

Graduation at Madison College

Finding a Career She Loves



Kimberly Chan overcame many barriers to earn an associates degree in accounting and was awarded the Devi Bhargava Award at Madison College's graduation ceremony.

By Susan M. Pohorski

Imagine swimming while wearing shoes, sweat pants and a sweatshirt. With heavy wet clothes weighing you down, it would be difficult to make any progress.

Kimberly Chan understands that feeling. She dealt with several undiagnosed conditions that dragged her down and made school difficult.

Chan's struggles began in kindergarten and proceeded through high school. Finally, at Edgewood College, her instructors recognized that she needed some assistance with her extreme anxiety and referred her to the Disabilities Resource Center. With some help, Chan completed a bachelor's degree in math with a concentration in education and went on to become a substitute teacher.

"I found out that wasn't the best fit for me," she said. Next, Chan earned a nursing assistant certificate and began working in home health care. During that time, she found out she has asthma and needs an inhaler. However, that increased her anxiety.

When a patient died, the loss was very difficult and Chan realized home health care was not a good fit for her either.

Another piece of the puzzle

By this time, she was seeing a coun-

selor and taking medication for anxiety. The counselor noticed her hands shaking along with other symptoms and diagnosed Asperger Syndrome, generally considered to be on the "high functioning" end of the autism spectrum. Compared with those affected by other forms of autism spectrum disorder, however, those with Asperger syndrome do not have significant delays or difficulties in language or cognitive development.

She began tutoring dyslexic children and learned that she too was dyslexic. It was another piece of the puzzle of her life. "That helped me understand why I do some things I do and why I struggle with reading," Chan said.

Friends and relatives encouraged her to pursue accounting. Although she was really scared to go back to school, Chan enrolled in the Madison College Accounting associate degree program. Once again she turned to Disability Resource Services for help.

"I learned about so many accommodations I never knew about before," Chan said. Disability Resource Services staff provided audio books and an audio recorder for class lectures. Student note takers also helped and Chan was able to take tests alone in the Testing Center with extra time and noise cancelling headphones.

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Learning to have confidence

When approaching anxiety-producing circumstances, Todd Jones, senior disability resource liaison and her counselors taught Chan to look back on a situation where she was successful to give her confidence. Although she would never volunteer in class, Chan challenged herself to be the first to raise her hand in one class this spring. "I made a goal to put myself out there," she said. And she did.

As a member of the Business Professionals of America chapter, Chan competed at the state level and then at the national convention in Boston. She earned sixth place in managerial accounting and eighth place in advanced accounting and her team placed fifth in the financial analysis event.

Madison College honored her with the Devi Bhargava Award recognizing her for overcoming substantial barriers, achieving academic success, being a successful self-advocate and contributing to the understanding of issues surrounding disabilities.

Nadia Rahman, Disability Resources Services intern, met with Chan

during her time at Madison College.

"Kimberly has come a full 180 degrees in her time at the college," Rahman wrote in her nomination for the award. "She confidently discloses her concerns, needs and abilities. I anticipate that she will continue to self-advocate through educating her peers and creating awareness for the importance of equal opportunities."

Making education equal and fair

Chan advises other students to take advantage of the services offered. "They make education equal and fair," she said. "There is nothing to be embarrassed about. Half my class wouldn't have known I had accommodations."

This spring she achieved a 4.0 grade point average and earned an associate degree in accounting. "I love accounting," she said. "I couldn't have done it without the support of everyone in the Disability Resource Center, my family and counselors."

Having found her best career fit and how to deal with her challenges, Chan is facing the future with less anxiety, more hope and a big smile. She is currently interviewing for accounting positions.