

The joy of scholarship

Phi Beta Kappa nod is the capstone of my cherished Madison Experience BY EDEN PARKS ('11)

Every so often, the college experiences that create the most personal exasperation can transform into sources of delight.

My Madison Experience had its shares of ups and downs. I have berated myself for choosing an overly full schedule to ensure I could take an extra class with a favorite professor. The same professor would share precious moments after class and offer encouragement, advice or hard-won praise. Sometimes I would exhaust myself by working into the early hours of the morning at Carrier Library. My reward — an exam sporting a better-than-expected grade. I'd walk across the Quad grimacing at the fact that, once again, I changed a correct response on a test to the wrong answer and recognized my misstep as soon as I turned in my paper.

I gained the valuable lesson of not taking everything quite so seriously.

There are also the Madison memories that are completely wonderful from start to finish: Becoming friends with people who have similar goals is high on that list. The most significant of my memorable Madison events occurred unexpectedly in my senior year when I received recognition from the Phi Beta Kappa Society, the nation's oldest and most prestigious academic honor society. I was excited and gratified by this honor. There is a certain level of pride knowing that the years of effort I put into studying did not go unnoticed or unappreciated.

As a member of the 2011 initiates into the Xi of Virginia JMU Phi Beta Kappa chapter, I attended an induction banquet for student inductees on March 18. It was a privilege to be in the company of JMU alumna and inductee Constance N. Wilson, M.D., a pioneer in medical research and founder of Endacea Inc., an emerging biopharmaceutical company. Wilson spoke eloquently about her gratitude for the gift of insight and the importance and rewards of using intellectual abilities for the benefit of others.

The 2011 inductees were read the words of Charles Evans Hughes, the 11th Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court; and those, too, have stayed in my mind: *"The particular interest*

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of Phi Beta Kappa is in liberal education. Whatever debate there may be as to its exact definition, it means the development by careful training of the capacity to appreciate what has been done and thought, the ability to make worthwhile appraisals of achievements, doctrines, theories, proposals. It is liberal because it emancipates. It signifies freedom from the tyranny of ignorance and, from what is worse, the dominion of folly. Learning is not its aim, so much as intelligence served by learning ... At this time, when the world stands in need of every influence, which favors intellectual discipline and achievement, the service of Phi Beta Kappa is of heightened value. It holds aloft the old banner of scholarship; to the students who have turned aside from easier paths and, by their talent and fidelity, have proved themselves to be worthy, it gives the fitting recognition of a special distinction."



Summa cum laude 2011 graduate Eden Parks says that her Phi Beta Kappa induction was the capstone on an already cherished Madison Experience.

'I know that it is incumbent on each of us to contribute to a better future.'

The weighty notion that a liberal education emancipates individuals defines my Madison Experience. Knowledge acquired is so much more than facts and figures. My studies as an English major have led me to develop a great deal as an individual. The exposure to different ideologies, cultures and worldviews has helped me to discern aspects of myself I would not have considered otherwise. This self-realization has been one of the greatest driving forces and the greatest benefit of my college education. Intellectual development has a tangible nature. Looking back on my freshman-year essays — which seemed very clever at the time — I shudder at my inexperience. Now, I look at the world I am entering and realize that, yes, the human family does need freedom from "folly" on so many levels. I know that it is incumbent on each of us to contribute to a better future.

Finally, I am humbled by the knowledge that the interest, aid and appreciation I received from my professors was not because of a Phi Beta Kappa status. From day one of classes, JMU professors made a real investment in their students. It was obvious they were in class because they loved to teach. From courses on the Gothic Novel to 17th-Century British Poetry, from Excursions in German Literature to Dante, from Creative Writing to the History of the English Language, my professors made each and every session a wonderful journey into the realm of scholarship.

Beyond the honor of now belonging to a prestigious few, I can say that I have come to value those intellectual experiences as my Madison legacy. For me, and I imagine for my fellow inductees, Phi Beta Kappa's acknowledgement is the capstone on an already cherished college experience.

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