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“A Sense of Community and Support Within These Walls”

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Instructor Erin McNeely tutoring a small group of students.

I often teach Sutherland-Chan’s Introduction to Massage weekend workshops, where prospective students come to get a glimpse of the profession. Recently, an individual trying to decide between attending us and another college asked me, “What’s the vibe like at S-C?”

For me, the answer was easy – “It’s a community, and you never feel like you’re alone in this.” As someone who has attended a busy commuter university, a public college with multiple programs and S-C, I have had a variety of student life experiences. While my former experiences often left me feeling like a number, S-C has felt like a family, and has even given me one of the most meaningful friendships I have ever had. I found that when seeking help with academic or personal issues, the faculty at S-C were quite helpful in comparison to the other institutions. I wanted to see if our current students feel the same way, so I decided to speak to some of the Term 3s. I figured that by this point in their student career, they will have got a feel for what the “vibe” at S-C is really like, and if that feeling of support I felt I had was shared.

My first conversation was with Joe Ingoldsby and Vindra Maharaj. Joe came to S-C having attended university for theatre many years ago, as well as completing massage school and having a career as a massage therapist in the U.S. Joe felt that what makes S-C different from his previous experiences is the one-on-one instruction that has been available to him through the school’s Cirque de Science tutoring program and Practice Clinic sessions. In comparison, he recalled that outside of the mandatory hours, there was not much in the way of student support at his previous massage school.

Vindra briefly attended a community college for a general arts and science program before deciding she wanted to become a massage therapist. For Vindra, the anatomy and physiology courses at S-C have been her most difficult challenge. In order to get through the material, she has utilized Cirque tutoring, working closely with instructor Erin McNeely '14. She describes her experience as positive and says that all of her questions were always addressed thoroughly. Vindra also has a learning style that requires her to write exams in a separate space and be allotted extra time, which the school has accommodated.

As I chatted with Joe, one of his classmates chimed in that she was once unable to find a babysitter for her child, and was able to bring her into a class with no questions asked.

This sense of student support was definitely something that I experienced during my time at the school. I used Cirque and always left feeling more confident because of the way the instructors explained things. Instead of simply regurgitating information, they provided useful applications that helped me actually understand it.

Alex Gorobets, another T3 student, mirrored this sentiment. Before attending S-C, Alex was as an obstetrics physician in Russia and the Ukraine for 12 years. He was admitted through our Advanced Standing for Health Professionals program. Moving to Canada was not only a culture shock, but presented him with academic challenges due to differences in thinking, reasoning and communication. Alex told me that the language barrier coupled with the stresses of adaptation negatively affected his self-esteem and self-confidence as a student. He sought advice from Matt Chu '15, S-C's Student Services Coordinator. Matt directed him to the lunch-hour sessions and constantly encouraged him with supportive advice. Alex stated that every teacher and clinic instructor he has been learning from has in some way tried to help improve his self-confidence and performance skills. He recalls instructors Natalie Bramwell '15 and Loida Blas '01 saying to him, "Believe in yourself, you are doing great!" – the positive feedback he needed in his time of self-doubt.

Students facing academic difficulty due to language restrictions, learning challenges, physical barriers or mental health issues can seek individualized approaches at S-C. Those with learning needs that necessitate accommodations can go to Matt with their circumstances. He makes the faculty aware and addresses the planning and logistics involved.

When it comes to personal issues that may interfere with studies, Joe stated that he has always been able to approach the faculty and not feel like a number or a line in a policy book.

Speaking to these individuals, I felt as though my answer to the prospective student was valid, and that my sentiment is shared among current students. My past experience as a student was markedly different from my time at this school. S-C may be academically challenging, but having that sense of community and support makes all the difference.



Cirque de Science and Practice Clinic are both no-charge lunch-time tutoring services accessible to all students. Instructors are available for the hour, and students can bring the gamut of needs to be addressed.

Cirque is focused on helping students with academics. Instruction style is usually one-on-one, although groups are welcome. Students are asked to email their specific questions or areas of challenge ahead of time so the instructors can prepare as needed.

In Practice Clinic the spotlight is on help with hands-on proficiency, clinical skills or treatment challenges, practical subject tutoring and O/P taking issues.