

PROFESSORS YOU LOVE

Introduce yourself to your professor

You might form a lifelong friendship and change your Madison Experience

BY HEATHER BRANSCOME ('06)

It was a beautiful morning in May 2006 when I graduated from JMU. My emotions were on the psychological rollercoaster we all experience when faced with new challenges. I was both excited and apprehensive about my future. Yet, even these emotions could not come close to those I felt my first day at freshman orientation.

Now, I realize my fortune in encountering several great professors who exceeded my expectations and left a lasting impression on me. My first-semester biology professors, Dr. Carol Hurney and Dr. Sharon Babcock, left an indelible mark on my life, and saw me through every step of my Madison Experience.

My first recollection of Dr. Hurney is from the annual JMU Admissions Open House hosted for prospective biology majors. I was doubtful and anxious about declaring a major, but Dr. Hurney's contagious enthusiasm solidified my decision to choose biology. JMU surely chose the best professor to introduce students to the biology program!

Her Bio 114 lectures quickly became the highlight of my week. Dr. Hurney's passion for teaching is extremely palpable and her presentations are engaging. She quickly instilled in me the belief that one can never take too many notes. I have vivid memories of her pausing mid-sentence, looking up into the lecture hall and asking, "Why aren't you writing this down?" I'm glad that I even jotted down her humorous quotations. They provided some much-needed laughter while studying. And, my relentless note taking was extremely beneficial in other courses.

It took a few weeks before I got the first indication of how I was doing. I was mortified when I received a 'C' on the first

test. I thought I had nailed it. The transition from high school to college proved to be difficult, and I realized I needed advice on how to better adapt my study habits. I decided to speak with Dr. Babcock, who taught my Bio 114 lab. I had more interaction with her due to the smaller size of the lab class, so I deemed her more approachable. She didn't seem nearly as alarmed as I was

about my grade! I was stunned when she complimented an essay I had prepared for a lab report. After discussing my test, Dr. Babcock encouraged me to introduce myself to Dr. Hurney and to take advantage of office hours. I took this lesson to heart: Always introduce yourself to your professors.

I became a fixture at office hours offered by Drs. Babcock and Hurney, and they were always willing to answer questions. I know they recognized my insecurities, and their combined efforts slowly helped me to overcome them. With their help, my self-confidence increased and so did my performance.

It was bittersweet to see that first semester come to an end, but I maintained correspondence with Dr. Babcock and Dr. Hurney. Throughout

my Madison Experience, I found myself turning to them for academic advice. I was always generously welcomed into their offices. By the time I enrolled in Dr. Babcock's anatomy lecture course, I was a senior. I was no longer a shy, uncertain girl sitting in the back. I plowed through anatomy like it was my job. The knowledge that I finally achieved the level of academic satisfaction for which I had been striving was not only affirmed by my grades, but it gave me a sense of personal pride.

I have the utmost respect for Dr. Babcock's and Dr. Hurney's intelligence, dedication and passion for teaching. Their encouragement and kindness came at a crucial time, and it was invaluable. I'm thankful for that initial 'C.' I would not trade it for anything. Not even an A+. Thanks, Dr. B and Dr. H. ✎

About the Author Biology major Heather Branscome ('06) participated in the March of Dimes, Tri-Beta and was a member of the Rockingham Memorial Hospital Volunteer Auxiliary. She works for the American Type Culture Collection in Manassas, Va., and previously served as a cell biologist for more than three years. Branscome has completed several credits of graduate-level coursework at George Mason University.



Heather Branscome ('06) says JMU biology professors Sharon Babcock and Carol Hurney helped mold her into the type of student she wanted to become.

About the Professors Carol A. Hurney and Sharon Babcock are JMU biology professors. Hurney also serves as executive director of the Center for Faculty Innovation. She joined the JMU faculty in 1998. She earned her B.A. in biology from the University of Rochester in 1986 and a Ph.D. in biology from the University of Virginia in 1995. In 2005 she received the JMU General Education Distinguished Teaching Award. Sharon Babcock is associate director of the Institute for Innovation in Health and Human Services and coordinator of pre-professional health programs. She earned a B.S. from the University of Oklahoma and a Ph.D. from Duke University Medical Center.