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Destination DePaul

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Once a Blue Demon, always a Blue Demon. But where do Blue Demons come from? Our alumni followed a multitude of roads to reach DePaul. Whose story is similar to yours?

**THE ALTAR BOY**

Stanley Herzog (BUS ’68) attended St. John Bosco Catholic Church on Chicago’s West Side, where the Rev. Patrick J. Mullins, C.M., was a priest. Fr. Mullins, who also had been a historian and librarian for DePaul, collared Herzog one day and asked where he was going to college. When Herzog shrugged, Fr. Mullins told him to take DePaul’s upcoming entrance exam. Herzog passed and enrolled. “I did not regret it,” he says.

“I wanted to do something in business, and DePaul had a good record. And I could take the train to school,” says Herzog, who was the first in his family to graduate from college. To earn extra cash, he and his classmates often started little ventures. The one that paid off the most was an investment club that led to him getting a job at stock brokerage Paine Webber and Company upon graduation. Although Herzog was drafted for the Vietnam War later that year, his college degree helped him land a noncombat role as a secretary to a major general.

After his military service, Herzog returned to Paine Webber and later worked for Bear Stearns and Fidelity Investments in Chicago. A frequent visitor to DePaul, he marvels at how much the Loop Campus has changed. “All we had back then was the Lewis Building, and even in that building, the only thing that looks the same is the entrance. And the elevators. They’re still slow.”
The Neighbor

Vic Faraci (MUS ’54) walked past DePaul University every day on his way to DePaul Academy, a high school located in what is now Byrne Hall, but he never considered going there. No one in his family had ever gone to college. Faraci told his band director, Thomas Justus (MUS ’38), that he planned to get a job after he graduated from high school, saying, “My father works two jobs a day to keep our family going. I can’t afford to go to college.”

But Justus was also head of the music education department at DePaul’s School of Music. He offered Faraci a full scholarship to get the talented young drummer into the university band.

Although he did not have the classical music background of his fellow students, Faraci thrived. He even formed a dance band called Vic Faraci and His Orchestra, playing for dances in “The Barn,” the old student auditorium.

Faraci’s big break came, not on the stage, but from a classmate, who introduced him to the owner of a small record distributor on Michigan Avenue. It was the beginning of more than 40 years in the music business. When Faraci retired in 2000, he was senior vice president of marketing for Warner Brothers Records. “DePaul offered me the opportunity to pursue goals that I never would have pursued—and certainly not achieved—had I not gone there.”

The Legacy

Nina Whalen (CMN ’12), Faraci’s granddaughter, grew up hearing about DePaul. “My grandpa and I are super, super close, so honestly, when it came time for looking at colleges, I just wanted to go where he went.”

Whalen didn’t grow up in Chicago; she is from Valencia, Calif. Despite never having set foot on campus, she immediately accepted her admission offer. While it was initially hard being far from home and family, Whalen says, “When I got to DePaul, it felt like home, too. Everyone is just there for each other. I felt that from the first day on campus.”

It helped that she could see her grandfather’s photo on a wall or talk with DePaul faculty and staff who knew him. “People I’d never seen before would tell me these in-depth stories about him,” she says. “It made the whole experience more special.”

After working for Comcast SportsNet Chicago for three years, Whalen is now an account executive for a marketing agency. She says DePaul was everything her grandfather promised. “I was given so many awesome opportunities. I was news director of the radio station. I was involved in student government. I got to go to Paris on the [Vincentian Heritage Tour]. All of those opportunities stand out so much. I’ll never forget.”
The Transfer Student

In high school, Indra Pelaez (CDM ’02, MEd ’05) was so good at math that her teacher sent her to programs on college campuses to encourage her to enroll. But Pelaez, who had recently immigrated from Guatemala, didn’t think her English was good enough: “I didn’t feel like I belonged. It just didn’t feel right.”

So Pelaez enrolled at Wilbur Wright College in Chicago and earned an associate degree while strengthening her English. Like her high school teacher, her community college advisor and her math teacher urged Pelaez to get a bachelor’s degree and recommended she check out DePaul. “So I went and I fell in love. I felt safe and I felt like people really cared about me,” Pelaez recalls. Still, she felt ill-equipped to navigate a large university, that is, until she connected with a peer mentor through the Office of Multicultural Student Success who showed her the ropes.

After she graduated, she took a job at Wright College working with first-generation students. “I realized that my passion was to help others, just like I had people helping me,” Pelaez says. She returned to DePaul to get her master’s in human services and counseling, and then spent 15 years supporting students enrolled in the City Colleges of Chicago. Now associate vice chancellor of engagement and success at Houston Community College, Pelaez never misses a chance to stop by campus when she returns to Chicago: “I love coming back to DePaul. I feel comfortable here. I feel like I belong. That was the atmosphere I felt when I first walked in, and I still feel that way.”

“I FEEL LIKE I BELONG.”
—INDRA PELAEZ (CDM ’02, MEd ’05)

The Adult Student

Anghesom Atsbaha (SCPS ’85, MA ’93) was in the final semester of his bachelor’s degree in his native Eritrea when war forced him to flee. He ended up in a Sudanese refugee camp, where he made the first of several connections that brought him to DePaul. Atsbaha was hired to help with a refugee survey by a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She persuaded him to apply for asylum, and he was resettled in Chicago.

She also put Atsbaha in touch with a faculty member at Northwestern University. Rather than help him enroll at Northwestern, the professor recommended that Atsbaha complete his degree at the School for New Learning, now called the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCPS). “It was one of the best choices of my academic life,” says Atsbaha. Not only was he able to complete his bachelor’s degree in a year, he also became close friends with former SCPS Dean David Justice. Atsbaha returned to SCPS to earn a master’s degree. Soon after graduating, he began teaching courses on African history through the college, “and I’ve never left.”

Atsbaha remains an adjunct faculty member at SCPS, as well as a tenured faculty member at Truman College, part of the City Colleges of Chicago. He co-founded and directs the...
Truman-DePaul Bridge Program that helps students transition to DePaul.

“I found meaning here. The faculty are always trying to help you find your own path and your own identity,” he says. “The school became my home.”

THE ASPIRANT
When Arielle Williams (JD ’18) was a child in Chicago’s Englewood neighborhood, she and her mother watched in fascination as lawyer Johnny Cochran defended former NFL player O. J. Simpson during the latter’s televised murder trial.

“Right then I knew I wanted to be a lawyer,” Williams remembers. In her teens, her passion shifted from entertainment to criminal defense law as she became aware of systemic flaws in the justice system and inadequate representation for those accused of crimes. She earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in social work and interned in a probation office in preparation for law school.

However, she did poorly on her Law School Admission Test (LSAT), so she wasn’t accepted to any schools. She vowed to not let that happen again.

“I studied all the time, I got tutors, I took online courses, everything,” she says. She retook the test, and her much-improved scores netted her several admission offers. She chose DePaul’s College of Law because “I could feel the love. I knew I would be supported.”

That mattered because no one she knew had ever gone to law school. She found a friend and mentor in DePaul Chaplain Tom Judge, who provided her with both practical and emotional support. “I found myself in Tom’s office often, chatting about life’s highs and lows,” she says.

Now Williams is thrilled to be working for her new idol, criminal defense attorney Jed Stone, at Stone & Associates in Waukegan, Ill. The depth of her joy became clear to millions when a video of her finding out that she had passed the Illinois Bar Association exam went viral. (Watch it at depaulmagazine.com.)

“Now I’m doing what I set out to do.”

THE BRIDGE STUDENT
Arthur Vásquez Jr. (BUS ’03) readily admits he was a lot more interested in sports than in grades while attending high school in Hammond, Ind. This became a problem when he wanted to play college soccer.

“I had a 2.2 GPA in high school,” he says. “I got turned down pretty much everywhere,” except at DePaul, which admitted him conditionally through its summer bridge program. Not only did he do better than the required C average, he made the dean’s list—but not the soccer team.

“Since sports wasn’t on the table anymore, I shifted my mindset to academics.”

While having to attend the summer program was a blow to his pride, it stoked his desire to succeed, he says. “Bridge

“It was the best of both worlds.”

—ARTHUR VÁSQUEZ JR. (BUS ’03)
was an important piece of the process for me because there were good people there who wanted to be successful but who really didn’t have an opportunity. DePaul gave them that opportunity.”

Vásquez discovered how to balance work and fun when he joined a social fraternity, Phi Kappa Psi. “A lot of [the brothers] were Strobel [Honors Accounting Program] members. They were very smart people who helped keep me focused,” says Vásquez, who now is chief operating officer and chief financial officer of Indiana University Health. He says people also knew how to relax. “It was the best of both worlds.”

The international student

Paul Carisma (CMN ’14) was a senior in high school in Haiti when a major earthquake devastated the island nation in 2010. Because most of his high school became an American military base and many of his teachers left the country, his odds of graduating were slim. Then his mother got a call from Laura Hartman, a professor in DePaul’s Driehaus College of Business, who advised the microfinance organization where Carisma’s mother worked.

“Laura said, ‘I know we’ve only communicated through emails and conference calls, but if you’d like, your son can spend four months in Chicago with me and finish at my daughter’s high school,’” says Carisma. His mother accepted.

Carisma applied to DePaul because of the university’s Vincentian values. “Where I grew up, I was always volunteering,” says Carisma, who often served as a translator for medical teams in remote areas of Haiti. Transitioning to Chicago’s weather was another thing entirely.

“When I was a freshman, that’s the year we had the ‘snowpocalypse’ snowstorm and DePaul closed. I don’t remember that week. I don’t because I literally went into hibernation,” says Carisma, laughing. “My friends would come to my room and say they walked on the lake, they skied on Lake Shore Drive, and I was underneath two piles of comforters. I was just in a daze for an entire week.”

Carisma not only adapted; he came back for more. He is currently in DePaul’s master’s program for public service management. “When you’re at a university, you expect to meet different people, but when you’re actually interacting with them and having conversations with people who’ve had a completely different experience than you, it’s very interesting. You have to be willing to delve into their world and see what they’ve experienced. DePaul really taught me that.”

The veteran

After nine years in the U.S. Army, Lucas Estelle (CSH ’17) wanted to use his veterans benefits to finish the associate degree he started at Chicago State University. After he graduated, a professor there told him he should look into DePaul.

“DePaul, this whole organization, with all the different resources, they really want me to succeed.”

—Paul Carisma (CMN ’14)
“I didn’t know if I could keep up with the curriculum that DePaul has, but my teacher said, ‘Yes, you should give DePaul a try,’” says Estelle, who grew up on Chicago’s South Side. “DePaul is one of the better schools for veterans in Chicago. I lucked up. Man, it’s been a wonderful ride.”

The ride got bumpy a year later when Estelle experienced homelessness. DePaul faculty and staff helped him find housing and support through the university’s Center for Students with Disabilities. Student veterans and staff in the Department of Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs kept him motivated. Even his mathematics study group helped him stay on track. “That’s when I knew this was the right school for me,” says Estelle.

“I feel that I was able to close a chapter of my life that had always been open. I told myself as a young kid, ‘I want a degree,’” says Estelle, who is now a specialist with the partner finance division at CDW.

“To close that door and to watch other doors open because I have that degree, it’s a good feeling.”

THE OUT-OF-STATER

Jessica Le (BUS ’18) could have stayed in Texas and gone to college with her high school friends. That’s exactly what she didn’t want to do. “It would have been the same experience of high school all over again. High school 2.0,” she says.

So she and her stepfather began visiting colleges in Illinois, where he grew up. “On our tour at Loyola [University], our guide said, ‘DePaul is our rival.’ I said, ‘DePaul? Where’s that?’” After they toured DePaul’s campus, her stepfather said, “Why don’t you just go to DePaul? You’ve never lived where there’s the city scene. DePaul is in the city. It’s exactly what you want.” She agreed.

Le knew she made the right choice after the first quarter. “My Texas friends never talked about new people they met. I had to make new friends. I had to figure out college by myself. That actually shaped who I am today, because if they were with me, I wouldn’t have found my independence.”

Le values the mentors and support she found at DePaul, especially through the business fraternity Delta Sigma Pi, which she served as president. “DePaul strives to make sure that students are well-rounded. I think all the internships I’ve had throughout my collegiate career got me my role [as a forensic accountant] at Deloitte. DePaul pushed me and shaped me. If I had gone to a state school in the middle of nowhere, I don’t think I would have had that experience.”