

Shannon Neville

▼ University of Miami ▼ 3.73 GPA
▼ Senior in Psychobiology

When Shannon Neville is praised for being an outstanding student leader, she acts like it's all routine — a lesson in modesty she learned from her father, who also was her softball coach. "He taught me a lot about discipline and following through," says the 21-year-old.

Neville got involved early on at the University of Miami. "I was like, 'I'm not going to be like that in college — I'm just going to study,'" she says. "That lasted two weeks." Since her freshman year, Neville has been one of UM's most visible campus leaders, participating in more than two dozen groups, including five honor societies and the elite President's 100.

As Speaker of the Senate in Student Government, Neville mentors 45 student senators and serves on several college committees. She says her passion for leading helps her overcome obstacles, such as when she worked to create 24-hour library access. "When I started the project, people laughed and said, 'It will never happen — it's been tried before.'" But six months after she convinced library administrators to give the idea a try and worked through financial and



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security issues, Neville was happy to report big numbers and good feedback from students.

An inaugural participant in College Leadership Florida, Neville also is vice president of Alpha Epsilon Delta and an active member of the Women's Resource Center Program Board, ODK, Mortar Board, and the Cinematic Arts Commission. She says knowing your limits is part of being an effective leader. "I see so many things I'd like to change," Neville says. "But if you take on too much, you're not going to be exceptional

in anything."

In addition to her leadership responsibilities, Neville plays on UM's fast-pitch softball team and helps out in the community as a volunteer at the Miami Heart Institute and as a Funday Executive Committee member. She also is a licensed First Responder and is certified in CPR.

Armed with "a big fat planner that is my bible," Neville pencils in daily commitments to manage her time. "The last few years, I've had to write in things like 'lunch,' 'work out,' and 'sleep,'" says Neville, who also works as an administrative assistant in UM's Smith Tucker Involvement Center and as a master tutor for the College of Arts and Sciences to support herself.

"My biggest strength is helping others take stock in the organization that they're in by giving them projects and letting them know they're an integral part," says Neville, who enjoys reading about leading and working with different personality types. "That's the way you get people motivated and get them involved."

Neville sees the education of youth as the biggest challenge for leaders today, which explains her desire to nurture upcoming campus decision-makers. "I try to consciously cultivate and encourage them," says Neville, who has taught an Emerging Leaders class at UM. "I try to make sure that the things we've encouraged and the lessons we've learned aren't lost." 🐼

Susan O'Keefe

▼ Daytona Beach Community College
▼ 3.73 GPA ▼ Sophomore in Biology

"My family, without a doubt, is the biggest motivating factor in my life," says 24-year-old Susan O'Keefe, who made a major life change in 1994 when she enrolled at DBCC. "I was 19, waiting on tables, married, and pregnant, and I decided that was something I didn't want to do until age 65, with no retirement and nothing to give my children."

After adjusting to college classes and realizing nontraditional students were underrepresented as campus policy-makers, O'Keefe decided to encourage others by getting involved. In 1997, she became DBCC's first woman Student Government Association president, as well as District II Legislative Liaison for the Florida Junior and Community College Student Government Association. Under her leadership, SGA introduced seven new clubs, sponsored community-wide events, raised funds for a student's liver transplant, and organized a forum on the Cassini Space Probe launch.

O'Keefe also is the first DBCC student to hold a national office. As Southeast Regional Director for the American Student Association of Community Colleges, she carries the



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concerns of two-year college students to Washington. "Decisions on financial aid matters are made in D.C., so you can't even address it at the state level," says O'Keefe, who has discussed Pell Grant increases and other issues with Sen. Connie Mack, Sen. Bob Graham, and Rep. Corrine Brown. O'Keefe also met her goal of calling every community college SG president in Florida to research concerns and provide updates about ASACC.

The post also has allowed O'Keefe to champion an issue close to home. "There's

been talk about not allowing college prep classes to be funded by financial aid. House Bill 1545 was huge for our student body," says O'Keefe, who had to take a preparatory math class herself when she started college.

Any apprehensions O'Keefe had about serving as SGA president were dispelled during a leadership retreat. "We had to walk across a balance beam blindfolded, and my goal was to depend on other people. As I was walking across, I thought, 'This is my whole year in front of me,'" reflects O'Keefe, who gives her fellow officers all the credit for their successful term. "You can hardly call one person a leader. I feel like it's a team with one goal: to be an advocate for students."

In the community, O'Keefe has participated in the March of Dimes Walk America and Easter Seals events and secured donations for a terminally ill student. She also supports herself and her family as senior office assistant at DBCC's information desk and in the records office.

O'Keefe can't pinpoint her biggest accomplishment. "It's all just little things that make big differences here and there," she says, adding that she's not so much a role model as a poster child for Florida's community colleges. "This system gave me a second chance. It remediated me and gave me the opportunity to excel," O'Keefe says. "I'm not some amazing person. It's just that I took advantage of a wonderful opportunity right in my backyard." 🐼