

CAREER & EDUCATION

Scholars Find World of Opportunity

Mt. Hood students overcome obstacles

Mt. Hood Community College counts many hardworking, accomplished and truly amazing individuals among its 33,000 students. But perhaps none represent that absolute best in "earned potential" than Onjalai Flake and Drew Raine, who were recently selected to the 2011 All-Oregon Academic Team Scholars.

The award recognizes outstanding students for their academic achievement and commitment to public service. All 40 Oregon Academic Team Scholars were presented with medals by Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber on the floor of the House of Representatives.

Flake, at 25 years old, has lived a lifetime – and then some.

"I consider myself to be the ultimate survivor," she says. "In the past few years, I have survived cancer, buried my father and other relatives and helped my mom battle an advanced stage of breast cancer." And, she assumed this huge responsibility while taking a full load of classes at MHCC.

"Three years ago a series of unfortunate events within my family brought me from St. Louis, Mo., to Portland," says Flake, who is one of nine children. "Because of this move, I had the unique opportunity to attend college through my father's veterans' benefits. I would be a first generation, non-traditional student. Fear, doubt and worry quickly rushed in and led me to wonder whether college was the right choice for me."

However, when she found an MHCC course catalog in her mailbox with large writing urging her to "be your dream," she had no doubt that college – and MHCC in particular – were the right path.

"And, it turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life," says Flake, who has accom-



Drew Raine (left) and Onjalai Flake earn honors for their academic achievement and commitment to public service.

plished much in the past two years at MHCC. She chartered the College's first Black Student Union, serves as an officer of Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society of two-year colleges, and has a resume filled with scholarships and accolades.

After graduating from MHCC June 11, she plans to attend George Fox University and major in communication arts and minor in journalism broadcasting.

For Raine, many people believed that a college education was a long shot for this 31-year-old woman. Computer illiterate, low income, single parent, a learning disability – and, as if that

weren't enough, she suffered a stroke at age 18 that nearly destroyed her arm.

After years of physical therapy, Raine is now fully recovered, but says she was "forced to spend her hard-earned college money on doctors' fees."

Armed with determination to continue her education, she enrolled in the Transitions program at MHCC. Transitions is a career planning and college preparation program for single parents, displaced homemakers and women with low income who have faced significant life challenges.

"As a single mother struggling

for self-sufficiency, I did not have the skills to provide a sustainable future for my family. I needed to become computer literate just to fill out a job application. The process of enrolling in college intimidated me," she says. "The Transitions program taught me how to identify my skills, exposed me to the resources that

have made me a successful student and allowed me to transform from simply surviving to thriving."

Through Transitions, Raine says she is able to "recognize the unique trials of our lives, look past the trappings of our cultures and previous experience and into the unique talents of the women around us. As I let go of my assumptions, learned to value my talents and employed interdependence, I discovered the power of my voice. Now, I want to support that transformative process for others as a peer mentor."

She now has her sights set on earning an associate degree next year in Computer Information Systems with a focus on database development. She plans to transfer to Washington State University Vancouver and pursue a bachelor's degree in business with a focus on Management Information Systems.

Both Flake and Raine credit MHCC with playing a large role in their selection as All-Oregon Academic Team Scholars: Instructors empower them, fellow students inspire them and their own personal challenges provide a strong sense of purpose in their lives.

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