Dear Friends of the Dougherty Family College,

Spring is a season of renewal and rebirth. At Dougherty Family College, we are taking time to celebrate six wonderful years of our college. I’m thrilled to take the opportunity to highlight some of the successes made possible through your commitment to our scholars. Many scholars tell us that college costs are the biggest barrier to educational attainment. Since our mission is to remove barriers, and the cost of college is at the top of the list for scholars, we are proud to say 92% of our scholars graduated from DFC with zero student loan debt last year.

Employers seek candidates with professional experience, and most scholars need to earn an income while they pursue their education. Our robust internship program allows students to earn that income while they gain the experience necessary to be marketable in their chosen career paths. We placed 217 scholars in paid internships. As a result of gaining real-world experience, our alumni are working full-time as young professionals at US Bank, Target, St. Paul Public Schools, and other great organizations in Minnesota.

This May, we celebrate our 5th graduating class with their associate’s degree. We have graduated 266 scholars and look forward to adding another 40-45 by the end of the academic year. 77% of DFC graduates are enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program or have earned bachelor’s degree. Since 2021, 45 DFC alumni have earned a bachelor’s degree. We estimate that we will graduate another 30-40 scholars with bachelor’s degrees by the end of this summer.

This year we are celebrating 13 DFC scholars who have received the DFC Excellence Scholarship. The DFC Excellence Scholarship is funded by the estate of Marty Ryan and Richard Sterbenz and the generous support of Dr. Gene Frey and his late wife, Mary Frey. The endowed DFC Excellence Scholarship pays the tuition and fees for our graduates for up to three years as they pursue their bachelor’s degree at the University of St. Thomas. In addition to the DFC Excellence Scholarship, the Heim and Soran families have provided extremely generous continuation scholarships for more of our graduates to attend the University of St. Thomas.
There is a lot of joy at our college at this time of the year, and we are excited that next fall, we are on track to have the largest enrollment since the pandemic. Over 122 scholars have already made deposits. We have made significant progress, and our recruitment efforts continue. After six years, we are a strong college, and we will continue to grow and develop. Our scholars deserve the best. This drives us to be our best.

We are fulfilling our mission, and we have outstanding educational outcomes. We could only do this with the support of our phenomenal scholars, staff, faculty, individual and corporate partners, foundations, and community leaders. I cannot wait to see what the next six years will bring Dougherty Family College. The best is yet to come.

We appreciate each of you for the many ways you support our scholars in becoming transformational leaders. We are changing the landscape of higher education together.

Much Gratitude and Love,

Buffy Smith

Dean and Frey Endowed Chair, Dougherty Family College
Interview with Scholar Graduating with Bachelor's Degree

Janette Mendoza

Year in School: Senior

Major: Human Resource Management

What three lessons did you learn at DFC that have helped you in your bachelor's degree program?
The first lesson I learned at DFC was using my voice. I often thought my voice didn’t matter or was afraid to share my opinions. DFC created a space where I knew my voice mattered and gave me opportunities to discuss serious issues with my peers. I gained confidence in sharing my voice and developed the ability to have difficult conversations. At DFC, students and faculty frequently discuss the issues of our time. Through these conversations, I learned that disagreement is okay and that having challenging conversations is essential for growth. Lastly, I learned the importance of paying it forward. I was given a lot of support which positively impacted my success. I want to pass along the goodwill I’ve been extended and help those who need it.

What are your plans after graduation?
I plan to start my career in human resources; specifically, I want to enter an entry-level generalist role in a company in Minnesota.

What advice would you give a student about the benefits of attending DFC?
At DFC, you’re given support as soon as you walk on campus, and the support and care you receive won’t end once you graduate. The people around you genuinely care and want you to succeed and will support you in achieving your goals.
Interview with Scholar Graduating with Bachelor's Degree

Aiesha Osman

Year in School: Senior

Major: Environmental Studies

What three lessons did you learn at DFC that have helped you in your bachelor’s degree program?
The importance of community, 1:1 connection with faculty and staff, and using all campus resources

What are your plans after graduation?
Right now, I don't have specific plans after graduation. I am open to seeing where life takes me. However, I hope to work in the environmental sustainability field.

What advice would you give a student about the benefits of attending DFC?
Build community and connections with everyone. These relationships will stay with you beyond graduating from DFC. Dougherty Family College is a family! Also, take advantage of the many resources at DFC. There are so many opportunities, and so much DFC has to offer, so take advantage of it all!
In September 2022, an anonymous donor/s started a match challenge campaign. Dougherty Family College (DFC) will receive $10 million when it raises a matching $10 million. By adding $20 million to the Dougherty Family College endowment, we can provide scholarships for every DFC scholar – closing the education and prosperity gap for 300 scholars every year and changing the trajectory of future generations. Together, we can make this a reality. This matching gift is a rare opportunity to secure the future for a college that changes lives, families, and communities. Meeting our goal will ensure that DFC is forever a force for the common good.

To unlock the match, DFC must raise $10 million by June 30, 2023.

Pledges and estate gift commitments count toward the match if made by June 30. Gifts can support any area of DFC (such as scholarships, meals, laptops, textbooks, metro passes, program support, etc.), excluding capital expenditures. Also included are scholarships that allow DFC graduates to earn their bachelor’s degree at St. Thomas.

Six years ago, Dougherty Family College made a promise to minimize the financial, academic, and social barriers for scholars to earn their associate’s degree and provide them with a seamless pathway to their bachelor’s degree. We need your help to guarantee that promise.

Please give [online] or connect with Emily Wingfield (email: ewingfield@stthomas.edu; phone: 256-762-6456) to discuss your gift.
The Minnesota Neonatal Foundation is changing the neonatal intensive care unit experience for many parents, families, and staff. This small but mighty nonprofit is approaching the NICU journey through healing, empowerment, and a therapeutic experience. Last year, the Minnesota Neonatal Foundation saw a need in their organization for an intern. A simple Google search led the organization to Dougherty Family College, and a past professional connection opened the door to a new opportunity.

“I loved the (DFC) concept, and I thought it fit well with our principles,” said Dr. Jeanne Mrozek, Founder & President of the Minnesota Neonatal Foundation.

Elizabeth Diaz, a sophomore at DFC, joined the foundation in Fall 2022. Diaz began her time with the foundation helping the team expand the foundation’s social media presence. She also helped to increase outreach efforts within the parent community.

Diaz said the people and connections she has made are her favorite parts of her internship experience. Dr. Mrozek and her team have provided Diaz with direct support, leadership, and mentorship during her time at the foundation.

“Being a part of a startup has really helped me to understand how to network and how to have good communication. Both are just so important to get things done,” Diaz said.

Diaz refers to the mission of the Minnesota Neonatal Foundation as “beautiful.” The passion everyone has and how it translates into their work inspired Diaz and helped her grow confidence in her own capabilities.

“The value of the learning and growth I have received here is something I can directly apply to my future career and business. To watch how you can utilize your passions for what you want to do, and then flip that to give back to the community you care about is really a beautiful thing.”
Something about new beginnings has a way of bringing about mixed feelings. For instance, walking into a room anticipating a relationship with a person you have never met before could make anyone feel anxious, cautious, and awkward, yet at the same time adventurous, excited, and hopeful. That is exactly how the mentoring relationship between Pedro Costa, Director, Real Assets at Castlelake, and Felipe Nuñez Hilton, the second-year scholar at Dougherty Family College (DFC), began.

Pedro and Felipe are participants in the DFC Professional Mentor Program, which provides DFC scholars with a mentor who offers guidance, support, wisdom, connections, and much more. Despite any uncertainty, the drive to connect brought Felipe and Pedro together one afternoon in early November last year for the mentor program kickoff event. The two have continued to lay the foundation for a meaningful relationship.

Many definitions and perspectives on mentorship exist. However, for the purposes of the DFC Professional Mentor Program, the focus is on the relationship between the mentor and mentee, especially involving individualized guidance and support to further a scholar’s knowledge of workplace culture and professional skills.

“I see the mentorship program as an opportunity to share experiences, resources, past mistakes, and learn together,” said Costa. “It's a way to give back part of the grace first given to me by others who have helped and mentored me throughout my own career.” Mentoring is important to DFC scholars not only for the relationship-building, knowledge, and skills gained but also for the professional socialization and personal support that is needed to facilitate success in the marketplace and beyond. “I joined the program because I wanted to get help with knowing what I should be doing in my life,” said Nuñez Hilton. “Pedro gives me the best advice so that I can succeed in my life. I personally don't know much about professional development, my religion, or my future, but joining the mentorship program has helped me understand all of it.”
However, the mentees in the program are not the only ones who benefit from these relationships. Serving as a professional mentor can also provide new perspectives, insights, and experiences from the next generation that can be informative for the mentor’s professional practice, future mentoring relationships, and personal relationships.

“You can learn from anyone of any age and in any career stage, and both can impact each other’s lives, as you may be dealing with similar issues at times,” said Costa. “It means mutual learning and growth, building friendship and servanthood, improving self-understanding, and hopefully leaving better and more prepared people to society.”

Willingness to reach out, connect, and take a chance on someone is not easy, but the example of Felipe and Pedro’s mentoring relationship shows that doing so can lead to fulfilling, lasting connections, valuable outcomes, and unexpected revelations for mentors and mentees alike.

If you or someone you know might be interested in serving as a mentor for a Dougherty Family College scholar, please contact Brad Pulles (email: brad.pulles@stthomas.edu) to learn more.