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Danielle (Gilbertson) Lillge: Young Alumni Award

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2004 Young Alumni Award

Danielle (Gilbertson) Lillge '00

When Danielle graduated from St. Norbert College, her goal was “to effect change as an educator – to address the social inequalities that plague our educational system.” Her life since then, as a high school English teacher at Two Rivers, Wisconsin and as a graduate student at the University of Michigan, has begun to fulfill this goal.

But this passionate desire to affect the lives of others really began at the College. Danielle chose St. Norbert College because she wanted to be a part of a learning community where she could develop personal relationships with students, faculty and staff, where students were valued as contributors to campus life and where the College’s mission extended beyond the classroom and the campus. For Danielle, this included student teaching abroad, organizing service trips, helping to establish the TRIPS program, organizing the first “100 Men Who Cook” fund raiser for the TRIPS program and bringing Campus Ministry and LSI trips programs under a common vision and effort. Her accomplishments were recognized by her receiving the St. Norbert College Dean’s Award in her senior year.

At Two Rivers High School, Danielle spearheaded a three-year effort to establish new curricula to meet the needs of students who were having difficulty academically. With the objective of helping her students to see how their learning related to issues affecting the larger community and how they could have a voice in effecting change, Danielle and her students wrote and received a grant for a unit on poverty and homelessness. This, in turn, enabled the students to participate in service-learning efforts with the local Salvation Army and Habitat for Humanity Chapter and to work with Milwaukee-based Second Harvest.

Professionally, Danielle has made presentations at conferences in Wisconsin and Missouri about integrating research inquiry and technology. Recently, she spent four weeks as a writer at the Oakland National Writing Project Summer Institute, challenging traditional norms of writing instruction and exploring how writing can empower students. In all her efforts, she continues seeking to equip her students with the tools and understandings that will enable them to effect change in their own work and to view themselves as contributing to a larger community.

Danielle sincerely appreciates the opportunities SNC afforded her and all students, but she gives special accolades to Nancy Mathias: “working with Nancy on service trips helped me to envision how the field of education must be about social justice,” and how and why teachers need to enable their students “to envision anew their place, their power and their purpose in our communities.”

Hats off to Danielle, a St. Norbert College graduate who is making a real difference in the lives of her students – in and out of the classroom.

St. Norbert College

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