Alumni Spotlight — The 2010’s

Alumni Spotlight: Jennifer Paul ’11

Jennifer Paul graduated from the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg in 2011 with a biology major and a chemistry minor. Read more about her life during and after Pitt-Greensburg.

The thing that drew me to Pitt-Greensburg was … the value. I originally toured the Pitt Oakland campus with my father as a senior in high school. Although I was impressed by the visit, the expense of living in the dorms wasn’t something that appealed to us (sorry, Litchfield Towers!). My dad suggested Pitt-Greensburg, if I was still interested in attending a more affordable Pitt campus. I did; I really enjoyed the idea of being closer to home but still having the prestige and legacy of Pitt attached to my degree.

My first impression of Pitt-Greensburg was … that it was a beautiful campus. It literally is “Greens”burg.

My favorite thing as a student/fondest memory was … Science Seminar. During my first year at Pitt-Greensburg, I was a member of the “Science Learning Community” and enrolled in a science-majors only freshmen seminar (which still exists today). This course allowed me to truly get to know others in my major and the professors who really made an impact on me. Assigned to the course was a “Peer Leader” who attended the class as a teaching assistant and organized outside class projects. At the end of the course we were asked if anyone was interested in applying to become a “Peer Leader,” and I did so thinking it would be an appropriate way to give back to a course that provided so much to me. I credit the seminar for my involvement on campus as a sophomore, junior, and senior and the reason I didn’t transfer to any other Pitt campus.

The faculty members who had the greatest influence on me were … Barbara Barnhart and Kristina Pazehoski.

When I returned as a “Peer Leader” the following year I was assigned to a class taught by Barbara Barnhart. Over the course of four years at Pitt-Greensburg, I believe I have taken 6 (Seminar (first time), Seminar (second time), Biology 1 Lab, Biology 2 Lab, Embryology Lab,
Senior Capstone) courses with Barb. She’s a wonderful instructor who really cares about her students, not just academically but personally. Her hope for me succeeding made me feel like I couldn’t disappoint her and motivated me to put forth more effort.

As a senior, I took on an independent capstone project with Kristina Pazehoski (Dr. Paz). She helped me understand the application of science in terms of graduate schools, conferences, and research presentations. Dr. Paz showed me the more professional aspects of earning a degree. Like Barb, I knew I could go to her for any issue whether science-related or not and that meant a lot to me.

After Pitt-Greensburg, I went on to … obtain my Masters of Science in biology from Chatham University. When I graduated in 2013, I applied for a faculty position at Pitt-Greensburg and received it. I’ve been here since 2013!

My reason for staying connected to the University is … to give back to a University that has provided so much to me.

In my spare time, I like to … hang out with my corgi (Reggie), find foodie activities, discuss Game of Thrones in all forms, visit with my family, and cheer on the Pens, Buccos, and the Pitt Panthers!

My family/friends are … the most important part of my life. They are always there to support me, and I am so grateful.

Tell us something we didn’t ask … College is truly what you make of it. It doesn’t have to be all about the end-game of receiving a degree and moving onto the next milestone in your life. I think that the best way to experience it is to get involved on campus!

Alumni Spotlight: Andrew Reese ’13

Andrew Reese graduated from the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg in 2013 with a BS in Business Management. Read more about his life during and after Pitt-Greensburg.

The thing that drew me to Pitt-Greensburg was … the distinction of being “military friendly.” Being a non-traditional student transitioning from the military, I was looking for a place that
provided a challenge academically, allowed me to have work/study balance, and permitted me to commute back and forth easily. I scheduled an admissions visit. After the meeting with the staff, I realized it was a perfect fit.

**My first impression of Pitt-Greensburg** … was the cleanliness and commuter friendliness of the campus. I was impressed with how accommodating and welcoming the staff were, from registrar to admissions to academic advising to professors. It made for an easy transition which allowed me to focus on balancing work/life and put me on a path for success.

**My favorite thing as a student/fondest memories were** … meeting new friends and receiving the guidance that I was able to get over the course of my studies. I was really able to develop great relationships with so many people because of the close-knit community. I was able to develop more than I had ever imagined, both personally and academically, and it has carried over into my professional career.

Also, being a food guy, I can’t forget how surprisingly good the meals were—especially the breakfast, as I was a morning commuter!

**The faculty members who had the greatest influence on me were** … numerous. There were so many great professors—Dr. Rudnicka, Professora Contreras, Dr. Vallano, Mrs. Jones, Dr. Rechter, Mrs. Smith, Mr. Kimball, Dr. Krisner, Mr. Gaal, and Dr. Vollmer, who tremendously helped me through emails and the time spent during advising.

**After Pitt-Greensburg, I** … took an opportunity with HJ Heinz as senior analyst within their North American Supply Chain and continued my military career as an operations manager through the US Air Force at the 911th Airlift Wing within the Civil Engineering Squadron as a reservist. After about a year in my role at HJ Heinz, I was selected to manage the merger and acquisition, as well the overall accountability, of the HJ Heinz and Kraft Foods Global Military Accounts. Post-merger, I transitioned to senior manager of the Supply and Operations Planning for the KraftHeinz North America Food Service Distribution and Supply Chain.

**My reason for becoming active with the alumni association is** … the incredible experiences that I was able to accrue over my time at Pitt-Greensburg. It was this experience that helped me find my passions and develop myself. I hope to support and continue to help bridge the next group of future leaders who find themselves in a position similar to me.

With that, I hope to bring some professional experiences and leadership back to help foster continued success and improvement within the University, as well as, the community.

**In my spare time, I like to** … volunteer with a variety of veteran’s initiatives and local community organizations, in addition to golf, run, travel, watch Pittsburgh sports, and eat out at great local restaurants—I’m open to suggestions!
Alumni Spotlight: Elliot Sheedy ’12

Elliot Sheedy graduated from the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg in 2012 with a BA in Visual and Performing Arts. Read more about his life during and after Pitt-Greensburg.

The thing that drew me to Pitt-Greensburg was … the complete randomness and faith in circumstance.

My first impression of Pitt-Greensburg … was there’s magic in this valley.

My favorite thing as a student was … being in the theatre/music productions—unquestionably the best!

The faculty members who had the greatest influence on me were … Stephen Schrum, Chris Bartley, and Amber McAlister. They are the pinnacle of an arts trifecta for me—it was a constant conversation between our cohort of what was art and how we should live with it.

Gary Lutz taught this class about "the sentence" that completely rewired my brain and how I approached artistic practice. Stephen Murabito taught me about this small-town sensuality that, I know, impacted my sensibilities dramatically. Sayre Greenfield, Kelli Maloy, Lipika Mazumdar—my library is still based on their syllabi.

After Pitt-Greensburg, I went on to … study filmmaking and media production at a graduate student level, create a feature film about a cult fitness instructor, embark on a music journey to liberate the world from top 40 radio, and travel to exotic lands in pursuit of the best espresso pour.

My reason for staying connected to the University is … my love for the people at Pitt-Greensburg.

In my spare time, I like to … produce media content at The Spectacular House.

My friends and family are … simply exquisite.
Tell us something we didn’t ask … There is an underground tunnel between Millstein Library and the Office of the President—to accommodate her unquenchable reading habit. I saw an aquatic window one evening while I was wading in the creek.

Alumni Spotlight: Casey Stanton ’12

Casey Stanton graduated from the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg in 2012 with a BA in communication. Read more about her life during and after Pitt-Greensburg.

The thing that drew me to Pitt-Greensburg was … the location of the school, class size, and the athletic program. I wanted to attend a university that was known for its academic excellence while having smaller class sizes and a city close with a lot of potential opportunities after graduation.

My first impression of Pitt-Greensburg was … great! I felt as if I was part of something bigger than myself, and I would have the ability to make a difference. I had met with both the basketball and soccer coaches/teams and instantly knew this was the place to which I needed to transfer. Everyone was so welcoming and friendly. I knew this would soon be my home for the next three years.

My favorite thing as a student/fondest memory was … whether a practice or a game, on the court with my teammates!

The Pitt person who had the greatest influence on me was … my coach of two years, Erin Eaton. Basketball and being part of a team taught me so much both on and off the court. Erin pushed and challenged me in ways that I had never been. She really grew into my biggest mentor.

After Pitt-Greensburg, I went on to … a career in the financial services industry in Pittsburgh. I started with Northwestern Mutual in October of 2012 as a recruiter and am now the director of recruitment for our South Hills District Office. I have recently taken on the role of associate financial representative for our managing director, as well. I owe a lot of my professional success to my experiences on the court and in the classroom at Pitt-Greensburg.
My reason for becoming active with the alumni association/staying connected to the University is … to share my past experiences with potential students and to give back to the establishment that gave so much to me.

In my spare time, I like to … be active around the city, play PSL sports, and spend time with my fiancé Phil and dog, Kemba.

My family/friends are … extremely important to me. Although we are all over the East Coast, we are very close. My brother just graduated from LaSalle University, and now lives in Philadelphia, and my sister just accepted an athletic scholarship to play D1 soccer at the University of Hartford.

Tell us something we didn’t ask … In May, I will be running my first half marathon in honor of my godmother and the American Cancer Society.

Alumni Spotlight: Benjamin Vasunda ’10

Benjamin Vasunda graduated from the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg in 2010 with a BS in management/accounting. Read more about his life during and after Pitt-Greensburg.

The thing that drew me to Pitt-Greensburg was … the easy commute to campus. Initially I had only planned on staying at Pitt-Greensburg for a semester or two, then transferring to the Oakland campus. I had such a great experience my first semester that I decided not to leave.

My first impression of Pitt-Greensburg was … how easy it was to approach the professors outside of class, and I loved the community feel of the campus.

My favorite thing as a student/fondest memory was … free food week at Chick-fil-A. I think our Intermediate Accounting class went there each day.

The faculty member who had the greatest influence on me was … Professor Pamela Ondeck. I credit her with helping me get to where I am today. She pushed me to do my best each semester and left me very well prepared for life after college.
After Pitt-Greensburg, I went on to … Washington, DC, and spent almost five years in public accounting working with a variety of not-for-profit organizations and employee benefit funds. In January, I moved on to a role with Marriott International on their financial reporting team.

My reason for becoming active with the alumni association is … to stay up-to-date with the future plans of the University and, if possible, to help create a better experience for current and future students.

In my spare time, I like to … get outside as much as possible, whether that’s golfing, playing softball, running, or just walking around my town. When time permits, I also like to travel and explore new places.

My family/friends are … the most important part of my life. Even though I’ve moved out of the area, I try to get back as often as possible to see my family.

Alumni Spotlight: Huong Vo ’14

Huong Vo graduated from the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg in 2014 with a BS in Natural Sciences. Read more about her life during and after Pitt-Greensburg.

The things that drew me to Pitt-Greensburg were … the academic programs and extracurricular activities offered—and the location of the campus. The campus was located close enough for me to drive home but also far enough to live on campus for the full college experience. I transferred to Pitt-Greensburg my sophomore year of college after realizing that another school for not the right one for me.

My first impression of Pitt-Greensburg … was the beautiful campus and the change from living in the city. While Pitt Oakland is just minutes away from home, it was not my first choice.

My fondest memory as a student was … attending the Habitat for Humanity Collegiate Challenge spring break trips. It was such a great experience to be able to travel to different states (North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) to volunteer with their Habitat for Humanity Chapter in building affordable homes for low-income families.
The Pitt person who had the greatest influence on me was … Brian Root. Brian helped me grow as a leader of different student organizations on campus, and he continues to be my mentor even after graduating.

After Pitt-Greensburg, I went on to … Robert Morris University for a degree in nursing. I am currently enrolled in an EMT course at MRTSA through CCAC and work as a full-time office assistant at MedExpress.

My reason for becoming active with the alumni association is … to give back to the campus and community, and to stay connected with my friends and other alumni.

In my spare time, I like to … go shopping and spend time with my friends and family.

My family members/friends … also enjoy Pitt-Greensburg as much as I did. With the wonderful experience I had, my brother, Quoc Vo, also transferred to Pitt-Greensburg his sophomore year. He is currently a senior majoring in criminal justice—and involved in Habitat for Humanity. My roommates and friends from Pitt-Greensburg are still my best friends today!

Tell us something we didn’t ask … While at Pitt-Greensburg, I was on the executive board for the Student Government Association, Habitat for Humanity, Village Senate, Resident Student Council, in addition to being an International Student Mentor.

Alumni Spotlight: Zachary M. Weisner ’13

Zachary M. Weisner ’13, otherwise known as Zach or “Scrat,” is pursuing his dream of becoming a doctor after majoring in Biological Sciences and Chemistry with a minor in Psychology here at Pitt-Greensburg.

He also is a Class Agent for the 2013 graduating class.

Weisner believes staying involved with the Pitt-Greensburg Alumni Association (PGAA) allows him to remain connected to Pitt-Greensburg. “I want to help future generations of students coming through Pitt-Greensburg recognize their potential,” he explained.
Drawn to Pitt-Greensburg by the small class sizes, he felt it allowed for better discussion and therefore better understanding. “As a scientist, it’s incredibly important to have a strong understanding for detailed and complex topics,” Weisner said. “My professors were always willing to help.”

Recalling how friendly everyone was, he said those who had the greatest influence on him were Barbara Barnhart, instructor in Biology and his Academic advisor; Olivia Long, PhD, assistant professor of Biochemistry and his Biology Research advisor; Mark Stauffer, PhD, associate professor of Chemistry and his Chemistry Research advisor; Diane Cheek, instructor in Biology and advisor of Beta Beta Beta National Biological Honor Society, for which Weisner served as president for two years; and Dorothy Zilic, assistant director of Career Services.

“While there were many other faculty members who played a key role in my development as a student and as a person, these professors went above and beyond to help me succeed,” Weisner said.

As a junior, he had the opportunity to work at the Pittsburgh campus with Cecelia Lo, PhD, a developmental biologist who has been mapping the genes responsible for congenital heart defects.

“During my time with her, I analyzed genetic material and conducted studies on mutant mice to better understand heart disorders,” Weisner said.

As a freshman, sophomore, and junior, Weisner served as a resident assistant. He especially enjoyed building community. “One of the biggest programs I planned was a Halloween party in Apollo. Leading up to the party, I had my residents help decorate the hall. We covered the walls in garbage bags, made bloody handprints, and put up red Christmas lights. This was a great opportunity to get to know everyone and have a really good time.”

After Pitt-Greensburg, Weisner worked as a paramedic in Monroeville for a year. “It’s a true honor to serve and represent my community, and I’m very proud of that.” He then went on to earn a master’s degree in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at Georgetown University. During that time, he pursued a research project at the National Institutes of Health where he developed a 3D, high-resolution protocol to study pentalogy of Cantrell, specifically cases in which the heart is positioned outside of the chest.

Currently, he is in the process of applying to medical school. “My hope is to pursue a career as a physician with the US Navy and travel the world,” Weisner said, adding that he loves to cook and travel, and recently returned from a trip to Ireland.

As a Class Agent, Weisner hopes to keep the Class of 2013 connected and to help all members of the Pitt-Greensburg alumni network. He understands the importance of having a strong support system. “I have a very large family. There are about 70 of us—aunts, uncles, and cousins on my mom’s side,” he said. “My friends and family have always supported me in my endeavors, and I am forever grateful for that.”