

December 18, 2010

Dear PBKACA Scholarship Committee,

As I sit down to tell you about my amazing first semester at Macalester College, the one thing that didn't cross my mind too often over the semester was the financial burden of college. That's because this scholarship allowed me to enjoy and fully immerse myself in what Macalester and St. Paul had to offer without finances holding me back. This scholarship also allowed me a head start on my savings so that by the time I graduate, I can repay my loans with a little more ease. Some friends that I've made at Macalester had to decide whether they would forgo the opportunities Macalester had to offer for a cheaper state school. I cannot express in words how grateful I am that I haven't had to deal with this type of dilemma. I'll try to explain why that type of decision would be so hard by telling you about how I spent my first semester at Macalester.

My first week at Macalester was jam-packed with orientation activities/events, new names and faces, and parents everywhere. We were all exhausted by the end of the week and before we knew it, it was time for classes to start. September was a major transitioning month. Classes were structured differently, dorms were a new experience, and there were so many new clubs to try out.

This semester I had one large lecture class (with about 40 students), a medium sized introductory class, and two smaller classes (with about 15 students). Most of the classes (even the lecture class) provided an intimate experience with professors who were *always* available (and this sometimes included the weekends, too!). Sometimes I would go to office hours to introduce myself to professors and end up sitting for an hour talking about a wide range of topics. The professors' love for their subject is evident in their teaching styles and most professors are actively involved in the campus (which is invaluable for such a small campus). One of the harder things about college classes is the differences in pace, course load, and grades. In high school, when teachers said that one year of an AP course is equivalent to a semester, they weren't exaggerating. The reason the course load seems to be more difficult is because the classes move at such a quick pace. In particular, the amount of readings seemed exponentially larger than in high school. Coming from four high school years during which I thought I had developed strong time management skills, I still found myself staying up later than I expected to on some nights. The course load is also difficult because every assignment is given a higher value. There isn't any "busy work" in college, so that makes a large part of grades dependent on exams and large papers. Despite this, I found it refreshing to be in a learning environment where people are motivated by knowledge, not grades, and are more willing to collaborate with research instead of competing with each other.

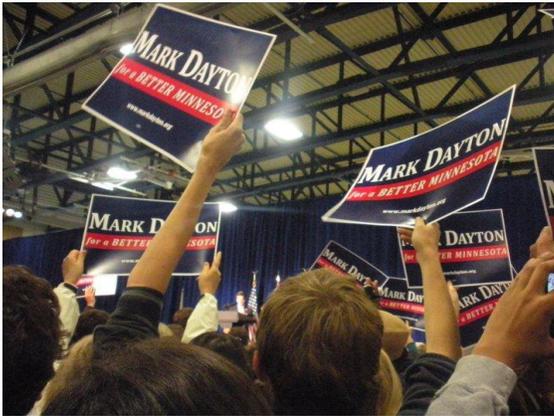
This different environment might be the result of the college environment in general. Most people say that when you go to college, you learn to live independently. While that may have some truth, I think that I would describe my experience more as learning to live with so many peers. In college, you live only a few feet away from your friends and classmates. It makes it so easy to schedule meetings or to just sit and talk. A sense of community is formed almost instantly. And this community isn't artificially created. When I left this past Friday, some of my goodbyes to people who I've only known for four months were as hard as my goodbyes to friends in August.

While a strong community is formed and many of us joke about living in the "Mac bubble," the college offers many opportunities for us to interact with those working outside of the immediate area. There are speakers, both known and unknown, hosted weekly. One highlight was in early October when Macalester hosted VP Joe Biden, Senators Franken and Klobuchar, the Twin Cities' mayors, and a few other political figures in a rally for governor-elect Mark Dayton. Many organizations also bring speakers

to campus or host trips to various locations in the Twin Cities. I remember doing some campaign work in the local area (which is much different than in Chicago!) and volunteering with MaCCARES (Macalester Conservation and Renewable Energy Society) on 10/10/10, the international day of climate action. I'm also very excited to be a freshman representative on Macalester's student government (MCSG). This position has allowed me to get to know my class, understand how the college works, and make a difference within the school.

Macalester offers many resources, both institutional and through clubs, that have enabled me to explore a variety of disciplines. The projects I've partaken in this semester are in large part the result of the ease and availability with which Macalester provides them. This semester has been promising and makes me excited to explore new initiatives in the Spring. While I'm happy to be home and away from hip-high snow mounds, I can't wait to go back and see what spring has in store for me.

Sincerely,
Merita Bushi
(P.S. here are some visual aids for you to enjoy!)



ABOVE: (Left) Signs from the Mark Dayton rally with Joe Biden at Macalester College. (Right) President Obama speaking at the Dayton Rally held at the University of Minnesota.

BELOW: (Left) The famous cherry and spoon sculpture from the Sculpture Garden in Minneapolis. (Right) The bank of the Mississippi River (a few miles away from campus)





(Left) Student Government's legislative body.



(Right) A sunset on one of Minnesota's 10,000 lakes on a MCSG retreat



A few volunteering pictures. Specifically these were with MacCARES for 10/10/10.



A glimpse of "MinneSNOWta"

The picture on the left is after the *first* day of snowfall.