



Kristin and John, a Harmony Theater participant, take a moment before he goes on stage for the spring 2009 performance.

A Shining Example

Surprisingly, Kristin Panacio '11 didn't consider studying special education until she became a student at Gwynedd-Mercy College. During her first year, she was enrolled in the Teacher Apprentice Program (TAP), which places students in a classroom or similar environment for experience in the education field. To fulfill her requirements, Kristin apprehensively chose to participate in Adult Services, a student organization that works with adults with disabilities. "I was petrified, but it turned out to be the best experience. It changed my life," she says.

The junior, who is working toward a triple certification in elementary, special and early childhood education, blossomed into a role model for all education majors. She became a student director for Adult Services and a student leader for Harmony Theater, which is a theater program for individuals with disabilities. She loves seeing the participants excel, and being a part of their transformation.

Kristin also works with an 18-year-old woman with autism a few days each week. "I teach her social skills and how to be socially acceptable in the community," Kristin says. "We go to the movies, go bowling and get our nails done together."

The opportunities for Kristin to make an impact on a student's life are endless. Last summer, Kristin taught autistic students from ages 11 to 14 during extended school year (ESY), a four-week program at Souderton High School. Kristin completed this to prepare for her student teaching experience, which she will begin in spring 2011.

"I hope every day my students leave learning something," she says. Based on Kristin's enthusiasm and love for teaching, her students will learn something every day, whether it's a solution to a math problem or a lesson in life. "Enhancing the core of the student is more important than the grades. I don't think that enough schools emphasize this."

KRISTIN'S SCHOLARSHIPS

Gwynedd-Mercy Scholarship

Kristin receives the Gwynedd-Mercy Scholarship, a partial tuition award based on academic achievement and financial need.

Mother Mary Bernard Award

She also receives the Mother Mary Bernard Award, which is available for first-time freshmen only. Students must have SAT scores of at least 1000 (Math and Critical Reading combined). The scholarship is valued at \$7,000 and is renewable for three years as long as recipient continues to meet eligibility requirements and maintains a cumulative GPA of at least 2.75.