

A man with a goatee, wearing a dark blue pinstriped suit jacket, a bright blue shirt, and a patterned tie, stands outdoors with his hands in his pockets. The background is a blurred green hedge and a stone wall.

A Leap of Faith for a **BETTER FUTURE**

Jason Glynn is the “quintessential non-traditional student.”

“I never thought college was in the cards,” he said. “Where I grew up, lower- and middle-class students didn’t go to college.”

Growing up in rural Maine, he dropped out of high school to work and help take care of his father, who had become ill. After his father passed away, Glynn returned to high school and was able to graduate on time.

He began working as a welder, his ultimate goal to become an underwater welder. He was dealt a blow, though, at 19 years old, when he and his girlfriend were in a bad car accident. She didn't survive, and Glynn was left badly injured with a lot of physical pain. He went on disability for a little while then returned to welding.

A collapsed lung sustained in the accident meant his dreams of becoming an underwater welder were shot. He continued welding for 10 years — "I saw it as a relatively efficient way to make a decent living" — but his lack of a college degree meant he topped out at a team leader.

Glynn found the work unchallenging and too physically demanding given his injuries. Also, the recession was in full swing, so his future was uncertain. In 2012, he built up the courage to go back to school, enrolling at Southern Maine Community College (SMCC).

"Because of my dismal high school track record, I had few other options," he said. "I never expected to be offered a position in an honor society. That began a huge transformation."

Glynn soon excelled at SMCC. He became an active member of the Alpha Chi Nu Chapter, serving as chapter president. He became the managing editor of the college's student newspaper and gravitated to the most challenging courses SMCC had to offer.

"When I first met Jason, it was obvious to me that he was extremely driven to be successful both as a student and a campus leader," said Shane Long, advisor to the Alpha Chi Nu Chapter. "Jason is extremely focused on results. He pushes himself and the organizations he was involved in here at SMCC to be the best."

Glynn took a "huge leap of faith" when he quit his job as a welder to focus on school, going from a mid-\$50,000 salary to just \$9 an hour as a tutor. He received Pell grants, but real-world expenses kept him in dire straits.

He had used food pantries before and saw a need for one on his campus. Research among his chapter showed that one in seven students on his campus were food insecure and that a lack of nutrition impacted cognitive learning. Glynn began seeking volunteers, outside donors and other forms of support to begin the Captain's Cupboard on his campus.

In its first year and a half, more than 20,000 pounds of food were collected and distributed to more than 500 students. What started as a service project for his chapter is now a fully functioning food pantry wholly supported by the college administration.

"This was done through the chapter, but it was very much personal," Glynn said. "I knew how beneficial (food pantries) could be, and there are many other students making sacrifices to come back to community college.

"No one should have to bypass food to buy books."

Glynn's confidence continued to grow as he became more involved at SMCC and as he began receiving scholarships recognizing his accomplishments. He was named a 2013 Coca-Cola Leader of Promise, a 2014 New Century Scholar and a 2015 Oberndorf Lifeline to Completion Scholar. He also received a \$10,000 Phi Theta Kappa transfer scholarship to American University, where he is an International Political Economy major focusing on Asian studies.

Extra money is the obvious benefit to receiving scholarships, but Glynn has found that they have a more intrinsic value.

"Everybody likes to be recognized, and I truly believe success begets success," he said. "Scholarships let you know that you're being noticed for working hard, and they keep pushing you further."

Rosemary and Lou Oberndorf established the Oberndorf Lifeline to Completion Scholarship, which gives financial aid to students who have been faced with an unanticipated financial barrier that could keep them from completing their degree or certificate. Up to 15 scholarships of \$1,000 each are awarded annually.

The Oberndorfs are steadfast supporters of attending and completing college on any level. With their establishment of the Oberndorf Scholarship, however, they feel they can have a real lasting impact on some of the most need-driven students out there.

"At a community college, we know it doesn't take much to throw students off the track to completion," Lou Oberndorf said. "Completion is critical to me. Completion is the signal to the world that you've achieved something, and it will stay with you the rest of your life."

For someone who for most of his 32 years rarely left Maine, Glynn is preparing for a career that could show him the world. He's even learning a second language — Mandarin.

The opportunity to travel regionally and internationally; to network with like-minded students from all over the world; to apply for scholarships that can ease the cost of a college education — with benefits like these, Long said membership in Phi Theta Kappa can "open up a world of possibilities for a student like Jason." And Glynn couldn't agree more.

"Phi Theta Kappa is a great motivator," he said. "It provides the support, encouragement and recognition people desire to keep pushing themselves forward. And that goes a long way with one's success." ♦

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