

switched

FROM BUSINESS TO DENTISTRY

*Can a simple question change your life?
According to Kristen Gerity '04, yes, it can and did*

by Michele Tinker, Director of Annual Giving

“No one ever told me I couldn’t do it,” stated Kristen Gerity, commenting on where she is today. Kristen, a 2004 graduate of Defiance College, is currently a student of dentistry at Ohio State University. Now just weeks away from officially adding D.D.S. to her name, Kristin realizes that if she’d been at a different college, she might not be here right now.

When this young woman from Whitehouse, Ohio entered Defiance, she came in as a business major. Kristen had been focusing on this track for quite

some time. Active in DECA, a business and marketing extracurricular program at Anthony Wayne High School, she even competed at the regional, state and national levels within the organization, where she did very well. “I can just sell stuff – it’s a talent,” she freely admitted. Coming into DC, Kristen was on course to take the business world by storm.

Then a couple of things happened to make her reconsider this direction.

Instead of a basic science class, she took geology from Professor Mary Ann Studer. One day, Mrs. Studer asked her if she enjoyed the class. When Kristen said yes,

the professor said, “Why are you going into business?” That conversation made quite an impact on Kristen.

It was the summer after her sophomore year when Kristen had the opportunity to intern with a local financial institution. It was a wonderful experience, but it made her realize that she didn’t want to start at the bottom of an organization and take 20 years to move up the corporate ladder. She began some serious soul-searching and decided she wanted to pursue a career in some field of medicine. However, she wanted to be able to have a family, and have more normal working hours than most physicians do, and she hit upon dentistry, with an eye to becoming an oral surgeon.

Two weeks before the start of her junior year, Kristen switched her college focus entirely.

She related how she walked into her business advisor’s office and informed him of her plans. She told him, “These are the classes I’ve taken, and these are the classes I need to get a Natural Science degree, okay?”

Well, not exactly. Her advisor referred her to Professor Dave Reed, then head of the science department. Professor Reed told her she would be taking four years of science in two years, and she didn’t have the prerequisites for many of these classes. He asked, “Can you handle this?”

Kristen felt certain that she could. She had taken honors science classes in high school, which she thought would make up for the lack of the prerequisites. She must have been convincing, because after listening to her, Reed said, “Well, you have it figured out,” and signed off on it.

“I started my science classes and found out exactly what I was in for,”



Kristen Gerity '04

Kristen said with a rueful smile. Her first year as a science major, she studied nonstop. "I was used to getting straight A's, and my first C devastated me," she remembers. It was, however, in a science class for which she hadn't taken a pre-requisite.

Her late switch to a science major exacted a big toll on other areas of her life. She dropped out of student government and her marketing club, and drastically curtailed her social life. Kristen thinks she alienated a few friends, who didn't understand her sudden change in direction and the amount of work she was putting into it. "Most of the people got it," Kristen explained. "I think they were enjoying the show!" Kristen gives a lot of credit to Professor Studer for what she was able to accomplish. In addition to providing emotional support, Studer recruited her for the honors program and Kristen got back into participating in extracurricular organizations.

It was at the end of her junior year that she took the dental admission test, with just one year of science under her belt. She did well enough to get an interview with OSU and another college.

One question asked was, "How in the world did they (DC) let you do this?"

Her OSU interviewer told her he liked her but he didn't know what to say to his colleagues to convince them that she should be accepted into the dental program.

"I have done more in one year than most people have that have applied to this school," said Kristen Gerity '04 to her dental program interviewer.

Her response was, "I have done more in one year than most people have that have applied to this school."

When she graduated from Defiance College, Kristen was awarded the Pilgrim Medal, the highest honor given by the College. It is given to the graduating senior who exemplifies self-reliance, pride in work, courage and conscience, strength in education and faith in God.

Now, Kristen has passed all her boards, and will be graduating in June. She'll spend the time until then working in the clinic with patients. Dental students are required to complete a certain number of required procedures before graduation, and she is almost done with these requirements. Kristen also has dedicated a lot of her time to the Ohio Project, which works with low income/Medicaid patients in high need areas throughout the state, and she is teaching a class on making partial plates.

Kristen has high regard for the DC science faculty, who she felt were very supportive of her efforts at every turn. "No

one ever told me I couldn't do it," she emphasized. She especially remembers a senior year experiment on whitening teeth that she's sure tested the patience of Dr. Spiro Mavroidis to the limit. Research showed Kristen that cow teeth are

similar to human teeth, which is what she decided to use in her project. However, instead of being able to secure cow teeth, she ended up with cow jaws and had to remove the teeth for the project herself. This turned out to be a more difficult process than she had anticipated, and resulted in her turning the DC anatomy lab into something resembling a scene from a horror movie.

Her plans to become an oral surgeon have changed. She has discovered that she enjoys the range of procedures in general dentistry, and feels she has a good eye for cosmetic and rehabilitation dentistry. She will be joining Lima Dental Associates once she gets her license this summer.

Despite the rough patch they hit when she switched her major, Kristen is now engaged to John Piper, also a member of the DC Class of 2004. John is currently working as an athletic trainer in Chelsea Community Hospital in Chelsea, Michigan, but has plans to relocate to Lima as well. "We've spent four years apart and that's long enough," Kristen said. ♦

Dr. O'Connell Named Provost

Dr. Catharine O'Connell, vice president for academic affairs at Defiance College, has been named Provost of the College, effective June 1. Dr. Gerald Wood, president, made the announcement, saying, "The creation of this position will strategically align the curriculum and co-curriculum to help us achieve the goal of creating an integrated culture of engagement." To accomplish this, the Provost will oversee the areas of academics, student life, and athletics.

Dr. O'Connell came to Defiance College in 2004. In her time at Defiance, Dr. O'Connell has helped to lead the College in several initiatives including the creation of the innovative Hench Autism Studies Program; growth of the College's signature program, the McMaster School for Advancing Humanity; and the development of new academic majors in international and global studies, computer forensics, and nursing. She presents regularly at national conferences on Defiance College's efforts to integrate academic excellence with education for responsible global citizenship. The past two years she has participated in the Cambodia Learning Community as part of the McMaster School for Advancing Humanity, traveling with Defiance students and faculty to Cambodia to take part in their service-based research initiatives.

Prior to her arrival at Defiance College, Dr. O'Connell served at Cabrini College in Pennsylvania where she was the dean for academic affairs. Dr. O'Connell earned her Ph.D. in American Culture from the University of Michigan, a master of arts in American Culture from the University of Michigan and a bachelor of arts in American Studies from Amherst College. ♦



Dr. O'Connell, right, enjoys Commencement 2008 with speaker Maria Hinojosa, far left, and Rev. Jan Bechtel, campus chaplain.