



Bao Vang with her family

education as inspiration

Each Saint Paul College student dedicates him/herself to pursuing higher education, but does it for different reasons. Many aspire to make a better life for themselves and their families. Others dream of finally pursuing their passion. And some seek to make their families proud or become a positive role model for their children.

Many of these reasons motivated students Bao Vang and Taban Artema to enroll at Saint Paul College. But, both had one more important reason for earning their degree. Because of the personal circumstances and challenges these students faced and overcame, Vang and Artema also aspire to use their education to make a difference in the lives of others.

Creating a Safety Net

Bao Vang is a lively, animated and extremely busy mother of two young children. She works full-time at the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, where she coordinates the Nonprofit

Saint Paul College students using their education to change lives for the better

Leadership Program. But that's not all – she is also a Saint Paul College student in the Fast Track Business Management Program, a special program that allows students to earn a two-year Business Management degree by going to school part-time evenings and weekends. She says the key to balancing family, work and school is by staying organized and setting goals.

“I live by my Smartphone. I’m always putting deadlines into my calendar and constantly looking at my syllabus to make sure I’m on track,” says Vang. “I also dedicate two or three hours each night to homework. I try to be conscious of spending time with my family, but also balancing that with my school work.”

Vang says though her schedule is busy, she keeps everything in perspective by remembering her reasons for returning to school.

“I always wanted to go back to school and get the degree I

needed to advance my career, but I just got busy with work,” says Vang. “Then I had two children, and I knew it was time to do something better for my family and set that example for my kids.”

Once Vang completes her four-year degree, she plans to take her education and use it to improve the lives of others by continuing her work in the nonprofit sector – hopefully by teaching others how to start and run a successful nonprofit organization.

“When I came to America in 1976 as a Hmong refugee, my family’s first interaction was with nonprofits,” says Vang. “They helped us to come here, learn English, and make it through the hard times. Nonprofits are truly your safety net when things aren’t going as planned. I want to help organizations do that for people.”

Striving for Justice

The face of Taban Artema has been a familiar one on the Saint Paul College campus. As a Student Ambassador, Artema led groups of prospective students and their families around the College, talked with them about the school and helped answer their questions. Those groups were also helping Artema, who is an immigrant from the war-torn African nation of Sudan.

“The weekly tours were a great opportunity to practice my English in front of large groups of native speakers,” says Artema. “Leading the tours helped me gain conversational

skills and confidence. Now, I can speak easily to groups of all sizes.”

At the same time, Artema was also earning his Associate in Arts degree – the first step toward his dream of becoming a lawyer, the profession he’s aspired to since childhood.

“Growing up, I always loved the law,” he says. “Sudan has many political issues and wars. I knew that the law could help the people in this situation.”

Artema graduated from Saint Paul College in May 2009 and is now enrolled at the University of Minnesota, where he plans to complete his bachelor’s degree in political science and go on to earn his law degree. In the future, he hopes to help solve problems similar to those he experienced during his time in Sudan.

“I’m considering an emphasis on international law,” says Artema. “I would like to use my law degree to help refugees in our community or to work on human rights issues.”

Making a Difference

Like so many Saint Paul College students, Artema and Vang are pursuing their degrees to achieve a better future for themselves and for their families. This alone is an admirable goal, and something that should make every student proud. The fact that both students plan to use their newfound knowledge to help others is also a remarkable achievement – demonstrating the incredible power of education to change lives for the better.

Taban Artema wearing traditional Sudanese attire

