

PSUC SENIOR AIMS TO CHANGE CHILDREN'S VIEWS

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On his way to a housewarming party, then-teacher's-assistant Jason St. Louis contemplated on the flaws of the education system. Seeing students encounter all kinds of obstacles when navigating their academic path was disheartening to him. As St. Louis made his way through the concrete jungle on an August day in 2009, St. John Baptist de la Salle, the saint patron of teachers, directed his course. A year later St. Louis found himself on the other side of the school bench.

Now in his senior year, English Language arts major St. Louis is not the traditional student. His path to Plattsburgh State was not without a detour, yet he was always on the track to his destiny. After graduating from a private boarding school that he attended the last three years of high school, St. Louis tried finding his calling. He dabbled with business at LaGuardia Community College, but he always gravitated toward education.

Even before graduating high school, St. Louis was passionate about working with kids. He was a camp councilor for the neighborhood camps in Queens and part of a church youth group called La Sallian, named after St. John Baptist de la Salle. He later went on to working as a teacher's assistant for students with special needs in Queens. St. Louis was also a part of an after-school program.

Though he was content with the work he had, St. Louis began to realize his capacity and his hopes for

the children weren't aligned.

"Seeing so many kids come in and having to reteach them something that they should have learned at school was disheartening," St. Louis said. "It's easy to sit there and point the finger at the teachers or the parent or — the less conventional — the child, but I saw it as a collective failure from all of us," he said.

In his quest to repair the hole in the education system, he applied to colleges with his girlfriend. A few months later the city of Plattsburgh would provide a platform for him to realize his dream. He spent some time in Clinton Community College and transferred to Plattsburgh State.

While at PSUC, St. Louis started to unpack biases he wasn't aware of having. Through courses such as J.W. Wiley's "Examining Diversity Through Film", his engagement in Center for Womyn's Concern and internship at the Center for Diversity, Pluralism and Inclusion, St. Louis acquired a better grasp of social issues.

He became more equipped to facilitate those conversations and learned things like the power of language. What in the past seemed to be frivolous — like the use of the word girl instead of woman — was now an important part of him. These platforms provided him with the tools he will need to create something more valuable than the "Take Back the Night" T-shirt he designed.

"I'm going into a field that is populated with women—mostly women. If I don't learn from women about women, I don't think I will be very successful at my job," St. Louis said. "I'll be working with little boys and girls, and I need to be that pushback to all the societal things that we come across," he said.

His friend Aaron Schwartz, whom he met in one of J.W. Wiley's classes and who interns at the CDPI office, is one that witnessed not only the impact his contribution in CWC has had on him but also how it has helped him in his internship. Schwartz said St. Louis is constantly able to offer insight into feminism that aided CDPI in what they do because of his work with CWC. St. Louis also recognizes his own male privilege and is able to "not put it entirely aside, but make sure that he doesn't allow it to cloud his judgment."

Schwartz describes St. Louis as a considerate and thoughtful person who would rather have deep conversations than vapid ones. Despite his interest in contributing to these discussions, Schwartz noticed that St. Louis was a bit reserved. Schwartz said CDPI helped St. Louis with that.

"I've noticed that in the past he tended to be a touch reserved before he was willing to put out his perspective on things and now he has become more confident in his voice," he said.

Elizabeth Davies, an intern at the CDPI office, describes him as a person who is reliable possessing all the qualities a friend should have. As a coworker at the CDPI office, she has seen his passion for social injustices.

"When the Garner case came back and seeing the actual emotional impact that went along with that...it's not just talk he actually feels what he does," Davies said.

So what does the future hold for the man whose friends view as one with an impressive intellect and

who can accomplish whatever he set his mind to?

Schwartz predicts a future that includes a Ph.D and can see St. Louis being a “great professor.” St. Louis hopes for two things — running his own classroom and starting a family. Whether it’s his biological children or the children he teaches, he believes and hopes they will benefit from his experiences with CDPI, CWC and as a teachers assistant.

“If my future children can be better than I am (then I’ve done well),” he said.

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