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### **Danielle Abner Earns MSCC Academic All-Star Honor**

Mid-South Community College student Danielle Abner from Marion has been named an Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges (AATYC) Academic All-Star for 2010-2011.

While it came as no surprise to her instructors, Abner admits to being stunned by the prestigious recognition.

“It was a real surprise, and I still have a hard time believing it,” said Abner, a 35-year-old single mother interested in becoming a teacher. “I really didn’t expect to do so well in college, so any of the scholarships I have received have been a surprise. This is very unexpected but very nice.”



“It is no surprise that Danielle has been recognized as our AATYC Academic All-Star,” said Lori Payne, MSCC Lead Education Instructor. “She is one of the most conscientious students I have ever taught, and she is an excellent student overall.”

Logan Oliver, an English instructor and co-advisor of MSCC’s chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society, nominated Abner for her academic accomplishments and influence on fellow students.

“Danielle earned one of the highest grades I have ever awarded in my Composition class,” Oliver said. “She could have very easily settled for the low A’s she received on some of her early essays and finished with an A in the class, but that wasn’t enough for her. She sincerely wished to get better with each assignment, and that greatly impressed me. It is encouraging to me as a teacher to have a student who truly wants to learn instead of one who just wants to get a good grade.”

“Danielle also helped others understand exactly what it takes to be a good student. When other students saw her success, they started taking notice of her study practices, decision-making logic, and work ethic. They often asked her how to handle a problem they were having in class, and they listened intently as she quietly explained her solution. Her solution always seemed to work.”

Speech/Communications Instructor Mary Field described Abner as a “delight.”

“I could tell immediately that she was a dedicated student because of her tremendous work ethic,” Field said. “She also gave an impressive speech in class about an author, and every time I see one of the author’s books in a shop, I think of Danielle.”

Lee Anne Turner, MSCC Curriculum and Instructional Design Coordinator for Title III, said Abner’s commitment to class attendance, quality work, and fellow students impressed her.

“She had a scholarship interview one evening and let me know a week in advance that she would have to leave early,” Turner said. “To my surprise she returned to class after the interview. She was always helpful to her fellow students and turned in high quality work in advance of the due date. She took the Praxis I and passed it two semesters ahead of her cohort. That’s a great achievement.”

Dr. Azah Abanda, MSCC Chemistry, Earth Science and Mathematics teacher, served as Abner’s Elementary Algebra instructor and watched her complete that course as well as Intermediate Algebra in the same semester.

“It is a remarkable achievement to complete two math classes in one semester,” he said. “She possesses all of the attributes of a successful student: motivation, self discipline, and a willingness to work hard.”

A native of Michigan, Abner and her family moved to Arkansas when she was 14. She graduated from Gosnell High School as a self-described “B student.” She made plans to attend what was then Mississippi County Community College, but marriage, a series of relocations, and the need to go to work put a stop to her higher education efforts.

After having two children and struggling through a divorce, she found herself a single mom with little opportunity for the job she wanted. Abner worked with young children at West Memphis Christian School and the Steudlein Learning Center before electing to pursue an elementary teaching degree.

“I decided I had to do something, and Mid-South Community College gave me the opportunity I needed. “I told myself, ‘I’m a single mom, I know I can get financial aid; I’m going.’”

Even with that resolve, she found herself a little overwhelmed her first few days on campus.

“I’m 35, and all these kids are so young, and some of my instructors are even younger than I am,” she said. “When I first enrolled, I looked around and thought, ‘What am I doing here? Why am I doing this?’ It was just a little intimidating, but no one ever treated me like, ‘You’re too old to be here.’”

“The teachers bend over backwards to help you. They learn things about you, and they make you feel important and special. But I’m still surprised by my success. I never expected to be an A student, and I really believe it’s because of the instructors. Every class I take, every good grade I get just reinforces to me that I can do it. And I know there is a light at the end of the tunnel with a great big diploma.”

Abner said her two children think it’s “cool” that she is going to college, except when her study schedule interferes with something they want to do. “Because of all my homework, I can’t always take them places in the evenings.”

MSCC’s All-Star said she wants to teach kindergarten when she completes her degree requirements.

“The most fabulous feeling in the world is when a child ‘gets it,’ whatever you’re trying to teach him or her,” she said. “I want to work with younger children because they learn so quickly. Just seeing their face when they pick something up, that’s what I want to do with my life every day.”

As MSCC’s honoree, Abner will have the opportunity to attend the AATYC fall conference in Hot Springs. Academic All-Stars will be formally recognized for their accomplishments during a brunch on Tuesday, Oct. 19.

For information on the All-Star program or other scholarship/financial assistance opportunities at Mid-South Community College, please call (870) 733-6729. For general information about the college, please call (870) 733-6728, see the website at [www.midsouthcc.edu](http://www.midsouthcc.edu), or visit the campus at 2000 West Broadway in West Memphis.