

May 10, 2004

An estimated 3,487 students will receive degrees during Commencement ceremonies at North Carolina State University on Saturday, May 15. Following are short profiles of some of those students. The students' stories could add to your coverage of graduation activities or provide material for an interesting feature story.

Reservist Puts Accounting on Hold for Duty in Afghanistan, Kuwait

When Angela Amidon started a one-year graduate program in 2001, she never imagined she would be finishing the degree in 2004, after two years of active duty with the N.C. National Guard unit, the 139th Support Detachment (Rear Operations Center), based in Morrisville. Now the intelligence officer will receive her master of accounting degree two years after she expected to finish.

Amidon says that on Sept. 11, 2001, she knew instantly that her life was going to change. She had joined the National Guard three years earlier after growing up in a military family. "I was finally going to play my part," she says. She was immediately activated, and sent to Afghanistan with the XVIII Airborne Corps out of Fort Bragg. Her classmates in the master of accounting program gave her a coveted Palm Pilot as a gift, and kept in touch by sending pictures and care packages.

When she returned home at the end of 2002, Amidon prepared to continue her graduate studies. She was enrolled at NC State for less than a month when she was re-activated and sent to Kuwait. She returned last December and began, for the second time, spring semester courses in the MAC program. After being in a complete military mindset, she says, staying focused on school was a challenge.

Amidon predicts that the investigative and analytical skills she developed working in military intelligence will be helpful for her accounting career. While serving in two combat zones, she also learned to appreciate the advantages of life in the United States. "I'm calmer and more patient," she says. "I learned that you don't sweat the small stuff." The bottom line, she says, is that her experiences were life-changing.

Amidon is the wife of Clayton Amidon of Raleigh. She earned a B.S. degree in accounting from NC State in 2001. After graduation, she will study for the CPA exam and begin a job with accounting firm McGladrey and Pullen in Raleigh. She can be reached by email at angnoble@hotmail.com.

Forget the Utensils ... This Grad's Plate is Full

Forgetting the utensils at your next family picnic or cookout may not be such a big deal if Shawn Sowers' idea of an "All-in-One" plate becomes a reality. Sowers' unique design features a spoon and fork molded into the sides of the plate. The utensils can be detached and used as tableware. "The most common response has been, 'Why hasn't someone done this before?'" says Sowers, who is graduating with a master's degree in industrial design. "It was just one of those

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ideas that just popped into my head. It just makes sense. It makes so much sense, I almost can't take credit for it."

Sowers' work was one of 9,000 entries submitted to the Art of the Plate Design Competition sponsored by Dixie. His entry was chosen as one of the 100 finalists exhibited in New York's Museum of Arts and Design. Sowers was also one of six students who helped design an award-winning carpet line for Lees Carpets. Following graduation, Sowers plans to pursue a career in furniture design.

Sowers is the son of Richard and Karen Sowers of Shipshewana, Ind. He can be reached at 919/264-9914.

Extracurriculars Key to High-Achieving NSF Fellowship Winner

If you have a 4.0 GPA, you probably don't have time for any other activities, right?

Melanie Chin, a Park Scholar who will graduate with a 4.0 GPA and a double major in chemical engineering and chemistry, completely debunked this myth during her NC State career.

A member of Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi, Chin spent her free time outside of class participating in a variety of community service activities. She was involved with ReCreate State, a campus beautification project, and Nightwalk, which addresses public safety on campus. She also co-chaired Service Raleigh, a citywide cleanup event, and was a member of the University Library Committee.

Despite all of her other activities, Chin still found time every Saturday for four years to teach kindergarten Chinese and traditional dance at the Raleigh Chinese Language School. "As a Chinese-American I cherish my heritage and I think it is important to instill this concept in younger children," she said.

Chin recently received a National Science Foundation fellowship to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to work toward a doctorate in chemical engineering. Her long-term goal is to shape national science and technology policy.

Chin is the daughter of Conrad and Pearl Chin of Cary. She can be reached at 919/244-3867 or mpchin@unity.ncsu.edu.

Love of Law Has Student Positioned for Career as Federal Agent

As a child, Michelle Dodge loved to listen to her favorite uncle's stories about his work as police officer in a K-9 unit in Michigan. Those stories piqued her interest in the law, and her experiences at NC State have positioned her to pursue a career in federal law enforcement after graduation.

Dodge currently interns with the Drug Enforcement Administration, where she has worked alongside federal agents with surveillance, investigating cases, planning operations and writing reports. "The DEA has really shaped my experience in an effort to prepare me for the career of a special agent," Dodge, a political science major with an emphasis in law and justice, says. "They know that I am full-hearted in my ambitions and have really helped me to grow toward that position. The agency has given me many opportunities and made conscious efforts that have only reinforced me wanting to pursue a career in federal law enforcement."

As a junior, Dodge also interned with the Department of Defense's Criminal Investigative Service. Her internship with the Drug Enforcement Administration runs through October, and she's now in the process of applying for full-time agent positions in both agencies.

Dodge is the daughter of Phillip and Sharon Dodge of Raleigh. She can be reached at

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919/247-2259.

Student Speaker Hopes Graduates Will Continue to ‘Think Big’

The words of the late John T. Caldwell inspired Lauren Welch so much that she will use the former chancellor’s message to challenge her fellow graduates to “think big” during NC State’s commencement exercises. Welch took Caldwell’s message to heart after listening to a recording of a speech Caldwell made to students in which he encouraged them to “think big about your possibilities in this world.” Those words inspired Welch to make the most of opportunities during her time at NC State.

Since coming to NC State, Welch, a recipient of the prestigious Caldwell Scholarship named for the former chancellor, has participated in study-abroad programs, served as president of the Alumni Association’s Student Ambassador Program, and engaged in various service-learning projects. She has also served as a guest researcher with the Centers for Disease Control and interned with John Edwards’ presidential campaign. Welch will graduate with degrees in chemistry and multidisciplinary studies. Following graduation, she plans to intern on Capitol Hill before teaching in Austria as part of a Fulbright Scholarship. Welch plans to go on to law school to prepare for a future career in international politics.

“Graduation is a time to look back and reflect on who you are and who you have become during your four years at NC State,” Welch says. “It’s also a time to look forward and think about the future and the goals we set for ourselves. I hope the members of our class will continue to ‘think big’ about what they are going to do with their lives and not limit themselves in any way, shape or form as they consider their options for their professional and personal lives.”

Welch is the daughter of Chris and Renda Welch of Concord, N.C. She can be reached at 919/601-2019.

First Native-American Park Scholar Makes a Difference

Making an impact in people’s lives is important to Shelly Strickland.

So NC State’s first Native American Park Scholar and double major in biomedical and biological engineering will attend medical school at East Carolina University in the fall.

But becoming a doctor won’t begin Strickland’s odyssey to help people. That quest started years ago.

Strickland is a tireless champion of the Lumbee tribe. She is vice president of NC State’s Native American Student Association, and developed and implemented a program – Striving for Excellent Leaders for the Future – to help Native American youth in the Triangle develop cultural awareness and leadership skills.

Strickland also fulfills many community service duties as the reigning Miss Indian North Carolina. She volunteers at urgent care facilities and health clinics, and has worked to serve the homeless. Her resume of service helped her to win the 2004 College of Engineering Senior Award for Citizenship and Service.

While attending NC State, Strickland won Udall and E.J. Tyson Memorial scholarships, was a National Collegiate Scholar, and was inducted into Gamma Beta Phi, Golden Key and Phi Eta Sigma honor societies.

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Strickland is the daughter of Sandra and Ronald Strickland of Maxton, N.C. She can be reached at 910/521-4688 or srstric2@unity.ncsu.edu.

Wheelchair User Scores Big with Powerhockey Team and Hurricanes

Like many other students, Jonathan Greeson is a big Wolfpack fan with a passion for college athletics and hockey. Using his motorized wheelchair to get around campus and NC State's hallowed sports venues, he has fulfilled a lifelong dream to attend NC State and be part of the Wolfpack sports community.

Greeson has also turned that passion into an opportunity to make sports more available for himself and others who use electric wheelchairs. He is the founder of the N.C. Electric Wheelchair Hockey Association (NCEWHA) and the Carolina Fury, a wheelchair Powerhockey demonstration team. Greeson, who has muscular dystrophy, says Powerhockey requires less upper-body strength than other wheelchair sports and is ideally suited for electric wheelchair users.

But his hockey fever doesn't stop there. Greeson turned his enthusiasm into an internship with the Carolina Hurricanes. "I couldn't really afford the tickets, so I decided to work for them," he says. Greeson assists the Hurricanes community relations department in its fund-raising efforts to support local children's charities. He helps with special events, works at the silent auction booth at Hurricanes games, and fulfills donation requests. The training has been highly relevant, Greeson says, to his own efforts to raise money and garner publicity for the NCEWHA.

Greeson is the son of Vance and Connie Greeson of Pikeville, N.C. He will earn a bachelor's degree in business management, with a concentration in finance. He plans to become a financial planner. Greeson can be reached at 919/828-6574.

Passion for Politics Helps Student Develop Campaign Strategies

Lance Mangum plotted his college career much like a political consultant plots a campaign strategy. Mangum's maneuverings presently have him working behind the scenes in what will be one of most visible U.S. Senate races of 2004. Mangum, who majored in political science and minored in journalism, works as a part-time deputy press secretary for Erskine Bowles' Senate campaign.

"I've wanted to work in politics since I was 6 or 7 years old," says Mangum, who came to NC State largely because he believed attending college in the state's capital would enable him to gain valuable political experience. "I've always been intrigued by campaigns, and I enjoy the strategic element of politics. I'd like to become a political consultant, and working with the Bowles campaign has been a valuable experience."

During his time at NC State, Mangum has worked with two of North Carolina's most prominent political consultants – Gary Pearce and Brad Crone. He has also interned in Gov. Mike Easley's office and served in NC State's student government. Following graduation, Mangum will join the Bowles' campaign staff on a full-time basis. He also plans on attending graduate school, but when he enrolls will depend on November's election returns. "Everything really rests on what happens in November," he says.

Mangum is the son of Larry and Phyllis Mangum of Yanceyville, N.C. He can be reached at 919/875-1192.

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A Long Time Coming, but Degree in Sight for David Patton

Tanning hides for the likes of rock stars, NASCAR drivers and prestigious museums just wasn't enough for Robert David Patton.

The 39-year-old, who took his first class at NC State in 1988 and managed to fit in classes around his busy work schedule as a fur dresser, will complete his degree in agricultural business management with a concentration in biological sciences and a minor in economics. After spending a career tanning hides of a variety of animals for the rich and famous – rock star Ted Nugent and NASCAR driver Terry Labonte, among others – Patton is going into business for himself.

He's purchasing a tannery that is going out of business, and will open Lonestar Fur Dressing Company later this summer. He'll work on custom tanning for the sheep and goat industry; his business will be one of only three such tanneries in the United States. He hopes to later purchase more machinery and enter the taxidermy tanning industry.

Patton will work a second job with Caterpillar while he gets his business off the ground. His degree will come in handy as he looks to advance in that company.

"I have been working and going to school now for 17 years," he says. "Now I will work two jobs instead of going to school and working."

Patton lives with his wife and 2-year-old daughter in Clayton, N.C. He can be reached at darwin98@att.net.

A Quest to Help Other Fuels Textile Engineering Grad

Hailey Queen of Advance, N.C., enjoys helping others; she also likes to keep busy. In addition to pursuing a challenging textiles engineering degree, she spent four years in the marching band and the jazz band and also found time to play in the wind ensemble. She is also a member of Phi Sigma Pi, a national honors fraternity.

Queen's first post-undergraduate decision is what to do next. She's waiting for an acceptance announcement from two local AmeriCorps projects, Communities in Schools and the National Student Partnerships. She explains that this is her chance to give back to the community and calls it perfect timing. "Who knows when there will be another time in my life to devote an entire year to helping people," she said. "It's something that seems exciting and a different kind of opportunity and experience."

After a year of service to the community, Queen expects to return to the classroom and begin post-graduate textiles studies. Her senior design project was in the field of biomedical textiles and she expects to continue on that path.

Queen said her most rewarding college experience was her participation in the marching band. She spent her first three years playing the tenor saxophone; this year she was the drum major. Queen says playing in the marching band was a great stress reliever.

She identifies her textiles engineering curriculum as the most challenging part of her undergraduate college experience. Perhaps even a little more challenging than she expected, but she credits that experience with teaching her how to work harder.

Queen is graduating with a bachelor's degree in textile engineering, chemistry and science.

Queen can be reached at 919/413-5970 or haqueen@unity.ncsu.edu.