

REFLECTIONS

ISSUE #104 | FALL 2024



CONTENTS

3. A Letter From the Editor

4. From DC to Doughnut Mogul

6. Ice Breaking Advice

8. Dont Wait to Use What You Learn

10. L-Wing Murals Colour Us Intrigued

12. Empowering Exceptional Futures

14. Networking the Beat

16. Leading With Passion

18. Breaking the Stereotype and Building Connections

20. Full Circle Moment

22. The Lords of Gaming

24. HVAC Alumnus' Pain, Packaged in Purpose

27. DC Professor Passionate About Community Policing

29. Student Chefs Use Their Cultural Backgrounds to Take the Win

31. A Fresh Start for a New Mom

33. Who Would Have Thought a Tweet Could Change Everything

35. Reflecting on Lessons Learned and Journeys Shared

38. Letter from Alumni Office



Durham College bus loop in early fall. (Melanie Vincent)

Letter From the Editor



Dear alumni,
Welcome to the final edition of *Reflections*. For over 25 years, *Reflections* has shared and celebrated Durham College (DC) alumni wins, breakthroughs and accomplishments. The magazine reconnects us all, reminding students and alumni alike of the strength that can be found within the DC community. As we recognize this final issue, let us do so with an understanding - an understanding that while this chapter may be closing, the stories of our alumni will continue to unfold in exciting and unexpected ways.

This is not just the final issue of *Reflections*, it's also the final year of the DC PR and Strategic Communications program. During my time in at DC, this program has been heavily led by a DC alumni herself, Matisse Hamel-Nelis. I want to give many thanks to her and all the hard work she has given to this program and its students. The unwavering guidance and support of Hamel-Nelis was instrumental to my success at DC, and it will be exciting to see her carry on the new Public Relations Graduate Certificate program come Fall 2024.

Our graduating class will be made up of just 17 students. Due to the small size of our program, I was given incredible opportunities. I had the opportunity to connect deeply with my professors, ask countless questions and be given endless amounts of great advice. I had the opportunity to bond with my peers on an intimate level, feeling a strong sense of comradery and support throughout the stressful semesters. I remember the course that brought us all together: digital presentations. Everyone's mutual discomfort with public speaking sparked a closeness and trust that continued on throughout our two years at DC. I thank everyone for all the applause and uplifting comments that kept me going and gave me enough confidence finally enjoy giving presentations.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the production of *Reflections* over the years. To our alumni, for inspiring us with your achievements; to the PR and Strategic Communications students, for capturing these stories with passion and dedication; and to you, our readers, for joining us each issue to celebrate the impactful stories that come after DC. Here's to the next chapter in the DC alumni story, may we continue to support and inspire one another for years to come.

Ryann Wiseman

Managing Editor
Student, PR and Strategic Communications



Editor-in-chief
Matisse Hamel-Nelis



Copy Editor
Beth Coles



Copy Editor
Ally Medeiros



Copy Editor
Meagan Poole



Art Director
Sarina Jetha



Associate Art Director
Dan Cordeiro



Photo Editor
Nadeen Manasra

From DC to Doughnut Mogul

By Geetika Sharma

Photos by Nicole Morais

Right in the bustling heart of Whitby, Ont., there's an awesome sweet spot that has quickly become a favourite among locals and tourists. Crave Doughnuts was founded by Nicole Morais, a Hospitality Management graduate from Durham College, along with her partner Jeremy. They have carved out a name for themselves in the world of gourmet doughnuts, capturing taste buds with their made-from-scratch delights. Morais' journey from a student to a successful entrepreneur is a testament to her passion, resilience and the sweet taste of success.

"I really enjoyed the hands-on approach that Durham College offers," says Morais. "The teachers are really passionate."

After graduating in 2016, Morais moved to British Columbia to immerse herself in the hospitality industry. She worked as a server and gained valuable hands-on



Indulge in a sweet moment with Nicole Morais and her delightful doughnut delights!

experience, but her passion for entrepreneurship never faded. In 2017, she returned to Ontario with a dream and the determination to make it a reality. Alongside her partner, she embarked on a journey that ultimately led to the creation of Crave Doughnuts.

"Everything is from scratch, so it's necessary to find the right members," says Morais. "That was something essential

to us."

Morais recognized the need for top-notch, handcrafted doughnuts and started organizing pop-up shops in different stores. This ultimately laid the groundwork for her growing business. These pop-ups served more than just the purpose of selling doughnuts, they provided Morais with an opportunity to engage with the community, establish

strong connections and foster relationships that would play a crucial role in promoting Crave Doughnuts.

In 2019, they launched their first storefront in Whitby. The decision to open a physical store was driven by the significant support and demand they received from their pop-up shops. The success of their business led to the opening of a second



Doughnut in hand, happiness in heart!

location in Oshawa, which also serves as the central kitchen for both stores.

“Durham is huge, and it’s just crazy how much it’s growing,” states Morais. “There is so much opportunity for us to grow here.”

Their commitment to quality and community is reflected in their seasonal menus which feature locally-sourced ingredients such as apples, strawberries, and maple syrup. Crave Doughnuts has set a high standard for gourmet pastries with their best-selling items, including their signature crullers, crème

brûlée doughnuts and apple fritters. Their range of rotating, fun flavours have helped to create a loyal customer base. Starting a business is a huge undertaking. Launching one during a global pandemic presented unforeseen difficulties, however they managed to navigate these challenging times with grace and ingenuity. They promptly adjusted to the “new normal” by introducing an online ordering system, enabling customers to savour their scrumptious offerings safely.

Morais’ journey with Crave Doughnuts has been

successful, but it has also come with its fair share of challenges. One of these challenges is overproduction, which requires constant balancing. Despite all this, Morais has found a way to turn this challenge into an opportunity by giving back to the community.

“There is so much opportunity for us to grow here.”

Excess doughnuts are donated to various charities, homeless shelters and first

responders.

“We really appreciate everything they do for the community,” say Morais.

This embodies Crave Doughnuts’ philosophy of supporting and engaging with the community. Morais’ journey from a Hospitality Management graduate to becoming the founder of a beloved doughnut empire is an inspiration to entrepreneurs everywhere. As Crave Doughnuts continues to thrive, the partners have set their sights on further expansion, hoping to introduce their unique creations to doughnut enthusiasts across the country.

This is the story of how a simple idea fueled by passion, hard work and community support became the thriving business that is Crave Doughnuts. It shows that dreaming big and having the support of your community can take you a long way. Let’s not forget, who can resist the allure of a perfectly made doughnut? 🍩

Ice-Breaking Advice

By Meagan Poole

Photos by Stew MacDonald

Numerous post-secondary applicants and students frequently contemplate, “What are my passions and interests?” The answer to this question usually influences their selection of a preferred program as they embark on their educational journey. Stew MacDonald discovered his love for sports early on, but he realized he needed to enhance his understanding of the business side of things after completing high school. After talking with a friend who already took the program, he felt confident, and decided to pursue Sport Administration at Durham College (DC). He believed that the comprehensive curriculum - along with an internship opportunity with the Oshawa Generals - would not only assist him landing future job opportunities but maintaining them as well.

The value DC brought me was the practical real-world application, from being in the classroom, and through

the interning I did,” says MacDonald. “Without those two pieces, I might have been able to talk my way into a job, but I wouldn’t have held on to it for long.”

Since graduating in 1981, MacDonald has made significant progress from being a newly-graduated high school student with limited business knowledge.

“The value DC brought me was the practical real-world application, from being in the classroom, and through the interning I did.”

Since 2021, he has held the esteemed position of President and Chief Revenue Officer at OEG Sports & Entertainment, where he is entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the organization’s revenue operations. As one of the senior leaders, he leads a team that manages various aspects such as ticketing, premium seating, corporate

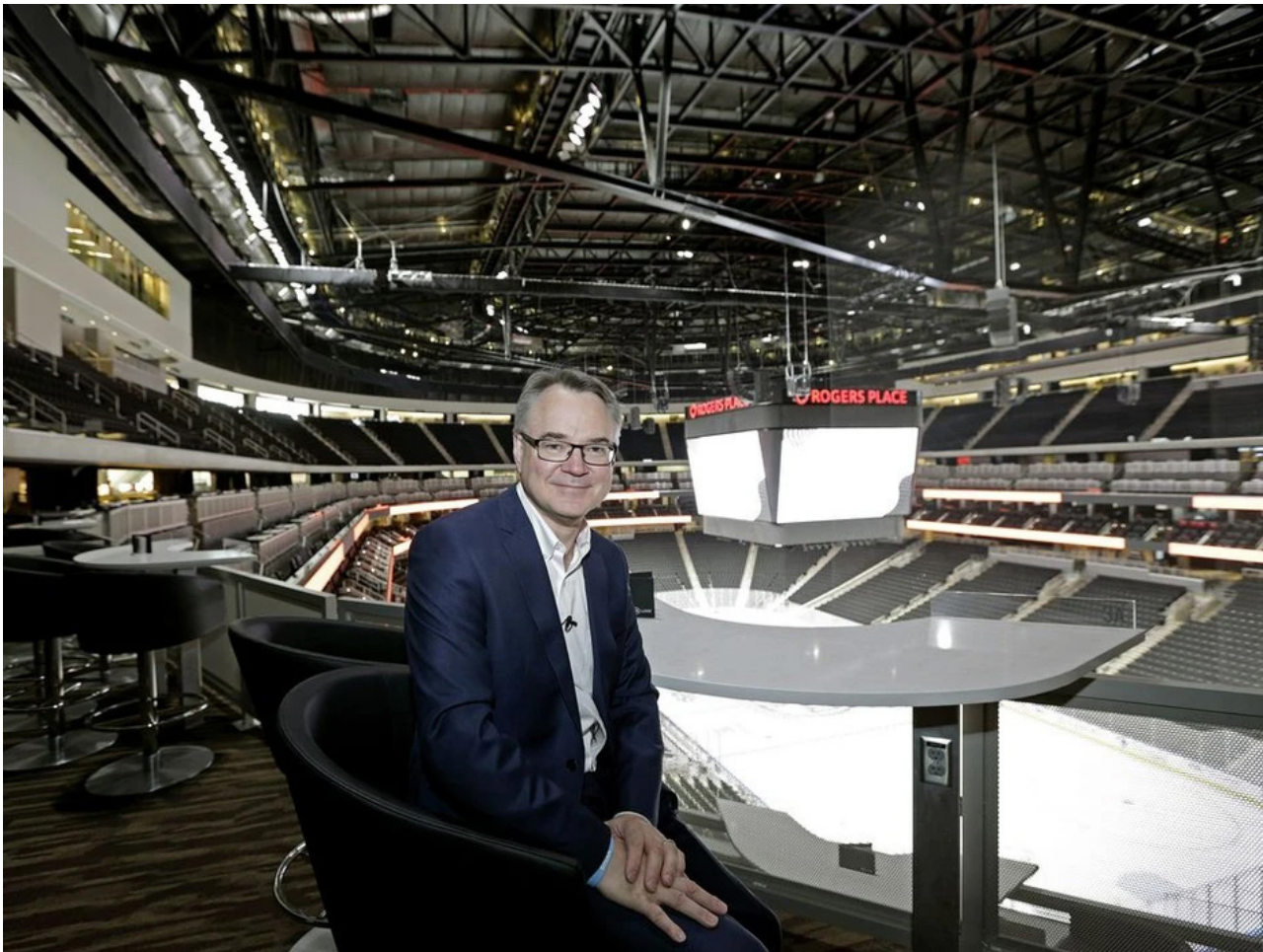


Stew MacDonald has become a marketing master.

partnerships, marketing, media and business intelligence for the Edmonton Oilers, Edmonton Oil Kings, Bakersfield Condors, and Rogers Place. And *Forbes* even acknowledged the Edmonton

Oilers as the highest revenue-generating team in the NHL this year.

Recently, MacDonald and team have been focusing on community outreach like they normally do, with a



Stew MacDonald's passion for his role, the game and the team made this moment possible.

strong involvement of their community foundation in the marketplace. They have been actively supporting amateur sports and making sports accessible for children, particularly in their own downtown area but it goes beyond that. Their

50/50 draw surpasses any other team in the world in terms of generating funds, allowing them to contribute a significant amount of money back to the community. These accomplishments serve as a testament to MacDonald and his team's exceptional expertise

and effective strategies, showcasing a remarkable transformation from his early days at DC.

"When you graduate, you've got your degree, and you're looking for that first job," states MacDonald. "Don't worry about job title,

geographic location, or how much you're getting paid. You've got to pay your bills, but don't make those your priorities. Your priorities should be your experience."

It is essential for prospective post-secondary students or current enrollees to carefully consider and reflect on their passions when choosing college programs.

“Don't worry about job title, geographic location, or how much you're getting paid.”

This question holds importance as it can ultimately lead to a fulfilling and rewarding career. If your passion lies in sports like MacDonald's, dedicating yourself to hard work in Sports Administration may result in becoming a senior leader within your favourite hockey team. When you are truly passionate about your field, it may not even feel like work. 🏒

Don't Wait to Use What You Learn

By Kevin Otoadese

Photos by Kristine Pineda



Clarke enjoys cutting various hair types and does an excellent job each time.

For most students, waiting until after graduation to use the skills they learned at Durham College is the typical path; however, that is not the case for current Public Relations student Joshua Clarke. The Public Relations program at Durham spans for about two and a half years, and second-year student Clarke is not letting any time go to waste. Through his own passion and hard work, Clarke grows his business using the marketing and communications

skills he is progressively adapting from the program and says he has noticed an improvement in his success. When Clarke was asked about his plans, he said he wishes “to implement that (public relations) into my business and create a name for myself when I get older.”

Clarke has been cutting hair for about three years and is currently working at the Shear Brilliance hair salon in Oshawa. Clarke took classes to learn how to become a hairstylist

throughout high school but started doing it more frequently in Grade 12.

Clarke completed a co-

“My passion for cutting hair will definitely be something that sticks with me throughout the years ,”

operative placement in a Black owned barbershop called Jackman’s Hair Co in Whitby

(sadly, no longer in business) to get his certification and began occasionally cutting his friends’ hair for some extra money. Clarke said, “in 2022, I took the leap and then actually decided to start cutting hair as just my part-time job.” Clarke is sure he can grow his business using effective and persuasive communication that he is learning as a PR student here at Durham College. Clarke uses PR tactics such as taking advantage of social media his business with his

hairstyling Instagram account @tendocuts. As a Black barber and hairstylist, Clarke performs protective hairstyles for afro hair, Dreadlock maintenance or twists making him a great addition to the community. White hairstylist may not be familiar with these hairstyles themselves and as such not a lot of people can provide these services here in Oshawa.

Clarke is nothing short of busy, he is a full-time college student and a plays middle guard as a member of the varsity volleyball team. He juggles dealing with classes, assignments, and team practice, but makes time to

build relationships with his clients and even provides home visits.

“As Josh’s first client, I’ve seen the improvement, persistence and passion that he has put towards his craft, and it shows due to his efficiency and effectiveness with his art” says long-time client Marcus Kilpatrick.

Clarke has used many marketing tactics like making edited before and after videos on his Instagram to showcase his work and grow his business, especially since it is still starting. Hairstyling is not a brand and is more in the service industry, so

all communication is made directly by the service provider to the client. Clarke performs this as efficiently and effectively as possible by adapting PSAs and Crisis communications techniques

“As Josh’s first client, I’ve seen the improvement, persistence and passion that he has put towards his craft, and it shows due to his efficiency and effectiveness with his art ”

learned in the program, for example any significant announcements about his business are publicised through his platforms to make sure they are received by his clients

“My passion for cutting hair will definitely be something that sticks with me throughout the years.” Clarke intends to continue this in the foreseeable future and understands that the PR course still has a lot to offer. Clarke is a perfect example that you don’t have to wait to graduate to use what you learn to benefit yourself. 🙌



4c hair styles are Clarkes speciality but he is not afraid to branch out.

L-Wing Murals Colour Us Intrigued

Story and photos by Alex Rae

While walking through the halls of the L-Wing in Durham College's Oshawa Campus, it might become easy to detect just how bare and monochrome the walls are in what's supposed to be the home of the Faculty of Media, Art and Design. Thankfully, the students in the Fine Arts program had the same mentality.

Despite existing as a program since 2002, Fine Arts hasn't had a surplus of opportunities to express themselves throughout the campus aside from a medium sized space by a Tim Hortons on campus. Thankfully, this lack of representation came to a grinding halt when the Fine Arts Program received a sizable budget to expand their creative stylings into the halls outside of their classrooms.

Fine Arts students Meghan Costello, Elijah McKenzie,



(Left to Right) Jennifer Rammler, Elijah McKenzie, Meghan Costello, and their professor Sean McQuay.

Jennifer Rammler and Jordan Dolman were acquired by their professor Sean McQuay through the work-study program at DC to work on this project. The goal? To splash a little more colour and art in the L-Wing as well as display just how diverse the artistic student body is at Durham.

After workshopping some ideas for a while on how to properly convey this idea of

diversity representation and selecting the right real estate to take up, Sean's team finally landed on doing 18 full sized

murals all around the L-Wing.

Unfortunately, as with most art, they couldn't start putting

pen to paper (or in this case paint to wall) immediately.

First this ragtag team of artists had to begin sketching out ideas for what they want their murals to look like and what sort of idea they want to convey through the art, if any. "They gave us a lot of freedom on what we wanted to design," says Costello.

Eventually it was decided that they'd want to express as many different styles and ideas as possible throughout the pieces such as Realism, Geometric, Abstract and other design concepts. This is what they decided to run with.

“They gave us a lot of freedom on what we wanted to design.”

Once finally happy with the 18 mural designs they selected (of a total 60 ideas), they submitted them for approval



Jennifer Rammler and Fine Arts Professor Sean McQuay admire one of the murals that they worked on.

from past Durham College president Don Lovisa, and current president Dr. Elaine Popp. Despite what you may have seen stereotyped in pop culture, the big players at the top of the college are some of the biggest supporters of the Fine Arts program. Dr. Popp has even purchased some student art for her office on multiple occasions.

Once the time was up and approval was granted, it was

finally off to halls to get started on the murals. Over the next couple months, the murals started to take shape and it was clear to not just the artists but to class commuters walking through the wing that the pieces breathed new life into the halls. The large new designs provide the plain walking spaces with something new to look at.

Although still in progress, it's obvious that Meghan, Elijah,

Jennifer and Jordan have been putting in many thoughtful hours into each design that have been painted in the L-Wing with Sean's help and guidance.

Without a doubt, the murals they've worked so diligently on will be the special touch that current and future students will be drawn to at Durham College. 🎨

DID YOU KNOW?

Fine Art Students are the ones responsible for the really cool art on the piano in The Pit on the Durham College Oshawa Campus!

Empowering Exceptional Futures

Story and photos by Radhika
Matta

Each child's educational journey is unique, and this is especially true for children with exceptionalities. The level of support and the educational approach can make a significant difference in their experience. Thus a combination of an inclusive and supportive educational environment, children with exceptionalities can thrive. Jodi-Ann Dunkley is a wonderful example of an educator who has made a positive impact on the lives of children with exceptionalities. Durham College has recently recognized her achievements by including her in the prestigious Dean's Honour Roll. As a standout student in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program, she's someone who truly embodies the "leading the way" spirit.

Dunkley's journey began with a nudge from her colleague while she was working as a home support worker.

"A colleague suggested that I should work with children,"



Dunkley's Journey: Advocating inclusive education, fostering environments where children of all abilities thrive. Through tireless dedication, it champions the rights and empowerment of children with exceptionalities.

says Dunkley. "And ever since then, it has been amazing."

This push helped her find her true calling, which is supporting and working with children with exceptionalities, forging meaningful connections with their parents, and fostering an adaptable environment where children can thrive. Working hand-

in-hand with these children and along with some great educators at her non-profit placement is what propelled her ability to work hard towards her passion and also maintain her high grades.

Dunkley's commitment to her work shines through when discussing her experience of working with children who

possess unique challenges.

"I've had children who elope, which means they run out of centres," she says. "It's a dangerous situation."

To navigate through such situations safely, she created "STOP" signs for children and teaches them how to use the word "STOP" themselves. Her creativity in finding



Durham College proudly honours Jodi-Ann Dunkley, a trailblazer in Early Childhood Education and Inclusive Support. Her visionary leadership has elevated standards in the field, emphasizing inclusivity and empowering educators.

solutions, in order to keep the children inside by directing their attention to other things such as toys or food reflects her unwavering dedication to ensuring that the children under her care are always protected and well taken care of.

Looking ahead, it's evident that Dunkley's passion and aspirations extend beyond her personal success. She envisions herself joining the Early Childhood Educators Association and continuing her journey of supporting vulnerable populations.

"Observing the children, recording what they're doing, and then being able to come back and give those resources to the families," says Dunkley.

She currently works in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and respite care with a child who has cortical visual disability. She hopes to use her expertise to raise awareness for the unique challenges these children face.

Being a second-year student, she has set an inspiring example of the transformative power of education and compassion. Throughout her

academic journey, she has demonstrated an unwavering commitment and a deep desire to make a positive impact in Early Childhood Education.

“ Jodi-Ann Dunkley is true pioneer in Early Childhood Education, inspiring educators to create empowering learning environments that embrace diversity and individual differences ”

As Dunkley prepares to embark on the next chapter of her journey and continues to lead the way, Durham College celebrates her limitless potential.

Her exceptional drive and compassion promises to make a lasting impact on the field of Early Childhood Education and beyond. Not only did she carve out a path to success for herself, but she is also making valuable contributions to the community.

The pride and admiration Durham College has for its students. The college recognizes their great potential, and celebrates their drive and compassion.

The students' commitment and dedication to the field of Early Childhood Education is recognized, as well as their potential to make meaningful contributions beyond their studies. 🙌

Networking the Beat

By Sophie Kauffman

Ellie Doe-Demosse's talent and dedication have not gone unnoticed in the corridors of the music industry. Her professional journey from Durham College's PR program to the communications co-ordinator at Universal Music Canada is evidence of her unwavering dedication to and passion for the art of sound.

After earning her advanced diploma in PR & Strategic Communications from Durham College, Ellie set out on her career with a well-defined goal in mind. Backed with expertise from her professors and driven by aspiration, she entered the music industry prepared to leave her mark. She faced challenges along the way, but her unrivalled spirit served as a guide to help her navigate the maze of possibilities and roadblocks.

Ellie quickly settled into the industry and became well-versed in the nuances of music distribution, marketing and production. Her capacity for quick learning and adaptation



Ellie Doe-Demosse is a force to be reckoned with, always looking for new ways to engage her clients audiences. (Ellie Doe-Demosse)

attracted attention, opening many doors for her to demonstrate her skills and

knowledge. Ellie's journey was characterized by several milestones, each of which

brought her closer to her ultimate goal. These milestones ranged from helping organize local gigs to spearheading digital marketing campaigns. She quickly fostered genuine connections and expanded her network with major players in the music industry at Universal Music Group with her strategic thinking and unwavering work ethic.

Being a member of the dynamic team at Universal Music, her responsibilities extend well beyond what is included in your typical job

“Reach out, but reach out with intention.”

description. She is a force to be reckoned with, always pushing the envelope and looking for new ways to engage the audiences of artists from Kali Uchis to Yung Gravy. Whether she's going on promo days with new talent or coming up with innovative marketing



Ellie and her colleagues from Universal Music celebrate Yung Gravy's single titled "Betty (Get Money)." (James Trauzzi)

plans, Ellie's influence is felt across the entire company and has left a lasting impression on the music industry. Her

"Reach out, but reach out with intention," she emphasizes. Ellie's strategic outreach and purposeful

“Try different ways to craft organic connections. Like finding ways to go out into the world and network with people currently in the spaces you'd like to occupy some day.”

journey is a monument to the transformational power of passion and perseverance, not just one of personal achievement. Not only has she made a name for herself through her dedication, but she has also motivated other young students to follow their dreams with the same abandon.

"Try different ways to craft organic connections, like finding ways to go out into the world and network with people currently in the spaces you'd like to occupy in the future" advises Ellie, reflecting her proactive approach to networking.

Her journey is a testament to this ethos, as she actively sought avenues to engage with industry professionals and carve out her path in the music world.

connections have undoubtedly contributed to her success at Universal Music Canada. Her story exemplifies the power of intentionality in forging meaningful relationships and advancing one's career in the PR industry.

Ellie is a perfect example of the kind of person who embodies the unwavering passion and unrelenting dedication that lie beneath the surface of the music industry. Her story of resiliency and determination — from Durham College to Universal Music — serves as a reminder that your dreams only stop when you do. 🎧

Leading With Passion

By Ryann Wiseman

With the announcement of Don Lovisa's retirement, Durham College (DC) was left eagerly anticipating the appointment of its new president. With a new president comes a new chapter for the college: students, faculty and the community alike wondered who would be the one to step into this role. Then, in January 2024, Dr. Elaine Popp was announced as the next president of DC, making her the second female president in DC history. Dr. Popp will now share her 25 years of experience in post-secondary education and excitement for teaching with the college, marking the beginning of a new era for the college.

Who is Dr. Popp? For the past nine years, she has served as Durham College's executive vice president of academics. In this role she brought numerous innovative projects to life and has launched 50 new programs, including six four-year bachelor's degree programs. Dr. Popp's emphasis on global engagement work,

applied research and digital learning have transformed the college and modernized program delivery.

As president, she intends to bring a community-focused approach to DC. With an emphasis on sustainability, DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) and belonging initiatives, and future-proofing the college, Dr. Popp is set to transform under her presidency. In terms of future proofing, she envisions new technology in the classroom, innovative program delivery and a focus on professional development opportunities. As for community building, it is her belief that colleges have a responsibility to make sure students are being educated not just to graduate, but to carry on important conversations about DEI as they enter their careers. She plans to bring these into focus in the next five-year strategic plan for the college, as the current plan ends in 2025. It's evident by both her future- and community-focused plans as well as her previous contributions to the



Dr. Elaine Popp is the new president of Durham College.

(Durham College)

college that Dr. Popp will be bringing many new and exciting projects, opportunities and initiatives to DC.

With any new presidency,

there are naturally questions about how one intends to lead. As a leader, Dr. Popp's warmth and wisdom speak volumes.

"Leadership is not about

being in the spotlight. It's about making others shine," she says. "I do believe in transformational leadership. So, helping other people ensure they have the ability to grow and realize their own full potential."

Dr. Popp's passion for teaching is evident in her candor as she shares about a person who has inspired her most in her career and life. She attributes her venture into post-secondary education to her second-year university professor, Dr. Marla Sokolowski.

"She taught ecology, and she was my first female professor," says Dr. Popp. "So, in first year I had all male professors, and second year I had all male professors except for her, and she was amazing. She was a great professor. She was motivational, inspirational and she also dressed cool. And so, she became a role model, and I saw myself being able to follow in her footsteps. And then I got my PhD, and I could teach. I would say that she was definitely a reason I started thinking about pursuing graduate studies and ended up where I am."

As the college navigates the

challenges and opportunities ahead, Dr. Popp's guidance will undoubtedly inspire a legacy of innovation, inclusivity and community engagement.

“Leadership is not about being in the spotlight. It's about making others shine. I do believe in transformational leadership. So, helping other people ensure they have the ability to grow and realize their own potential.”

The future of DC under her presidency is bright, marking a period of transformative change and lasting impact on students, faculty and the Durham community.

"I'm honoured to be considered to serve in the role for the next president," says Dr. Popp. "I'm excited about what might lay ahead for the college, building on our already strong foundation." 🏆

Exercise and Education

Dr. Popp is an avid cyclist and member of a local cycling club. When she's not working, she takes her bike and spends her days exploring the outdoors. She chose to pursue her PhD in exercise physiology because of her interest in how the body adapts to exercise and training. In fact, before she began her career in post-secondary education, she was a personal trainer. She loved helping people change behaviours to adopt more active and healthy lifestyles.

"I've always had a passion for learning," she says. "I think that passion for learning was just a natural stimulus for me to want to share that passion and help people learn... I taught horseback riding, I also taught fitness classes. So teaching, you know, teaching anything, I think, interests me. And I think it stems from the fact that I love learning."



Dr. Elaine Popp set out on a 50-kilometre ride with some fellow cycling enthusiasts from Durham College.

(Twitter @ElainePopp)

Breaking the Stereotype and Building Connections

By Bethany Coles

Photos by Durham College

According to Statistics Canada, in Canada, only five per cent of skilled trades workers are women. Here at Durham College (DC), the Faculty of Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship is leading the way in eliminating barriers for women entering skilled trades to increase in the presence of women in a male-dominated field.

Unifor recently partnered with Sheridan College, St. Clair College, Fanshawe College, and now Durham College has joined *Women in Red Seal Trades – Advancing the Career Ecosystem*. This is a project that will lead initiatives that concentrate on giving women in skilled trades support in career education, building a network and eliminating barriers. This initiative has received over \$2 million in funding, with \$300,000 contributed by Unifor.

“As we build our network support internally, we look to build externally too,” says Rebecca Milburn, principal

at Durham College, Whitby campus, and executive dean of the Faculty of Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship. “It’s an opportunity for all of our students to now be able to connect across the province to build a network of support and reduce barriers.”

Over the course of three years, this project will allow female students within the Faculty of Skilled Trades and

Apprenticeship to build a community through a variety of networking opportunities across Ontario. Giving women an excellent space of their own to grow, eliminate boundaries

and build a successful career in the skilled trades field will help increase the percentage of women in skilled trades and close the gap.

Partially funded by the

“Although we’re building a network, we also try to remove barriers. Whether that is a gender barrier, stereotype or a financial barrier, the goal is to remove those and create a level playing field for everyone to join.”



Women in the Faculty of STA gain incredible networking opportunities.

Government of Canada’s Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy, *Women in Red Seal Trades – Advancing the Career Ecosystem* will allow women access to a larger network of support and barrier reductions in training and employment.

“Although we’re building a network, we also try to remove barriers,” says Milburn. “Whether that is a gender barrier, stereotype or a financial barrier, the goal is to remove those and create a level playing field for everyone to join.”

Durham College is among the founding members of



The number of women in the Faculty of STA continues to see a positive growth each year.

this program and the group will ask four more colleges to join next year. However, this is not the first time we've seen DC leading the way in this field.


With an already well-established women's network at Whitby campus, Durham College has seen an increase in female enrolment in the Faculty of Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship. According

to the Office of Research Services Innovation and Entrepreneurship, from 2019 to present, female apprenticeship program enrolment has almost tripled with an increase of 36.2 per cent. Similarly, female enrolment in skilled trades programs has increased by 10 per cent since 2019.

This ground-breaking partnership is not exclusive to

Red Seal tradeswomen, but it is beneficial to everyone including apprentices and allies. It benefits employers, employees and of course, tradeswomen. There is no shortage of excitement surrounding this project and there has been excellent feedback from faculty members. The network is already seeing growth.

"Not only is there a growth in skilled trades in all of Canada, but we've seen growth at change in gender interest," says Milburn. "That's important because we all know that teams work best when they're diverse."

It's no surprise that DC is breaking boundaries and building connections to create diverse and well-rounded teams in the skilled trades space. The future is bright for women and DC is cheering them on every step of the way. 

DID YOU KNOW?

Annually, the Faculty of STA hosts a Young Women in Science, Technology and Trades Conference for girls 12 to 14 years old from Durham Region to educate them on future career possibilities through hands-on experiences.

The Faculty of Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship at Durham Colleges offers over 16 different programs.

Full Circle Moment

Story and photos by Jasmin Sisk

Her Oshawa, Ont., roots grow deep, and she bleeds Durham College green — Liz Chapman has come full circle and Durham College students are fortunate she did. In Chapman's high school years, she was a part of several different school clubs, including being a part the student council.

she went through the program, she fell in love with the work and discovered that it was an amazing opportunity to also help promote the artwork of her other artist friends. She eventually involved a large group of artists within the Durham Region where she promoted art shows and other various events. After graduating from Durham College, she never would

interest they have and tries to find ways to make clubs that suit their unique interests. "My job is to help support students with their ideas by helping them with event planning, marketing themselves, a little bit of everything that

comes along with being a PR professional," says Chapman. "It has been truly an amazing role." Another major part of what Chapman does within her role is building connections with students. "I feel incredibly lucky to be back with DCSA,"

“My job is to help support students with their ideas by helping them with event planning, marketing themselves, a little bit of everything that comes along with being a PR professional.”

Never did she think that those fond experiences would help provide her with transferable skills that would be beneficial to her eventual career. Chapman was raised in Oshawa, and after graduating from high school, she decided to take PR and strategic communications at Durham College. Her initial intention in taking the program was to build skills that could help her market herself as an artist. As

have guessed that she would eventually end up going back to Durham College, but this time not as a student, as an employee. Chapman was hired as the student network and engagement co-ordinator within the Durham College Student Association (DCSA). At DCSA, Chapman helps students create their own student clubs on the Durham College campus. She engages with students to explore what



Liz Chapman is excited to be back on the DC Oshawa Campus.



Liz Chapman feels incredibly lucky to have been working for the Durham College Student Association for almost 4 years now.

she says. "I thought I would be a really great fit for the role, and I fell in love with the student associations because of everything they do and have to offer." She loves the fact that she isn't trying to sell anyone anything in her role. Her favourite part is being able to connect with people and inform them about the awesome benefits that DCSA

has to offer. "When I started at Durham there were only about four clubs students could participate in," says Chapman. "Today, we are pleased to offer Durham College students approximately 50 different clubs on campus." In Chapman's free time, she is passionate about creating art and event planning, so she is pleased that she was able to

put both of those passions to good use in her position. "I am fortunate that I learned so many skills from the PR and strategic communications program that I use every day in this position," says Chapman. Chapman is passionate about her position, and about helping students find a meaningful way to connect with other students who share similar passions

and interests. She is proud to work for Durham College, and the students are lucky she has chosen a career path that brought her full circle, helping them lead the way to a wholesome and fun college experience. 🍀

The Lords of Gaming

By Daniel Cordeiro

Photos by Melanie Vincent

In the digital arena, where reflexes and strategy reign supreme, the world of esports sparks to life. It captures viewers with its explosive display of skill, spectacle, and pure competitive spirit.

Since the 1970s, the Durham Lords have been a proud part of Durham College's campus and have brought a feeling of community to the college since their inception. Spanning a majority of sports, it's no surprise that with today's gaming culture, a team of students would come together under the Lords' banner to fight for their place in the college's legacy through esports.

Being an esports player is demanding and tests the mettle of many players. It becomes more than just a game; you stop playing for yourself and begin playing for others. As part of the Durham Lords varsity team roster, in-game performance is important, but the players must also maintain their grades to stay on the team.

“It's about being able to regulate yourself and bring your best to the team.”

With multiple video games hosting a booming competitive scene, the esports team needed to collect a variety of teammates, each with a different game specialty. Housing tryouts twice a year, the Durham Lords quickly

expanded its roster, searching out students on campus who felt their skills were honed enough to land them a spot on the team. With 35 players, the team has covered most of the currently played competitive titles by separating into subgroups dedicated to individual games, allowing its members to focus on the games they are good at. This strategy has led to the team to quickly making a name for

themselves in esports.

“I'm really proud of my team,” says Pineda as he describes the team's recent successes, “Placing top eight at FragFest proved a lot to ourselves, especially with the veteran teams we faced.”

The Durham Lords have demonstrated their capabilities with each passing event, ranking first in Canada and sixth in the world in Rocket League. In this pseudo-racing



The arena comes alive where even lords gather to test their skill and prove they have what it takes to join campus esports.



Students gather to enjoy the campus esports arena which welcomes everyone whether you are team member or a someone looking to kill some time and play some games.

game, the players play soccer while controlling vehicles. The team demonstrate excellence in their craft and have won several tournaments both here on campus against Ontario Tech, defending the Campus Clash title, and off campus, with their recent win in the NACE Star League — an online collegiate competition spanning all of North America.

The core of successful esports is teamwork, and the Durham Lords reinforce this through their training and practice. Each game has a dedicated coach who

ensures the team stays sharp in preparation for upcoming events where they can prove themselves in the name of Durham College.

“It’s all about team play,” says Nicholas Pineda, one of the Durham Lords team captains. “If you don’t communicate something properly, the game can fall apart, which can be the difference between winning and losing.”

Gaming has been around for decades, and there are games for all types of people; while the competitive scene has dramatically expanded, many

people find themselves out of their depth when trying to dive into these communities. However, when esports come into play, the games become more of a test of strategy, skill, and teamwork instead of just a fun time. With things like titles, prize money, and pride on the line, just like physical sports, players must maintain their skills through practice while maintaining their physical and mental health.

“Being able to communicate and work with your team is what we prioritize,” explains Pineda. “Not just stats, it’s

about winning as a team so we can put together the best collegiate team we can be.”

Esports continues to be an expansive industry with a massive variety of games for players to compete in. With Durham College’s commitment to student success, the Durham Lords established a strong foundation in their team’s various skills and specialties. This foundation will continue to raise and support the members of the esports team as they fight to prove why they truly are the lords of gaming. 🏆

HVAC Alumnus' Pain, Packaged in Purpose

By Judith Parello

What do you do when you fall to rock bottom and life's commission just isn't working out. When HVAC troubleshooting skills become insignificant and everything and everyone around has disappeared? Chris Cull, a native of Bowmanville, Ontario, the younger of two brothers and joint caregiver to his late father, shares his deep truths and reality of inevitably hitting rock bottom from eight-years of opioid addiction.

“Stress just ate at me, ... the opioids ... it was like putting a band aid on a broken leg.”

Cull's father who was a paramedic in the Durham Region for 27 years was diagnosed with Huntington's Disease in Cull's late teens, began to decline leading up his enrolment in the HVAC technique program at Durham College. After his diagnosis, his father lost his job, license and



Chris Cull shares a smile of hope as he leans back in his chill persona at Durham College (Oshawa) photo studio during an interview about his "Surviving Addiction" Docuseries. (Judith Parello)

the will to live which resulted in him taking his very own life one day while he attended school. Trying to find a way to cope with the pain, loss and trauma, he turned to opioids. "Stress just ate at me, ... the opioids ... being able to numb myself down, ... it was like putting a band aid on a broken leg," Cull said.

“Trying to take his own life on a consistent basis ... you didn't know if you were going home to the worst day of your life.”

Cull reminisced about the

most personal and intimate details of trauma and his suffering in silence from his opioid addiction. He shared how living in his father's house, contending in his loneliness with the everyday challenges of tending to his sick father, while pursuing a diploma in the HVAC Technique program at Durham College was slowly

taking over the confined spaces of his mind. “Trying to take his own life on a consistent basis, while I was in school ... it was like every day, you didn’t know if you were going home to the worst day of your life,” said Cull.

“ ... I spent five years on methadone, I spent so much money on drugs by that point, ... I went down to 139lbs., ... something eating a chocolate bar was a good day in my world. ”

His father requested he finish school, which Cull honoured, but he quickly spiraled into addiction after his father’s passing, however completing school. Years later after losing 40 lbs and going two years without heat or hot water, “... I spent five years on methadone, I spent so much money on drugs by that point, ... I went down to 139 lbs, stealing food ... sometimes eating a chocolate bar was a good day in my world,” said Cull.



Chris Cull stands proud as he holds the Canadian flag in solidarity for his 8000 KM cross-Canada cycling journey. (Inspire By Example)

“ I had no idea how I was going to do this... I had not rode a bike in eight years... ”

He hit a very crucial life-changing moment when, with his dog, Chaz beside him, he pulled out a notebook, got a pen and drew four boxes into which he separated his passions, interests, hobbies

and dislikes, creating his own system to figure out his path.” His newfound sense of purpose would be the driving force to propel Cull to overcome his addiction.

Pushed by curiosity and fearless of the unknown, Cull embarked on an 8000 KM cross-Canada cycling journey to discover what he could do about the opioid crisis in Canada. After road tripping to Victoria, B.C. on the Pacific, he then rode through the provinces making his way to St. John’s N.L on the shores of the salty Atlantic, canvassing people in the hills and valleys, enjoying breathtaking sceneries in hopes to satisfy his curiosity regarding the opioid crisis. “I had no idea how I was going to do this; I had no experience in film, journalism, public speaking, public relations, had not rode a bike in eight years and was on the highest dose of methadone you could be on at the time,” said Cull.

He had reached out to many organizations seeking support for his vision of cycling across-Canada to address the opioid crisis but had received no response from any of them. Today he exemplifies how life can take unexpected turns as

he inspires by example and advocates against substance use and addictions.

Cull has celebrated a decade of recovery from his opioid addiction. His compelling passion for and commitment to mental health and addiction awareness and advocacy contributes largely to his current role as a Peer Support Specialist in the Emergency Department at Lakeridge Health in Oshawa. The two-times cross-Canada cyclist, is now making enormous strides as a consultant, motivational speaker, mental health and addictions advocate, filmmaker, founder of the digital library, Inspire by Example and an upcoming author.

“ ... It’s going to impact you in some way ... it’s not just the person who goes through, who struggles necessarily. ”

Durham College promotes mental health and well-being for all their employees, faculty and students. Aware of Cull’s impactful journey,

Durham College’s Social Impact Hub has partnered with him to launch his “Surviving Addiction” Docuseries.

This collaborative effort will explore the intimate lives of others affected by addiction and the perspectives of such individuals from a humanistic angle. “Basically, ... it’s going to impact you in some way ... it’s not just the person who goes through, who struggles necessarily,” said Cull. After his experience with opioid addiction, Cull now uses his resounding voice to share hope, the resilience to fight against opioid addiction and the courage to cultivate resilience as stories are shared and documented across Canada. Meanwhile Durham College is advocating for mental health and wellness in the community.

Cull’s opioid addiction journey has taken him from adversity to advocacy. Cull has been invited to travel with the Canadian representation to the United Nations for the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, Austria where he will observe and report on international drug policy as a Board member for the Canadian Centre



Chris Cull shares a moment speaking on substance abuse and addiction in March, 2024 at the United Nations for the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, Austria. (Chris Cull)

on Substance Use and Addiction. The opportunity in March 2024 is one of Cull’s many pursuits. This Durham College HVAC alumnus’ life’s temperature gauge has transformed his rock-bottom opioid addiction experience

to a global realization – a veracious testament to Cull’s perpetual courage. 🏆

DC Professor Passionate About Community Policing

By Beverley Martin Helmus

At the age of 18, Durham College Professor Maria Iannuzziello was the first Durham Regional Police female cadet, ever.

"There were not a lot of females policing at that time," says Iannuzziello.

New recruits always start on the front line, an area of potential conflict or struggle and she gained lots of experience in the Pickering, Ajax and Whitby, Ont., area.

She paralleled her policing with working on her degree in psychology. It's very easy for officers to get into the mentality of 'it's them against us' when dealing with the public.

"Working on my degree kept me in the academic realm as I was policing," explains Iannuzziello. "It was good for me."

Over time, she found her niche working with domestic violence.

"I was good at it," says Iannuzziello. "I was able to get them to talk and open-up to me."

“Working on my degree kept me in the academic realm as I was policing. It was good for me.”

This led her to having a great career in victim services, supporting victims of crime, exploitation, abuse or those just having lost a loved one.

In her 16th year, she jumped at an opportunity to complete a two-year secondment at Durham College, basically teaching in their Police Foundations program.

"I thought I had died and went to heaven," exclaimed Iannuzziello. "I loved the job."

With only 10 years left to retirement in her policing career, she competed and secured full-time employment



Professor Maria Iannuzziello is passionate about education and her DC Police Foundations students and it shows. (Maria Iannuzziello)

with Durham College in 2004. She is now coming into her 20th year of teaching law enforcement. She specializes in psychology, lecturing on youth and conflict with the law and more. She began working on her Master of Arts, part time, and discovered her

niche in teaching was, again, the social aspects of policing. Iannuzziello is now the Police Foundations volunteer coordinator.

She had been reading an article in the paper about at-risk schools in the Oshawa,

Ont., area that had very low Education Quality and Accountability (EQAO) test results in reading and writing.

Iannuzziello thought, “you know what, I think the Police Foundations students could

“We hit the ground running, and it was the best thing that ever happened, because working with vulnerable, disenfranchised populations is policing.”

do a great job in assisting this population.”

It would give her students an understanding of kids that they may be dealing with as young offenders later. They would have a better understanding of where these kids were from. Many came from poverty stricken and very dysfunctional families.

She approached the principle of one of those schools with her idea and the principle was onboard. Word got around and other schools began requesting to be part of



Dania and Chris are Durham College students currently in the Police Foundations program. They are enthusiastically manning the Back Door Mission Food Pantry supplying canned goods and more to those in need. (Beverley Martin Helmus)

the DC volunteer program.

“We hit the ground running, and it was the best thing that ever happened,” exclaimed Iannuzziello. “Working with vulnerable, disenfranchised populations is policing. On the road, dealing with mental health issues is 95 per cent of the job.”

In 2018, the Ontario government made volunteerism and community service a mandatory component of post secondary education. Their **Consultation Report: Police, Police Services and Community Safety**, had a consensus among participants

that training on helping vulnerable people was needed for police services. The most common suggestion was for “police officers to volunteer in their community, specifically with vulnerable people,” (Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, 2018).

Iannuzziello has a passionate understanding of how important and valuable student hands-on experience is. She believes it will nurture and create positive relationships between our future police and our most vulnerable citizens. Because of this, her volunteer

and community service programs continue to thrive and make a difference in our communities. Durham College students can be found working in organizations like Oshawa’s The Back Door Mission and continue to make relationships with students at local schools.

We can be proud of the fact that, one of our own, Professor Maria Iannuzziello is a frontrunner in a program that ensures our DC Police Foundations graduates are leading the way. 🇺🇸

A Platform for Education and Discussion

This spring, free to students and the public, Back Door Mission for the Relief of Poverty introduced its Back Door Mission Speaker Series with:

Durham College Professor Maria Iannuzziello speaking on police relations, Ontario Tech Associate Professor Dr Tyler Frederick speaking on youth homelessness, Karly Church of Victims Services speaking on human trafficking.

Striving to be a thought leader, it is Back Door Mission’s hope that this will be the first of many events.

For more information visit backdoormission.ca

Student Chefs Use Their Cultural Backgrounds to Take Home the Win

By Sarina Jetha

Picture this: Brazilian beef hearts, pickled beets, glazed carrots, farofa, crispy tripe and chimichurri – a winning dish that not only impressed the judges, but also showcased the culinary heritage of two talented student chefs. Second-year culinary management students Miguel Alves dos Santos Fonseca and Jess Dalziel took home the trophy when they won Canada's best new student chefs at Taste Canada's Cooks the Books Student Culinary Competition.

The culinary competition challenged these students to create a delicious plate using sponsored ingredients like Canadian beef, California prunes, Club House Spices and Tabasco sauce. With a time limit of only 45-minutes, Fonseca and Dalziel were able to use their cultural backgrounds as influence and whip up a prize winning plate.

"I think my cooking is all about my roots, the culture



When hard work and dedication pays off. Your new Cooks the Books champions, Miguel and Jess, posing proudly with their trophy. (Sarina Jetha)

and history of Brazilian food," says Fonseca. "How I grew up eating has influenced the way I cook, you know, I'll remember my grandma or mom making it and eating it at special occasions. At the competition

there were Brazilian items in the dish, and we brought some Brazilian roots, some Hungarian and some Canadian roots to the dish. It was a risk, but it worked."

Turning their hobby into a

passion, these student chefs began their culinary journeys in different ways, but both have been inspired by their cultural backgrounds and family surrounding them. Coming from Brazilian and Hungarian roots, along with developing their own techniques, influenced the young chefs cooking styles, which ultimately worked in their favour. Bringing different flavours from around the globe made their dish first place material. Though they were a bit hesitant to take this approach, they trusted their instinct and stuck to their roots, and wowed the judges with their different flavours and techniques.

Since winning the competition, Fonseca and Dalziel have not only grown as chefs, but also as people. They took this opportunity to gain more confidence in their cooking skills and to step out of their comfort zone by facing new challenges. Though being a chef and working in a fast-paced environment can be challenging in itself, this



Every second counts when plating! Just moments before Jess and Miguel were announced the winners of the Cooks the Books Competition. (Rohan Laylor)

competition made them realize how important it is to push

“Participating in the competition and doing well has made me realize that I can push myself to do more things that I’m not necessarily equipped to do.”

yourself and to always trust your instinct.

“Participating in the

competition and doing well has made me realize that I can push myself to do more things that I’m not necessarily equipped to do,” says Dalziel. “Things that were uncomfortable for me, I feel like I’m more comfortable with that now, and just trying to learn new things and being open to challenges and learning opportunities.”

Being able to bring their cultural backgrounds to the competition is also something that Fonseca and Dalziel are proud to be a part of. Their

ability to invest in their roots and showcase their culinary heritage through their cooking style made them shine in this competition.

“I see myself over the next two years preparing myself to take the Red Seal test and work on my apprenticeship,” says Dalziel. “Then eventually down the road, I’d like to have a side business selling desserts and stuff that I make a lot of at home, and to just keep learning as much as possible and being exposed to different cultures and cooking styles.”

With still so much to learn, these student chefs are not done. With fine dining and catering large quantity food production in their future, Fonseca and Dalziel are excited to see what the future holds for them and want to continue learning as much as possible. 🍴

A Fresh Start For a New Mom

By Ally Medeiros

Starting a new career is daunting, especially as a new parent, but there are ways to do it. Kathleen M. Gillis shares her journey of challenges and joys that brought her to where she is now.

She had to work through scheduling conflicts, doing homework beside her toddler playing with cars and relying on her family for support. There are always challenges with going back to school, but Gillis proves it can be done, and done well. She whole-heartedly believes it was all worth it.

Graduating in 2023 from the Early Childhood Education program at Durham College (DC), Gillis is now a registered early childhood educator (RECE) working for the YMCA's EarlyON program. This isn't where she once thought she would be.

Gillis first trained to be a photographer and became successful, owning her own photography business. However, after she had her first child in 2022, she realized she wanted a career that was

more aligned with her new needs. She prioritized her family and continues to try to

find a good work/life balance. She's achieving this now in her EarlyON role, in which

she works with kids all day and then goes home to her own. She's had to make tough decisions through this whole process to make sure she's being a mother and a student. Her new-found stability has brought her peace after the natural chaos of being in college.

"Balance is knowing I'm going to have to take a lower grade on something because my kid needs me more right now," says Gillis. "It's about making priorities and managing expectations - knowing that life sometimes needs us outside of school. You've got to pick and choose sometimes."

During her time studying at DC, she experienced passionate instructors - some who have inspired her in her work today. Mark Barranger-Mitchell and Christina Moore were instructors who knew their stuff and taught it with heart. She remembers their passion now as she plans out her career.

Gillis' plan is to continue her work as a RECE for a few years to settle into the job, test out



DC has many programs and services that can help parents balance their studies and obligations. (Gillis)



Gillis graduated and went right into her field, securing a dream job at EarlyON. (Tavares)

her skills and enjoy delivering care to kids. There are specific sections she'd like to dig into more as her career matures.

The neurodivergence post-graduate program at DC is one she's interested in completing because of her own family

history of neurodivergence and how important early support is for kids. For now, she is going head-first into her new career that she loves. She goes home with happy tears in her eyes and pride in her heart, knowing she's leaving a positive impact on the kids and families she works with.

"Everyone tells everyone, 'You can change the whole world,'" shares Gillis, "but I don't feel the need to change the whole world anymore, as long as I'm changing the world for people. I can see I've made people's lives even a little better. The fact that I feel that on a daily basis is so rewarding."

She wasn't able to have her moments of rest or "breaking down" when things became too much because her kid still needed her, so she relied on her husband, her in-laws and her friends. We all have a community of our own and we should lean on them when we need. Gillis is grateful to her little community, as they all worked together to make sure she got the education she needed. This allowed her to squeeze everything out of her classes and to become a top student in her program,

leading her to a meaningful and fulfilling career.

“Balance is knowing I’m going to have to take a lower grade on something because my kid needs me more right now. It’s about making priorities and managing expectations - knowing that life sometimes needs us outside of school. You’ve got to pick and choose sometimes.”

If anyone out there is afraid of jumping into a new career or debating whether or not to go back to school, go for it. Gillis has exemplified that even though it can be a struggle, it can give you a fresh start. 🍀

Who Would Have Thought a Tweet Could Change Everything

By Rebeca Blyde

Photos by Leah Smith



Matisse Hamel-Nelis receives her most recent award People of the Year by PRNews in the DEI category.

An unexpected and transformative experience marked the beginning of an amazing journey in the career of Matisse Hamel-Nelis, a Durham College (DC) alumna and now professor in the PR and Strategic Communications program.

As we move along in our professional journeys,

we encounter learning opportunities that shape who we become in ways we never thought possible.

For Hamel-Nelis, it was nine years ago during her second day as a corporate communications specialist at the CNIB Foundation when an unexpected lesson emerged from a simple tweet.

After being asked to create a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, she decided to use a fun fact, with the hashtag for “Did You Know” without realizing it would be interpreted incorrectly by assistive technology, particularly screen readers. This blunder was a defining moment for Hamel-Nelis, as what could have been perceived as a setback revealed itself as a profound learning opportunity. Rather than allowing the incident to overshadow her career, she embraced and took it as a chance for a deeper understanding of the

importance of accessible communications, and it reaffirmed her interest in fostering an atmosphere that is more welcoming and

“I am always happy to share information and educate others in the PR and communications field to be more accessible in their communications and make this world a more inclusive place for everybody.”

accessible for everyone.

“I saw it as a learning opportunity and asked myself, if, as a professional communicator I didn’t know that, then what else didn’t I know about being inclusive in digital communications?” she says. “It opened up a whole new universe for me, and I just became immersed in it

because I wanted to know everything to be a better communicator so that I wasn’t unknowingly alienating any one population.”

After the life-changing experience, she expanded her knowledge through various programs, including the Accessible Media Production at Mohawk College and the Diversity and Inclusion Certificate at Cornell University.

She’s not only a public relations professional and an accessible communications practitioner, but also a public speaker and consultant. Since graduating from the Durham College PR program in 2015, Hamel-Nelis has become an international award-winning communicator known for her passion and commitment to advancing accessibility and diversity in the communications industry.

Most recently, she was awarded the DEI Champion award as part of PRNEWS’

People of the Year Awards, which was well-deserved recognition for her advocacy work and diligent efforts in educating others about accessible communications.

“Earning this award was a humbling experience,” says Hamel-Nelis. “It is an amazing feeling. I’m always happy share information and educate others in the PR and communications field to be more accessible in their communications and make this world a more inclusive place for everybody.”

Her passion and dedication go far beyond her work, as she embodies the essence of advocacy and empathy. Her drive to make the world a more inclusive and equitable place is all about breaking down barriers and giving space for those who are often marginalized in society to have a voice.

And despite the challenges that come with creating sustainable strategies for accessible communications, she sees progress over perfection as a key principle to staying motivated, both for herself and everyone else trying to make accessibility a part of their everyday life.



As an award-winning communicator, Matisse always reflects on best accessible communications practices to strive for progress and inspire many along the way.

“Whenever I feel defeated or like nothing is changing, I remind myself that I’m leaving the communications space more accessible than I found it,” she says. “Even when I’m faced with the daunting wall of indifference, I know that what I’m fighting for truly matters. It’s about making the world a more inclusive place, one step at a time. And when I see others willing to learn and try, it encourages me to keep pushing forward.”

Hamel-Nelis’ career path exemplifies adaptability and a never-ending desire for growth. She’s recently taken the plunge and starting her own

business called Matisse Nelis Consulting, while continuing to be a part-time professor of the PR and Strategic Communications program.

And with the digital space being a place where professional communicators live, accessible communications aren’t just legal requirement in many jurisdictions, but it’s also an ethical imperative. This is why Hamel-Nelis supported the introduction of digital accessibility practices into the PR program as a way to better equip her PR students with the knowledge and skills to create content that is truly accessible.

“I’m always thrilled to see the eagerness of my students as they embrace learning about accessibility and creating accessible content,” she says. “By integrating these practices into the curriculum, we’re not just setting ourselves apart — we’re empowering our students to thrive and evolve into compassionate and skilful communicators.”

As Hamel-Nelis’ advocacy and commitment continue to pave the way for accessible communications, her journey serves as a source of inspiration and empowerment for both current and future generations of communicators.

Through her admiring dedication, she not only transforms the way we perceive digital accessibility but also imparts a profound sense of responsibility and compassion to those who have the opportunity to learn from her. As she starts her entrepreneurial venture and continues to shape the PR program, her legacy of advocacy, empathy, and relentless pursuit of inclusivity will likely leave an indelible mark on the communications industry for years to come. 🏆

Reflecting on Lessons Learned and Journeys Shared

By Nadeen Manasra

Two years ago, we were just individuals who came from all over the world united by our passion to learn. We didn't know this journey would take us to where we are now, the final cohort of the PR and strategic communications program. As we prepare to say our goodbyes, we look at the faces around us. The ones that were nothing but


strangers one day formed into lifelong friendships bonded over the ups and downs of this program. As we prepare to face the world and unlock our potential, we recognize the lasting mark left by our beloved program. With this being the final issue of this magazine, we reminisce about our time here, honouring the lessons learned, connections created, and dreams yet to be reached.

What makes this program stand-out is how it constantly evolved its curriculum to meet the demands of an ever-changing industry. Here at Durham College (DC), so much value is placed on learning from hands-on experiences. In our program, we not only have two internships, but also the experience of creating this publication.

Through learning the ins and outs of the Adobe suite and mastering our writing, we've not only been able to craft eye-catching digital content and entertaining visuals, but we've been able to produce Reflections for the incredible alumni of this college.

On behalf of the final graduating class, we extend our deepest appreciation to DC, its faculty and all the



alumni for your unwavering support. As we open the doors of our futures, we stand here with the knowledge, skills, and experience to leave our marks in the PR world. No matter where we end up, the relationships cultivated and lessons learned will forever be on this journey with us. Thank you to all our professors for helping shape us into the communicators we are today. 

Final Words From Our Last Cohort of the PR Program



"Being a part of the PR program and strategic communications course is tremendous accomplishment. Thank you to my peers, professors, ASC, IT and a special thanks to Matisse." - Judith Parrello



"This program has opened my eyes to the importance of communication both professionally and personally and just how expansive the world of PR really is." - Daniel Cordeiro



"I was very particular about the college I chose and felt that Durham College was the right fit for my professional development. In Toronto, there are many communications options, but I was impressed with the curriculum and field placements the program at DC offered." - Claudia Nosseir



"It has been a pleasure to be a part of the PR program here at Durham College and contribute to the last edition of Reflections. I will leave Durham College feeling fulfilled and thankful to have met and been influenced by so many incredible people." - Beth Coles



"I really enjoyed this program. Although, it had its stressful moments, I think it prepared us very well for the PR world." - Sarina Jetha



"Moving here for the public relations program really impacted my development and has made me the communicator I am today." - Jasmin Sisk



"There was a lot of moments I felt overwhelmed but I'm sure that's normal for every program. Although, the pressure made making it to graduation feel amazing." - Rebeca Blyde



"The Durham College PR program not only gave me valuable hands-on experience in the field but also the chance to cultivate life-lasting relationships with my incredible professors and peers." - Ryann Wiseman



"I went into my internship worried about retaining the information I learned previously, only to be relieved to find that once I started doing the work all that knowledge began to come back and made me realize that I am a public relations specialist." - Beverley Martin



"Studying PR has been incredible at Durham College. Learning how to shape perceptions through words and strategies has been eye opening." - Geetika Sharma



"The PR program has been an experience like no other and has been a great opportunity for me to make connections professionally and personally." - Alexander Rae



"Durham College's PR & Strategic Communications program appealed to me because of the many doors it opens for its graduates, and the program's emphasis on hands-on experience and industry connections." - Sophie Kauffman



"Matisse has been a fantastic mentor to me since my first year in the program, always sharing opportunities and resources beyond the classroom to apply my skills." - Meagan Poole



"This program has given me opportunities to meet amazing people, gain hands-on experience, and even publish my own work. Being a part of this class has led me on the best journey I've ever encountered." - Allison Medeiros



"Experience to me is the most valuable thing even though the road to success was rocky, the experience I have gained will stay with me forever." - Kevin Otoadese



"My time as a student at Durham College sharpened my public relations skills, the program has been a transforming experience for me from classroom theory into real-world expertise." - Radhika Matta

Letter from the Alumni Office

Dear DC alumni,

We would like to start by thanking the student management team for inviting the Office of Advancement and Alumni Relations to contribute to the final issue of Reflections magazine. Like the many, many teams that have come before you, you and your fellow public relations students have put countless hours into planning, researching, crafting, editing and laying out stories to create a publication that highlights the incredible achievements of Durham College (DC) alumni.

As we have had a number of public relations graduates work in our office as students and full-time employees, we know that your contribution to this magazine will serve as a record in the college's history, but also in that of your career.

Since its inception, Reflections has captured hundreds of stories including major college updates; teachers' impacts both in and beyond the classroom; and alumni updates, award-winners and trailblazers. Highlighting these stories helps to share how DC is inspiring learners to create success for themselves and their communities. Each semester we look forward to reading these stories told through the student lens. However, over the years the thing we have enjoyed most about Reflections is seeing the pride students have when sharing published issues, whether in their professional portfolios or with their networks on LinkedIn.

As we bid farewell to Reflections, we encourage alumni to stay connected to DC by following DC Alumni on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#) for the latest news and for opportunities to get involved.

Thank you again to the countless students who have helped us celebrate alumni for over 35 years.

Sincerely,

The Durham College Advancement and Alumni Relations Team



The Durham College Advancement and Alumni Relations Team are always supporting the college at various events, including at the Campus Cup.



Photos by Durham College

Published by the Durham College Alumni Association, 2000 Simcoe St. N., Oshawa, Ont., L1H 7K7
T: 905-721-3035 F: 905-721-3134 E: alumni@durhamcollege.ca