



News Release

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College graduation season “a family affair”

Aroostook County - When 19-year-old Michael Black of Presque Isle walks across the stage to receive her associate of arts degree in liberal studies from Northern Maine Community College at commencement on May 19, she will be the third member of her family in four years to do so. She will also be the third member of her family to receive a college or university degree in one week.

Among those cheering on Michael at NMCC’s graduation ceremony will be her older sister and brother, Cherie Black, 24 and Jason Black, 23, who in 2004 and 2005 respectively, earned the same degree from NMCC, and who on May 12 were members of the graduating class at the University of Maine at Presque Isle – Cherie earning a bachelor of science degree in secondary education with a concentration in English, and Jason earning his baccalaureate degree in English.

For her part, Michael will follow in her older siblings’ footsteps as she moves forward with attaining her bachelor’s degree, enrolling this fall in the liberal studies program at the University of Southern Maine with intentions to eventually move into USM’s music education program.

She also joins her older sister and brother in being among the most accomplished and celebrated members of her NMCC graduating class. Michael was recently named the 2007 liberal studies academic achievement award recipient, which is presented annually to an outstanding student in the program as selected by faculty. The honor was previously held by Cherie and Jason.

During their respective tenures as NMCC students, all three regularly attained Dean’s list status and were each named president’s scholars. Cherie and Jason each earned the coveted Falcon Spirit award, which recognizes students who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to make the campus a better place.

Michael, like her older sister Cherie, was named “Student of the Year,” the highest honor bestowed upon a student at the Community College. In a tongue-in-cheek display of sibling rivalry, brother Jason is quick to point out he was nominated for the award.

The Blacks are among a growing number of students from Northern Maine choosing to begin their college career at NMCC and first earn a liberal studies degree, which consists of the general education core of classes common to most four-year colleges and universities.

“Looking at all of my options, this was the most cost effective,” said Michaelae. “In my case, following Cherie and Jason, knowing the College and what to expect helped a great deal. I would come and hang out and spend the night and even attend classes. I didn’t only get to know the faculty and staff - NMCC became my second home.”

That feeling of “home” at NMCC is common amongst the student body on the close-knit Presque Isle campus; however, it was especially important to the Blacks, who entered the institution from a home-school environment.

Raised in Littleton, Cherie, Jason and Michaelae were taught at home by their parents, Dianne and Ron Black. They were first introduced to NMCC on what their father called a “school field trip” to the College during a campus-wide open house.

“I knew I wanted to come to NMCC. I loved the campus and the feeling I got when I visited,” said Cherie. “I was extra shy when I first came here. Coming to NMCC helped me come out of my shell. My ability to confidently express myself started here. The instructors would encourage me to speak up and engage me in conversation.”

“Home-schooling gave me a sense of relying. I would look up to Cherie. I selected NMCC because it was an opportunity for me to rely on someone and something – a College that I knew I’d be comfortable with,” said Jason. “Having a sister before me and behind me helped me gauge my own evolution as a college student. I both had a mentor and someone to mentor. I felt myself becoming more and more solid in my abilities, in part, because of having Cherie to follow and Michaelae behind me.”

The benefits of having an older sibling to follow were, according to both Jason and Michaelae, at times offset by the expectations set by their predecessor, especially in the classroom.

“The faculty saw me coming, and you could almost hear them say, ‘here comes another Black’,” said Michaelae. “The expectations were high for Jason, because Cherie was such a good student. They were even higher for me, because both Cherie and Jason were good students.”

Among those to “see another Black coming” was David Raymond, NMCC humanities instructor. Although the coming year will mark the first in seven years when one or more of the Black siblings is not enrolled at the College, Raymond will carry with him fond memories of three equally outstanding, yet uniquely different students.

“As intellectually gifted as these three are, their academic accomplishments pale in comparison to their character, for the Blacks are genuinely good people. In the seven or so years that they have been around NMCC (for they never completely left the campus, they merely went across town to take courses), I have never heard a single person utter an unkind word about them. That is because they are genuinely kind, considerate, selfless people. The kind of people who stay behind in the learning center after hours to help others on their own time, the kind of people you can turn to when you need someone to talk to about your troubles, the kind of people who reach out and befriend the downtrodden, the neglected, and the outcasts. Good students and good citizens, they are the kind of student that we are proud to claim as a graduate of NMCC, for our reputation is enhanced every time we are associated with them and their success. A family of children like the Blacks comes along once in a lifetime and we at NMCC are glad they came our way,” said Raymond.

The Blacks have equally high praise for their former instructors and the College community that has played such a pivotal role in helping to attain their educational and life pursuits.

“I’ve maintained a dozen relationships with faculty and staff at NMCC,” said Jason, who continues to work part-time at the College as a tutor in the learning center. “It’s become somewhat of a second family. The people here are people I cannot imagine not being in contact with. They have helped me so much as both a student and a person.”

“It’s not only the faculty – but the staff as well. From the residential halls and the dining hall to the custodians and the administrative staff, they are all so incredibly supportive. Because it is such a small campus community everyone comes together,” said Cherie.

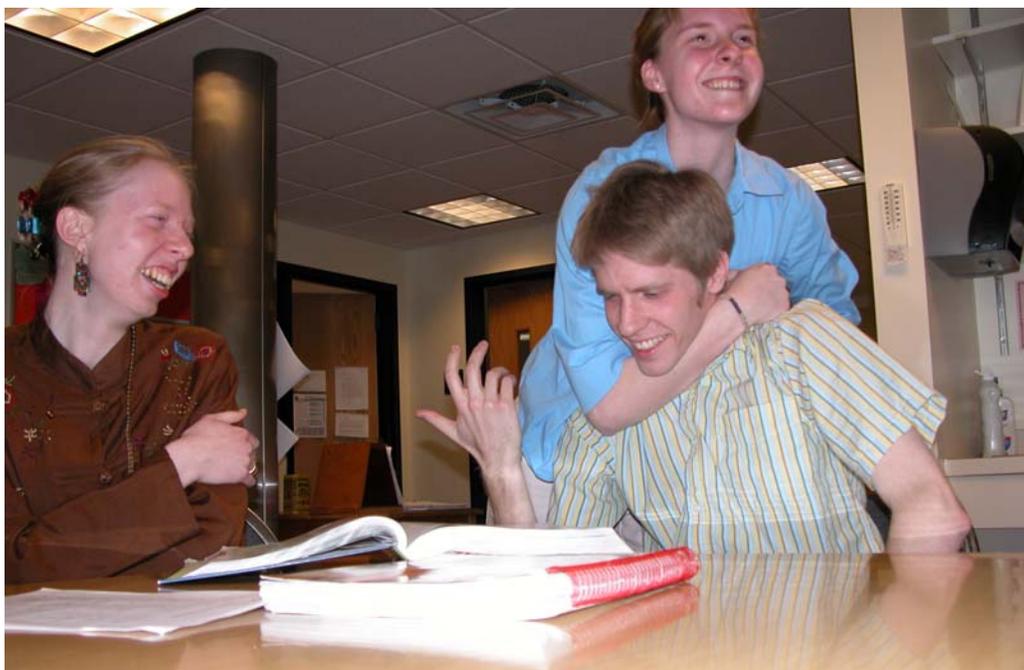
“I know that without the foundation that I got here at NMCC, I would not have the strong base I need to continue my education,” added Michaele. “I learned the fundamentals of the college experience here.”

It will be back to the classroom for all three Black siblings next fall. Aside from Michaele, who will continue her education at USM, Jason plans to attend the University of Maine in Orono to pursue his master of arts in English literature, with the intent to someday teach at the college level. Cherie will be doing her student teaching at a local high school in the fall and hopes to be teaching in her own classroom by next January.

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Cherie, Michaele and Jason Black (left to right) come together in the Northern Maine Community College Learning Center, where each has assisted other students as a tutor.



Michaele Black (standing) teases her older brother Jason while sister Cherie looks on as the three siblings enjoy a lighthearted moment amongst the flurry of end-of-semester activity. Michaele will earn her degree from NMCC on May 19. Cherie and Jason, both NMCC alumni, graduated from UMPI on May 12.