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Great Steps Forward Through Education: From the Congo: Learning a New Language, New Customs: Great Challenge, No Barrier

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From the Congo: Learning a New Language, New Customs

Great Challenge, No Barrier

By Prisca Tshibambe

Three years ago, I left my home nation of the Democratic Republic of Congo to pursue a bachelor’s degree in business administration. I was 18 years old, I spoke no English, and I had no family in the United States. I came to the United States to receive more than a better education. I came to find a better life. Arriving in the United States presented an exciting but daunting opportunity. An American education meant learning to speak, read, and write English. The challenge taught me much about persistence, hard work, and adaptability.

A Jesuit education was a tradition in the Catholic family into which I was born. Both my father and grandfather attended Jesuit schools, and it was an honor for my parents to perpetuate this tradition through me. At first, a Jesuit education meant nothing more to me than any other education. During my three and a half years in college, I learned a lot about the Jesuits and their accomplishments in the world, but it was only after attending a campus ministry retreat that a Jesuit education started to mean a lot to me. I received not only an intellectual but also a spiritual education, which is not something a lot of graduates can brag about in today’s world.

While I made a lot of progress with my English, I had not adapted yet. I became very quiet, shy, and unconfident. I was afraid that the students and the teachers would not be able to understand my English or, worse, would make fun of me. I started to withdraw and talked less. During my first semester, I did not actively participate in my classes for fear of embarrassment. Back home, you are expected to participate in class, and students become healthcare professionals. As expected, I have Loyola’s full support. As for the future, I plan to become a surgeon and practice medicine both here in the U.S. and abroad. I want to bring medical relief to areas beyond the boundaries set by politics, insurance plans, and personal interest, living a life of service dedicated to the “least of these,” wherever they’re found.

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On September 25, Archbishop Blase Cupich of Chicago blessed Arrupe College. Mayor Rahm Emanuel, administrators, Arrupe students and family members and friends attended the ceremony. Arrupe College is Loyola University Chicago’s new two-year associate-degree school for students with limited financial resources. Stephen Katsouros, S.J., dean and executive director of the college, said, “We want our students at Arrupe College to fall in love with the idea of being college students, of being academically successful in a rigorous Jesuit college environment. We want them to fall in love with the idea that they can do this, that they can be successful at the corner of Pearson and State – and beyond.”

I learned a lot about American culture, including country music (West Virginia’s “anthem,” John Denver’s “Take Me Home, Country Roads,” is my favorite country song). Respect is very important in my country. Although some students were very respectful toward authorities, many were not, which was very challenging for me. After I thought about it for a while, I found out that in the U.S. there is no severe punishment for being disrespectful while in the Congo there was a large range of punishment for this, which created fear and obliged everyone to be respectful especially toward our elders. Though my experience at Wheeling Jesuit University had ups and downs, overall it was extraordinary. My teachers have been very supportive and tried to accommodate my needs to the best of their abilities. The personal relation between students and faculty was the key to my education success. I plan to continue my education to be a woman for others as I now move on to law school.

Prisca Tshibambe, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, graduated in business administration from Wheeling Jesuit University in May 2015.