

## **NCC grad Nick Languirand finds discipline and community in martial arts after earning degree**

*Nick Languirand—Instructor at Inner Dragon Martial Arts  
Nashua Community College  
Associate of Business in Marketing, 2008*

Because of his physical disability, Nick's decision on where to attend college came with a few additional factors to consider.

"Since I'm disabled and also have a slight learning disability, I didn't feel that a massive campus would be the best fit for me to be successful."

Although living close to Nashua certainly helped Nick make the decision to choose the community college that was in his own backyard, it was important to him to be able to foster a tight relationship with his professors.

"Ultimately, I decided to attend a Nashua Community College (NCC) because I wanted to be in smaller classes and be able to have the opportunity to get to know my professors so that if I did have questions or needed a bit more instruction, I could easily find one-on-one time with them."

While attending NCC, Nick was heavily involved in the performing arts club and in student government, serving as a student state representative, vice president and president.

"I would have to say that the highlights from my years at NCC were getting involved in the many student clubs that were available to us, which gave me the opportunity to meet all kinds of students in different majors and programs throughout the college."

This involvement with the student body and his desire to focus on wellness fostered an aspiration to be involved in his community, which led him to taking martial arts classes at a studio in Hudson.

"After graduation, I wanted some sort of exercise program. After a few months, I realized it was more than just a hobby to get into better physical health."

After achieving the rank of first-degree black belt, Nick began sharing his passion with the community by working with new adult students and helping them learn their required material for their belt promotions. He also branched out to support youth in the program and deepened his community engagement.

"In addition to working with adults, I also work with our tournament team of children who travel to martial arts tournaments in the tri-state area and even help the owner of the school do a bit of promotion for charity and special events held by the studio."

Nick offered a bit of advice if a person is unsure of what direction they wanted to pursue in life:

"I would tell anyone considering attending college that if you're coming from a smaller high school and don't want a massive culture shock, going to a community college like NCC is the perfect way to get a good education in a variety of fields without having to spend a ton of money while doing it."

Nick plans to continue to help adults and youth discover their passions and gain confidence through a martial arts approach to wellness and self-discipline.

## **LIFE-OP is a post-secondary education and vocational program of the Nashua Center for Students with Developmental Disabilities**

Have you met the LIFE-OP team in room 105? Students in the program work and volunteer on campus, take classes, and participate in campus life to foster communication and social skills.

### **About LIFE-OP**

"It started with one student, now we have 15," said Nora Driscoll, LIFE-OP Coordinator, "They're not all full-time; they're between 1-5 days per week. We have all ranges of abilities, some are learning life skills, vocational skills, social skills; from learning to cross the street, to tooth-brushing, and greeting people," Nora said, adding some LIFE-OP participants live independently and take classes at NCC.

"One student graduated. She attended classes, and lived in her own apartment, we just helped advocate for her," Nora said, listing tasks such as helping the student navigate registration. "We helped her in her apartment with things like budgeting, cleaning, and we helped her get a job at Target where she's been a cashier for the last four years," she said. "Ultimately, we find ourselves out of a job as they become independent - that's the goal."

The student who started it all came from Nashua, and would look forward to school every day. The student's diagnosis was autism, and routine was important to him. However, once a student receiving services hits 21, they age out of their home school district and have to choose a new direction.

Nashua Center leadership brought a proposal to President Lucille Jordan who granted the program space on campus. "It was wonderful, and we owe it all to President Jordan, we are so thankful for her," Nora said.

Joining a college campus was a meaningful move for LIFE-OP participants. "They are so happy to get their ID and be just like their siblings and cousins - It's a milestone for them," she said.

Many of the LIFE-OP students are building vocational skills to succeed at work, and some are already practicing their career skills in part-time jobs in the area. For instance, Kristen works at the Presentation of Mary Academy in Hudson in the mornings, and volunteers at Corpus Christi and the Aynsley Place, an assisted living facility in Nashua. "Right now we're doing volunteer gift-wrapping too - we're always looking for things in our community to do," she said.

"Exercise is also a big thing; we all have Fitbits and we have competitions," Nora said. LIFE-OP students also pick healthy lunches and snacks, which correlate to some of their ongoing personal goals.

### **How to get involved**

LIFE-OP welcomes NCC staff, faculty, and students to connect with the group. "We foster relationships, and we'd love typical students to come down and eat with us or say 'hello' in the halls. These guys - they want to make friends too," Nora said.

Aviation Technology program coordinator & professor Patrick Geoffroy is a longtime friend of the LIFE-OP program, and stops by to say Hi to participants every week. "Kristen and her support staff Kyra have been coming in and doing little jobs for me - they redid my bookshelf and I was blown away because this thing was a mess," Pat said.

Pat recently picked up a new lunchbox made of a blank white fabric, and remembered that LIFE-OP included avid artists, "I had an idea that Kristen might want to draw on it, and it came back looking beautiful!" Kristen covered the lunchbox with colorful artwork, including several portraits of Pat, who the students call "Mr. G."

"We don't interact with LIFE-OP enough, more people need to get involved," Pat said. "They make my day - and they changed my perspective on people with intellectual disabilities."

Nora said they would welcome anyone else with a light-colored lunchbox who wanted a personal touch. But the team can also help with other tasks - whether volunteer or paid. For instance, the group recently organized Pat's bookshelves in his office.

"We would do anything. We do recycling with Richard and Rick, they're a great pair," said Nora, adding the group redeems cans to raise funds for activities, and everyone is welcome to drop aluminum cans off in Room 105, "We collect \$4, and that's a bowling trip for someone."

The group represents a wide range of abilities, but Nora said a usual favorite is completing errands. Anyone interested in connecting with LIFE-OP for volunteering or vocational tasks can contact Nora at [nriscoll@nashuacenter.org](mailto:nriscoll@nashuacenter.org), 603.883.8205 x57, or stop by room 105.

Also, if anyone is looking to make a new friend at lunch, they are welcome to sit down with the LIFE-OP team in the cafeteria.