

Ex-BC3 @ Cranberry student, language instructor to teach in Jordan as Fulbright Fellow

“Her story is worth repeating to newly enrolled students,” former Cranberry director says

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(Cranberry Township, PA) The introverted third-grader who daydreamed while listening to Frank Sinatra and Beethoven on the portable CD player stuffed inside her backpack noticed three lonely books on a shelf during her first trip to the Evans City Elementary School library.

Under the long blond hair that belied this tomboy would develop an ear for languages awakened by these Spanish, German and French books, Tiffani Humble says.

“My teacher said to us, ‘You are going to borrow two books. So go out there and find your books.’ I was walking around looking at books and thought, ‘This isn’t interesting.’ ‘No, I don’t really like this.’ And then there were three books just sitting by themselves in a little cubby. And I went over and I thought, ‘Oh, this is really interesting.’ And I opened up the books. I had no idea what anything said. It was like, ‘What are these words?’”

Today, Humble is 25, and one of only 1,700 U.S. students in 2017 to receive a \$26,400 Fulbright U.S. Student Program fellowship and its 10-month teaching position. It will begin in September in Amman, Jordan, where Humble will speak in Arabic, a second language in which she converses fluently, while teaching students English.

Humble, whose career goals range from working at the United Nations to attending law school, credits BC3 @ Cranberry – Butler County Community College’s Cranberry Township location – with helping her to realize her potential and find her direction.



Tiffani Humble, a former BC3 @ Cranberry student and language instructor, is shown with some of the 50 foreign language books she keeps at her home in Cranberry Township. Humble, a Fulbright fellow, will teach English to Arab children beginning in September.

“My instructors at BC3 helped me get excited about school”

“As a general studies student,” Humble says, “you are still trying to figure everything out, what you like, what you don’t like,” much like the third-grader who after perusing books found those that met her interest.

“My instructors at BC3 helped me get excited about school,” says Humble, a 2010 Seneca Valley High School graduate who earned 60 credits at BC3 through 2013 before transferring to the University of Pittsburgh.

The honors student, who will graduate this spring with a bachelor’s degree in sociology and a certificate in global studies, returned to BC3 in 2014 to serve as a reading tutor and to teach Fundamentals of Spanish and Fundamentals of English.

“Tiffani truly benefited from her BC3 experience,” says Alex Gladis, former director of BC3 @ Cranberry who, like Steve Lockovich, served as Humble’s academic adviser. “Tiffani had no idea on what career to pursue when enrolling at BC3. She did focus on the fact that she needed a college education to become successful. ... She truly served as a role model for other freshman by exploring several career options academically. Tiffani was able to find her true occupational passion in life. Her story is worth repeating to newly enrolled students.”

Sign language, and seven tongues

In addition to Arabic and her native English, Humble also speaks – with varying degrees of proficiency – French, Spanish and Japanese. She was exposed to German and Latin in junior high and has taken sign language courses on BC3’s main campus.

It was while she was attending BC3 @ Cranberry in 2013 that she first heard Arabic, a language she describes as poetic, one with 28 letters in its alphabet, written cursively from right to left and spoken by more than 300 million people worldwide.

“I fell in love with the language, the way it sounds,” Humble says. “That’s the one language that really stuck with me.”

While largely self-taught, she has taken Arabic I through IV courses at Pitt and has served as an intern at the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh since last summer, when she decided to apply for the Fulbright fellowship.

“The people in this culture are so loving,” she says. “You walk in, they give you hugs. They give you kisses on the cheek. They say Masha Allah” – which she describes as an appreciative term and one that expresses continued good wishes.

“Once you are in their group, they just want to share you. I grew to love these people. I grew to love the culture. And I think that is when I fell in love with Arabic. Because it was my one way to communicate with them on a different level. Not just English to English, but in their language.

What did Nelson Mandela say? ‘If you speak to a man in your language, it goes to his head, but if you speak to a man in his language it goes to his heart.’”

Former student will “assist others in need”

The Fulbright Program, under the U.S. Department of State, is the government’s “flagship international exchange program,” according to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The program is designed to “increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.” Its fellows — chosen for their academic merit and leadership potential — have the opportunity to “study, teach and conduct research, exchange ideas and contribute to finding solutions to shared international concerns.”

Among its requirements is that a student must have graduated with a bachelor’s degree, have sufficient proficiency in the language native to the country in which they will work, two essays – “One is a personal statement, about you and your life, and why you deserve this fellowship,” Humble says; and the other, “What you do teaching-wise, your lesson plans, your ideas” – and three letters of recommendation.

Gladis wrote one of those letters of recommendation.

“Tiffani has always demonstrated a need to serve her community and those in need,” Gladis says of the content in his recommendation letter. “As a Fulbright fellowship recipient, Tiffani will certainly be in a position to assist others in need.”

An advantage to her application, she believes, was her experience teaching at BC3 @ Cranberry and as a tutor at the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council.

“How can I help them achieve what they want?”

Her fellowship in Jordan “is all going to be about my students,” Humble says. “I know what it is like to not have a lot of things. I know what it is like to struggle. And to have to push and push yourself constantly every single day. You can’t let yourself go. You can’t let yourself slack. I want to know about my students. What are their dreams? What are their aspirations? How can I help them? How can I help them achieve what they want?”

The third-grader ended up borrowing those elementary school library books on Spanish, German and French, cramming them into the backpack next to the portable black CD player and music from Sinatra and Beethoven.

“I was reading them out aloud and my mom comes over and says, ‘Oh, you have a Spanish book. Do you understand what they are saying?’ And I said, ‘I really don’t care!’”

She would study French for five years at Seneca Valley High School and Spanish for four.

Her library of foreign language material today has expanded to contain at least 50 books stored on a bookcase in her bedroom, movies with or without English subtitles on her laptop and hundreds of songs saved on her cell phone.

“I am very proud of Tiffani for her accomplishments as well as her belief that the BC3 faculty made a difference in her life and career choices,” says Gladis, who remains a part-time BC3 @ Cranberry faculty member and teaches anthropology and native American studies.

She will tell her Jordanian students what she learned about herself at BC3, which Humble calls her home.

“Life can be confusing,” she says. “You sometimes won’t know what is going on until you look back and connect the dots. It’s important because a lot of people don’t know what they want to do with their lives, where their lives are going. But it’s OK. It’s OK to feel that way. But really push yourself, and try many different things.”