

## Taking Care of Business

For many students walking into the “hallowed” halls of higher education for the first time, college is a whole new world—and not in a good way. There are simple things like class locations and credit hours and prerequisites to figure out. There are complex things like the whole academic “lingo” and a prof’s teaching style to decipher. There are whole new sets of friends to make, work schedules to reconcile, and study skills to learn.

Smart college students—*successful* college students—are those who figure out early in their academic careers the quick paths through all the mazes. Vesha McNeely is one such student.

When McNeely started out at Ouachita Technical College, she had a unique opportunity. McNeely was told that she was in a unique pilot class, and that if she worked hard, she could make her way through two semesters of English in one semester--IF she worked really hard.

McNeely was enrolled in an accelerated Basic Grammar/Basic Composition class, a combination class that is a project the College is undertaking as part of its Achieving the Dream initiative to improve student retention and success in college. By working hard to meet the outcomes of two courses instead of one, McNeely could obtain six hours instead of three, save herself some Pell monies, and get into Composition I with not only the skills she needed to be a successful college writer, but with speed—an important consideration for someone who wants to go on for a four-year degree and beyond.

Says McNeely, “It was very nice, knowing that you are receiving credit for both classes at once.” Successful completion of the English classes was also required for other college-level courses. “You get to move on to the next subjects and continue to progress in all your required classes,” she says. The class “. . . helped me remember to always have a title, a thesis, a minimum of three paragraphs and a conclusion. I still manage to use some of my notes from the combo to help me get through the other [classes].”

McNeely, an outgoing and personable student, noted that she could not have been successful in the acceleration without her teacher—Ms. Donna Hill. “She not only taught us how to organize our thoughts in our papers, but she is very encouraging. She always told us to write about something we had an interest in.”

The encouraging faculty is not the only thing McNeely has liked about OTC. “OTC is a very small campus, which I like—meeting different people and speaking to others. The classes are not really big, so you can get more time to collaborate on what the teacher is explaining. It’s nice to see the school is prospering and moving on to higher heights.”

Although she started out wanting to be a middle school teacher, McNeely is thinking now about going for her Master’s degree in guidance counseling. “After I finish OTC, my plans are to attend Henderson State University where I can take up classes to become a school counselor.” She wants to help others successfully mold their futures and move forward into the whole new world of their own potential.