

## Putting Words into Action

by Mary DiAngelo

The most common advice I received as an incoming freshman was to try my hand at everything. You can always drop a club or two later, my older and wiser Peer Mentors said. I responded to this guidance with alacrity, and in retrospect I may have been a bit too enthusiastic. I entered the academic fray as a determined English major, and my experiences only confirmed my confidence in the department.

Like most freshmen, however, I wanted to try a bit of everything. This course of action is well and good—you discover many things, but at some point you have to accept your limits as a student. Upon entering my senior year, I feel as though I have finally narrowed my activities down to the things I love most. And yes, most of them define me as a resolute English nerd.

I first came to *The Collegian* (Washington College's literary magazine) in my sophomore year. I had written a few articles as a freshman, but wanted to be more involved in the editing aspect. I have never regretted waiting a year to get more involved, because this allowed me time to sample the ample buffet of clubs.

Sophomore year was the time for me to start focusing my interests. While it is fun to be a jack-of-all-trades, I found it unsatisfying to be a master of none. Now, I am entering my senior year as the Editor in Chief of *The Collegian* and the President of Sigma Tau Delta (the English Honor Society). Also, I am working on a little thing called a Senior Thesis. For the record, if your student decides to undertake a written Thesis his/her senior year, do not take any lack of communication personally. They are probably just buried under a pile of books.

Of course, between the many hours of arduous study, your student will somehow find time for fun and games; and I mean this quite literally. From the perspective of the English department, we offer an annual jousting tournament. This passed year I was not content with simply snickering from the sidelines. My participation included being the "horse," which entailed pushing my broomstick-wielding knight in a wheelbarrow toward a charging and similarly clad enemy. Don't worry parents; everything is padded, and you are in no more danger than any normal

athlete in any normal sport. While this unique Washington College sport is far from normal, we are still safety-conscious while we work out our academic frustrations. Not to mention, all of the padding creates an amusing, if undignified suit of armor. The joust attracts students of all disciplines, though the English majors tend to give the best chivalrous speeches.

If your student is literarily inclined, I advise that they become involved in our multifaceted Rose O'Neil Literary House. Along with being a great place to hang out, it offers many unforgettable events and readings. This past year, I went with a group of students and Lit House staff to the Association of Writers and Writing Programs in Chicago. We represented the Lit House in the conference's book fair, and during our free time we attended readings and discussion panels.

I even ran into Hannah Tinti, a breakout author who recently visited campus on the Mary Wood Fellowship. This fellowship allows an up-and-coming female writer to spend time on campus discussing writing and literature with students. The conference in Chicago gave me a much better grasp on the world of literature and publication. Hannah Tinti was just one of the many authors and publishers at the conference that offered their own perspective on writing. And as an aspiring writer, every insight helps.

Though I have emphasized focusing your interests, I would like to add that everyone should throw a dash of the unexpected into their activities, even if it is just one thing. If I did nothing but English all the time, I would become a much dustier person. Acting turned out to be my spice of choice. While this is not much of a stretch (English major who loves Shakespeare, who was an actor *and* a playwright), it gave me a much different view of the literature I deal with everyday.

I joined the campus acting troupe called "The Royal Fakespeare Players." In Fakespeare, we perform short interpretations of the Bard's plays including mad libs of original scenes and original scripts. Each year, our biggest performance is staged at the Renaissance dinner, hosted by the Music Department. I found that it was just as much fun to practice and advertise for our plays as it was to perform them. Sometimes we wandered around campus in character, haranguing bystanders in Renaissance speech. At Washington College, you should always be prepared for the unexpected, including being accosted by enthusiastic thespians.

Last semester, I participated in the ultimate Shakespearean experience – acting in one of his plays. Accustomed to staying on the writing side of dramatic productions, I was nervous about taking the stage for a full-length comedy. Fortunately, my acting disasters were minimal. As Don Pedro in *Much Ado About Nothing*, I slipped only once, and I managed not to fall. I found that acting in the play gave it a completely different tenor from a solitary reading. It was nothing like a movie rendition of your favorite book, which is usually disappointing.

Even though our production veered widely from my original imagination of the play, it gave me a deeper understanding of how words are rendered into action. For me, it was like reading a book in its original language, rather than a translation. By being in the play, I could interact with the characters that I had only imagined before. They were unpredictable and volatile, beyond the confines of my own imagination.

As I hunker down to write my thesis, I rest assured that I have done just about everything I wanted to do in college. Now that I have played make-believe grown-up, I am ready to try my hand at the real world.