The May 2013 issue of Spotlight on NTO features the Human Services Program at NTC. Current student Jeremy Ratliff tells how he took the long route to making his career decision, and graduate Aaron Mielke talks about finishing a bachelor’s degree in the field.

Human Services instructor Tammy Gorski shares her recent service trip to the island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and how service projects are part of the Service Learning Certificate offered here at NTC. You will also meet HS Program Advisor Christine Munson.

Meet Jeremy Ratliff, currently in the NTC Human Services Program

Like a number of students, I was a “late bloomer” in terms of kicking off my post-secondary educational career. In fact, I was 26 years old when I returned to school, having chosen the military as my first post-secondary option. My first choice in terms of a college education was that of Human Resources-Business Administration at Western Technical College in La Crosse. Looking back on that choice, I can't help but wonder what in the world I was thinking!

Honestly, the motive behind the choice was well intended. Originally, I considered Criminal Justice because I had spent most of my childhood with aspirations for law enforcement and had served in the US Army as a military policeman. However, my father suggested I try a different program. His logic was simple: Try something else you may be interested in so you don't miss out on a hidden opportunity. If you don't like it, go back to Criminal Justice.

I lasted a whole semester in the BA field. The instructors were great and so were my peers; but my heart and mind just weren't in it. It didn't help seeing the blue clad CJ students walking around with duty belts and talking about the firing range, Emergency Vehicle course, etc. To make a long story short, I switched to the WTC-Criminal Justice program the following fall and thought I had found my calling.

I proceeded to do very well academically and landed my first law enforcement job before even finishing school - something I take a great deal of pride in to this day, along with being the second person in my entire family to earn a college degree. (My oldest brother beat me to it by a semester!)
As the wheels of fate turned, I found myself seeking a career change. Now residing in the Wausau area, I discovered the many program choices available at NTC. I thought hard about what my true passion is and which past jobs I had enjoyed the most. The answer soon became clear: helping people! I have always enjoyed working with and around people and have taken a great deal of satisfaction in helping those in need. Once I had narrowed it down to that single concept, the choice was simple. In January 2013, I joined the ranks of the Human Services-Associate Degree program.

I'll admit I was a bit nervous at first. I was out of my comfort zone and in unfamiliar territory. However, I soon realized how the two job fields are very similar. I also realized many of the same skills I had learned in Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement would prove useful in the Human Services field. A week or two into the program, I came across another unfamiliar concept: being classified as an “NTO” student. When my instructor first mentioned the acronym, I had never heard of a non-traditional occupation. I came to understand not only the meaning, but the current trends associated with being an NTO student. According to school staff, being an NTO student means I am in the 25 percent of male students who have chosen Human Services as their career field.

I feel that being a “minority” in a field is a positive, growing concept. It seems that a variety of career fields are currently undergoing a face lift, so to speak. For example, more men are entering the Nursing field than in the past, and more women are entering the fields of law enforcement and corrections. It all makes perfect sense to me.

There is a place for all of us in any career choice we choose. It's just a matter of proving it and creating our niche, even if it means being pioneers of sorts.

Aaron Mielke, a 2010 graduate of NTC’s Human Services program, graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Human Services from UW Oshkosh in December 2012. He recently sat down to talk with NTO program coordinator Suzi Mathias.

Suzi: Tell me a little bit about your background.

Aaron: Right after high school, I enlisted in the army where I was a combat medic. While in the army, I injured both of my knees and was honorably discharged. I returned home to Wausau, Wisconsin, and I worked at several local manufacturers for about 10 years.

Due to my injuries in the military, I had to have both of my knees replaced and I could no longer work in a factory. I decided to go to school at Northcentral Technical College; however, I was unsure of what I wanted to do in the future. The Trio program helped me make a career choice. The instructors of the Human Services program allowed me to just come “try out” a class for a day to see what I thought. Eric Anderson, one of the instructors of the Human Services program, offered encouragement and support. I was hooked and knew I wanted to be in the Human Services field. I knew I wanted to make a difference and be a better person.
I was made aware that I was a non-traditional occupation student. In some of my classes, I did feel out of place at first, not only for being a male in a female-dominated program but also because I was older. My advisor reassured me that things would work out for the best.

Suzi: What struggles or successes did you have along the way?

Aaron: Learning how to use the computer and making the computer more user-friendly was a journey. Coming back to school after 20 years was an uncomfortable situation. Trio, Student Success, and the instructors made all the difference in the world. In each case, I was assisted in the transition to my new role as a student. Chris Munson, an advisor for the Human Services program, and Tammy Gorski, an instructor for Human Services, were very helpful in my decision making and meeting my goals.

Immediately after graduation from NTC, I transferred to UW-Oshkosh to complete my bachelor’s degree in Human Services. The NTC Transfer Specialist, Xang Lee, showed me the transfer guides on the web and worked with me to make the transition to a four-year college. He helped me with my application, registering for classes, and working with the Veterans Administration for financial aid.

Suzi: What are you doing now that you’ve completed your bachelor’s degree at UW Oshkosh?

Aaron: Currently, I am a substance abuse counselor at Ministry Health Care, St. Joseph’s Hospital in Marshfield, where I find my job very rewarding. This would not have been possible for me had it not been for Student Services and faculty at Northcentral Technical College.

Suzi: Do you have any advice for nontraditional occupation students?

Aaron: Don’t be afraid to accept help from Student Services and faculty! The assistance that I received from them had a major impact on my education, career, and personal life.

Instructor Tammy Gorski: Service Learning in the Human Services Field

I have always loved to travel, to learn about new cultures, and to meet new people. As faculty in the Human Services Program and as Human Services Club Advisor, I have had the opportunity to share what I have experienced with our learners. Many of our learners do not have the opportunity to experience international travel or even travel outside their regional counties.

When we look at one of NTC’s core values, Service to Community, I believe that the best way to demonstrate this value is by example. During the winter 2013 break, I had the opportunity to travel with volunteers of the Good News Project to the island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I was able to work with Good News members that were local to the island, as well as members that were from Wisconsin and Minnesota. During my time there, I experienced the local food, customs, visited two orphanages, and painted the inside and outside of two homes that we built (walls, trusses, doors, and windows). I visited a local elementary school and interacted with the classrooms. Upon return to the spring
term, I integrated comparisons from the trip into the classroom. Students love to hear stories (and I love to talk), so I felt privileged to share what I experienced with them, as many won’t be able to travel to international destinations.

How do we, the NTC community, encourage acts of service to our community? Some clubs will take trips, go to conferences or engage in local activities. Instructors can encourage service projects within the classroom and attendance at NTC community events. We also have a Service Learning Certificate. The Service Learning Certificate is a certificate intended to showcase the learner’s desire to make a difference in the community. In the four-credit certificate, the learner devotes once class to learning about service learning and the second to creating a service project. The learner picks what type of project they would like to do and where it will be. The service project could be a simple project, or something more involved. The Service Learning Certificate is an excellent complement to any associate degree. To find out more, visit: http://www.ntc.edu/certificates/ag-com/995204 or contact course instructor Amy Tamsen at tamsen@ntc.edu
Meet Human Services Program Advisor Christine Munson

My name is Chris Munson. I am the College Advising Specialist for the Human Services Associate, AODA, and Academic associate degree programs at Northcentral Technical College. I also advise students in Public Safety programs and Sign Language Interpreting in Education. I started advising in June of 2012; prior, I worked with Tutoring Services and Disability Services, while also helping with Job Search Skills Workshops and Mock Interviews.

My main roles as an advisor are to assist students in course planning, discuss how the current semester is going, review progress toward completing a program, and connect students with resources and services available through NTC. I enjoy working with the students and faculty in the Human Services programs.

I earned a Bachelor of Science degree from UW Green Bay with a major in Biology and minors in Chemistry and Environmental Science. I am currently pursuing a Master’s Degree through UW La Crosse for Student Affairs Administration. I love learning, problem solving, and working with students. Serving as a College Advising Specialist at NTC is a humbling experience. I am grateful to have the opportunity to work with the students that come through NTC.

My office hours are Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. To make an appointment, call (715) 803-1797. I have walk-in hours Mondays from 10-noon and Thursdays from 1-3 p.m. My email address is munson@ntc.edu

Your contacts for information on non-traditional careers:
Shannon Livingston, Perkins Grant director, 715.803.1482 or livingst@ntc.edu
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