

Collin students chase their Harvard dreams

GROWING UP IN AMMAN, Jordan, Collin College alumnus Farid Nemri could see the value of a good education all around him. As is the case in the United States, many of his country's leaders had attended Ivy League schools before returning home to help others.

"When they came back, they worked in great positions where they could create change and improve their country," Nemri said. "My dad always told me that education is the most important thing. It's the key that opens doors."

His father's advice is holding true for Nemri, whose education at Collin College and the people he met there have been keys to achieving his dream. After a lengthy admission process, Nemri has been accepted to the Harvard Extension School's baccalaureate program for the fall 2015 semester.

The Harvard Extension School offers both undergraduate and graduate degree tracks in addition to its role as a global continuing education resource for people seeking a Harvard education. A mix of web conference and select campus-based classes allows students to reap the benefits of the Ivy League without taking on the debt that usually accompanies them.

As one of 12 degree-granting programs at Harvard, the extension school also gives its students access to almost all of the resources available to traditional students, including its libraries, its faculty and events on campus.

For Nemri, who plans to move to Cambridge soon, the opportunity is a dream come true. He remembers talking with his father about the university at a young age, seeking out articles about it

online and reading the Harvard Gazette to learn more.

"I appreciate Ivy League schools in general," he said. "I have always wanted to attend one, but Harvard was always close to my heart."

Nemri isn't the only one. Jonelle Gascoigne, a 2015 graduate of Collin College and the outgoing Honors Institute Student Organization president, is also going through the admissions process this fall. Gascoigne said she appreciates the structure of the extension school's classes, which remind her of the honors classes she took at Collin.

"The classes are very much focused on the professor's passion," she said. "I just think you learn so much more when your professors love what they are talking about."

Gascoigne's passion is religion and, if accepted, she plans to earn a bachelor's degree with a concentration in theological studies.

"I absolutely love religion," she said. "I think it is important to study, because how can you understand someone if you don't know their primary understanding of the cosmos?"

Her love of the subject comes, in part, from her father who is currently seeking his doctorate of divinity. Homeschooled for much of her life, Gascoigne pointed to Collin's dual-credit courses as reinforcing a desire for higher education and her time in honors program with helping prepare her for the challenges ahead.

To earn her degree through the extension school, though, Gascoigne will first have to work her way into the program as Nemri did. While anyone can take classes through the extension school, only a small percentage of

students are accepted into the degree programs.

Students must first take three required courses to determine if they meet the school's academic standards and pass with a 3.0. Nemri passed with a 4.0. He also had to prove his critical reading and writing skills, meet an English proficiency requirement and write two entrance essays, which were reviewed by the admissions committee that ultimately accepts or rejects a student's application.


Nemri said he was confident he would be admitted, in part because of his experiences at Collin, where he focused on core science classes. While he has not locked himself into one field, he said he would like to do something in medicine or dentistry.

"I would like to pursue dentistry, but I also like working in international relations, dealing with global health—care issues," he said. "Hopefully, getting a bachelor's degree from Harvard would make it more likely to get into a prestigious professional school, such as one of Harvard's."

An honors-level science education wasn't the only thing he took from Collin, though. He also learned leadership during his time in the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society, where he served as the public relations vice president and ultimately as president of the college's Alpha Mu Tau chapter. He said that his professors and the PTK advisors, especially Dr. Jessica Hargis, a professor of political science, all made a significant impression on him.

His involvement in the student organization also helped him in another way. A PTK scholarship paid for the first three classes required for admission.

"Collin College was the reason I was able to pursue my dreams. It was the first step," he said. "It was time for me to take the next step and I am glad to have taken this Harvard experience as my next step."

For more information on Collin College, visit www.collin.edu. 



Farid Nemri is a native of Jordan.
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