people like Dr. Butler, and through her own energy and determination, Allie made her goal a reality. When she turned 18, she went to Holyoke Community College (HCC) through a program called the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative, or MAICEI. MAICEI is a state program that supports college opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, like Allie.

Allie said, “I wanted to go to college so that I could learn new things about myself, like I am capable of doing more than what people think I can do.”



Allie enjoying time in the art studio at HCC.

One of Allie’s favorite classes at HCC was painting. “I enjoyed painting class because it was so relaxing and fun,” she explained. Her painting professor, Frank Cressotti, shared a lot of new painting techniques. For example, he showed the students how to use

dark and light colors and different textures, and how to use the whole space on the canvas.

Faculty Feedback

Allie felt really good when Professor Cressotti wrote a letter of recommendation for her at the end of the semester. In his letter, he said, “While other students are extremely timid and cautious in their work, Allison proceeds with directness and courage. I wish other students had her attitude.”

Being a college student helped Allie build her confidence and independence. She learned how to set

up her own transportation from home to HCC. She also learned how to take her own notes in class.

At HCC, Allie learned a lot about herself and how to advocate. Advocating means finding ways to ask for what you want. One example was that she applied for higher-level art classes after completing Professor Cressotti’s class. Allie knew that she could succeed in more challenging classes, so she asked her advisor during priority registration, and enrolled.

Utilizing Supports

Allie found out she didn’t always need help, but she learned to ask for it when she needed it. For example, when she first started taking classes at HCC, it was hard to get around campus. She felt nervous and asked her coach to walk with her to class to make sure she didn’t get lost. But by the end of the first semester, she knew her way around and could walk by herself to all her classes.

College was different from high school because Allie’s classes were longer, and she had more work to do outside of class. For instance, she had to spend extra time in the art studio to get all her work done. She spent a lot of time painting at home, too.

Career Development

Going to college helped Allie prepare for getting a job. She took Job Search Strategies, Professional Etiquette, and Career Planning. In those classes, she made a resume and cover letter. She also learned what types of jobs she might be good at, how to look up information about jobs online, how to dress for an interview, and how to get along with other people.

Going to college helped Allie to build her art, communication, and technology skills. Today, she has a job working at a local grocery store. She also has continued her passion for painting, and has had her art shown throughout Massachusetts, including a solo show at the Cooley Dickinson Hospital Cancer Center.

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Allie used Facebook to invite friends and family to the reception for the show, and she sold 45 paintings. She donated what she earned from the sales of her paintings back to the hospital.

Career Mentor

Allie now takes painting classes with Donna Estabrooks, a local artist. Donna has become an important mentor for Allie and has encouraged her to show her artwork across Massachusetts. Allie said, “We both love to share happiness through our art and we both like to use vibrant colors and sparkles.”

In winter of 2018, The Arc of Massachusetts chose one of Allie’s paintings to be on the cover of a program for an important legislative event at the Massachusetts State House in Boston. Allie got the chance to travel with her family and friends to the State House to be recognized for her art. She said, “I’m glad I took public speaking at HCC because I felt comfortable giving my speech at the State House” -- with several



Allie giving her acceptance speech at the 41st Legislative Reception at the Massachusetts State House.

hundred people at the event!

While at the State House, Allie visited her state representative and senator. She thanked them both for supporting the MAICEI program, which had opened the door for her to attend HCC. She also asked them to continue to fund MAICEI and other new initiatives, so that other students with disabilities will have the opportunity to go to college.

Support Network

In spring of 2019, 12 of Allie’s paintings will be on display at Mt. Tom’s Homemade Ice Cream, an ice cream shop in Easthampton, MA. This will be another great opportunity for Allie to exhibit and sell her artwork. Allie’s former college advisor, Ty Hanson, helped Allie make the connection to this venue. Allie said, “I’m working on creating paintings with an ice cream theme for this art show. I’m using bright, cheerful colors in the flavors of ice cream.”

“While other students are extremely timid and cautious in their work, Allison proceeds with directness and courage. I wish other students had her attitude.”

–Frank Cressotti, Fine Arts Instructor, HCC

Summing up her experience at HCC, Allie said, “I really enjoyed going to college! It was a great experience. I met really nice people and the professors were very helpful.” Her recommendation to other students with disabilities, “Follow your dreams!”

HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSCRIPT

These are the courses Allie took at HCC between Fall 2010 and Spring 2013.

Fine Arts

- Painting 1 & 2
- Basic Still Photography
- Basic Drawing
- Ceramics 1

Communications

- Public Speaking
- Fundamentals of Writing

Career Development

- Job Search Strategies
- Career Planning
- Professional Etiquette

Health & Wellness

- Yoga 1 & 2
- Self-Defense
- Tools for Resistance Training
- Intro to Wellness
- Zumba
- Personal Fitness

About the Authors

ALLISON ROHAN is a fine artist from South Hadley, MA. She specializes in acrylic and mixed media paintings. Allie attended the MAICEI Program at Holyoke Community College and successfully completed 17 classes. She is an active member of her art community and has exhibited her paintings at many galleries and receptions throughout Massachusetts.

TY HANSON is an inclusive higher education specialist for Think College with the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Before joining ICI, Ty was the coordinator of the MAICEI Program at Holyoke Community College, where she served as Allison’s college advisor.