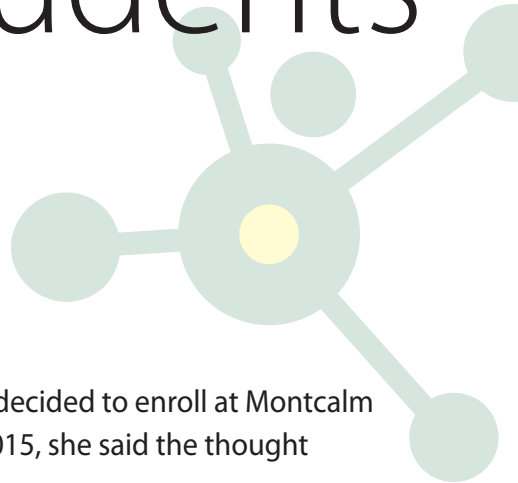


Connecting WITH students



When Betsy Schwartz decided to enroll at Montcalm Community College in 2015, she said the thought “terrified” her.

She has come a long way since that initial first day and is set to graduate from MCC in December with an Associate of Applied Science in Business Marketing degree.

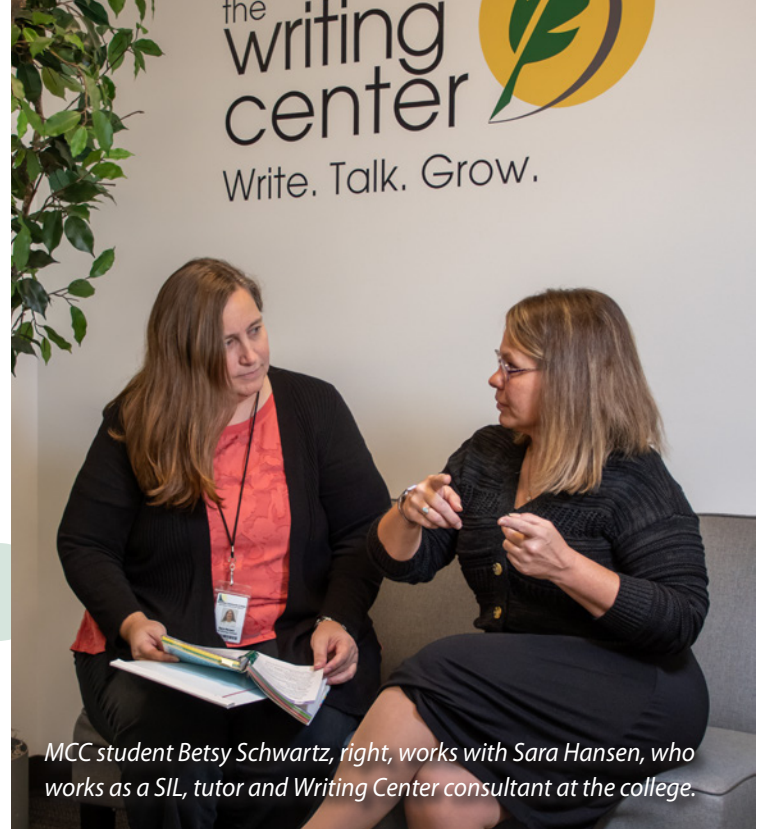
“These students often don’t know where to begin. I become a connector.”

-- Sara Hansen

In addition to her own hard work and perseverance, she credits the college for providing students a free network of services that offers support in instruction, tutoring, writing and more.

“When I first took my entrance tests, they were terrible,” she said.

The 49-year-old Greenville resident said it was important



MCC student Betsy Schwartz, right, works with Sara Hansen, who works as a SIL, tutor and Writing Center consultant at the college.

for her to get extra help as she worked to be successful in her first classes.

“That’s when I first met Sara Hansen. She was working as a Writing Center consultant in Greenville. I began working with her. Sometimes I would write my papers three, four or five times before I turned them in,” Schwartz said.

Hansen works as a Supplemental Instruction Leader (SIL), tutor and Writing Center consultant at MCC. In these positions, she helps students find solutions to help them be successful in their educational journey.

“I enjoy seeing and being part of student success,” Hansen said. “I approach each student as an individual with distinct strengths as well as struggles.”

Supplemental instruction partners peer success leaders within classrooms with small groups of students, much like a teacher’s assistant in a university setting. The program was initiated in 2011, and data shows steady improvements in student success since then.

As a SIL, Hansen said she often works with incoming students who are nervous about their first semester of college.

"These students often don't know where to begin. I become a connector," she said.

Hansen helps students learn to navigate the college atmosphere, connecting them with professionals who can help with computer and technology support, specialized learning needs and other simpler tasks, such as printing an assignment in one of the college's computer labs.

"With each step of learning, the students become more confident," she said. "They learn better organization and study skills to aid in that confidence."

This semester, Hansen is working as a SIL in the Introduction to College Reading class taught by English Instructor Jamie Hopkins.

"I love working with Sara. She has a sense of where we're headed in class and her work with the students complements the work we're doing in class," Hopkins said.

She said having a SIL in the classroom offers students and the instructor a unique opportunity to connect on a different level. At MCC, the SIL conducts a half-hour session with students prior to the instructor joining class.

"It's kind of like having a comedian warm up the room so they're ready when I get there," Hopkins said.

She explained that the SIL gets to know the personalities of the students and helps facilitate learning by asking questions and prompting discussion.

"Some students just aren't going to be the ones who raise their hands or speak up in the middle of class with a question, but they will nudge the SIL, who will then ask the question," she said. "The SIL also is able to sit with a student during special activities to provide extra support.

"It's those one-on-one relationships that really take learning to a different level, and as the instructor, we don't always have the ability to do that during class," Hopkins said. "It's hard to make connections with every student

To help support student success, MCC offers:

Academic advising and counseling

Accessibility services

Career exploration

Computer labs

IT support services

Library services

New student orientation

Supplemental instruction

Transfer assistance

Tutoring

Veterans services



MCC English Instructor Jamie Hopkins said students and instructors benefit from the support services MCC offers.

every day, especially with a bigger class."

Hansen said the connections she makes as a SIL carry over in tutoring and in MCC's Writing Center.

"When students struggle, the relationship we have from the SIL program allows me to more easily tutor them in the class or help them get the appropriate tutors for other classes," she said. "Often, these students become the regulars at open tutoring or schedule weekly tutoring sessions. The students will also more readily make Writing Center appointments with me or one of our other consultants.

MCC's Writing Center opened in 2016 to aid MCC students with writing projects in courses across the curriculum. The Writing Center's goal is to help students become stronger, more flexible and more independent writers. Writing Center consultants help students understand their assignments; generate, develop and organize their ideas; engage with and document source material; revise and polish drafts; and more.

"Students often come to MCC after being away from school for many years. These students often have learning gaps," Hansen said. "In math, these gaps are often issues with fractions or beginning Algebra. These students need someone to come beside them, encourage them, and help them to remember those concepts to prepare them for the more complex math required for their major. The same kinds of gaps occur in writing, and often the rules have changed. The Writing Center is a great place for those students to have an encouraging consultant work with them individually on these skills.

"I have often gone to class and scheduled multiple Writing Center appointments for the week before I leave class," Hansen added. "These students often continue to work with me in the Writing Center and in tutoring for the rest of their time at MCC."

Schwartz said she has grown tremendously during her

"It was just great to have a helping hand. I live by myself and I'm older. I was totally frightened and there were a lot of things I just didn't know."

-- Betsy Schwartz

time at MCC.

"While working with Sara, she explained to me what MLA format is. She helped me get a copy of the DK handbook and read through it as she explained the different rules to me," Schwartz said. "It was just great to have a helping hand. I live by myself and I'm older. I was totally frightened and there were a lot of things I just didn't know."

Hansen said being in the classroom as a SIL helps her better understand instructors' expectations, which supports her work in other areas.

"As a tutor and Writing Center consultant, I am in a position to learn what the students are struggling with. In turn, I can use that information in a SIL session to clear up confusion," she said. "It is also good feedback for instructors to understand what needs more clarification.

"When I recognize that students have a gap in learning, the relationship the SIL program creates makes it easier for me to be able to tutor students in those areas," she added.

Hansen urges all students to seek assistance when they need it.

"Not every student is good at everything," she said. "These services allow students to become better students." ■

For more information

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