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First Think College Graduates Participate in May 7 Commencement

Winthrop University

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First Think College Graduates Participate in May 7 Commencement

Quick Facts

- The Think College program brings students with intellectual disabilities to campus for two years to take classes, participate in internships and to live in Phelps residence hall with a peer mentor.
- Kevin Rauppius of Rock Hill and Barbara "Basia" Oley and Sara Oxenfeld, both of Fort Mill, said they never thought they would be able to go to college.



Think College Director Jennifer Cease-Cook, from left, with Barbara "Basia" Oley, Kevin Rauppius and Sara Oxenfeld.

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – Winthrop University's first **Think College graduates** will receive their certificates at the May 7 undergraduate Commencement exercises.

The **Think College program** brings students with intellectual disabilities to campus for two years to take classes, participate in internships and to live in Phelps residence hall with a peer mentor.

Kevin Rauppius of Rock Hill and **Barbara "Basia" Oley** and **Sara Oxenfeld**, both of Fort Mill, said they never thought they would be able to go to college. In fact, Oley said she was told in second grade that she would only be able to read on a very rudimentary level.

her until high school. After graduation from Fort Mill High, Oley and her family looked for the next step.

Think College Director Jennifer Cease-Cook said the program enables its students to build and strengthen skills so they can look for jobs, become self-determined, learn more about health and nutrition, network with others, and live independently. The Think College students worked at internships accompanied by a peer mentor, including at the library, Instructional Technology Center, the DiGiorgio Campus Center and others.

Oley is honored and proud to be the first student to sign up for the **Think College program**, which is offered at four other universities in South Carolina.

"I learned to be independent, gained job skills, learned to be on time to class and how to get my homework done," Oley said. With her love of reading, she wants to work in a book store or library.

The Think College program, which is offered through the **Richard W. Riley College of Education**, started with Cease-Cook, three students and two volunteers. Now it has grown to 19 students, 42 paid peer mentors, two graduate assistants, a program director and a program coordinator.

In its two years, the Think College program has received national attention. **Terence Brice**, one of the Think College students, won a **\$10,000 Autism Speaks United Negro College Fund (UNCF)**

scholarship. He appeared at the 36th installment of UNCF An Evening of Stars last year and met singer Toni Braxton.

A second headline came when **Baltimore Ravens player Steve Smith took a Charlotte high school student** to the prom, and she announced she will attend Winthrop's Think College program in the fall.

Attending and graduating from the program has been very fulfilling. Oxenfeld said she enjoyed her internship at **Macfeat Early Childhood Laboratory School** and helped plan a party for the 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds. "I always wanted to go to college to learn more," she said.

Born and reared in Fort Mill, she watched an older brother go to Clemson and wanted to go beyond high school. She hopes to get a job working with animals.

Meanwhile, Rauppius spent time taking a variety of sports classes and a Harry Potter class. He liked his internship with the crosscountry team, because he was able to run and get some exercise. After graduation, he wants to work part time and maybe full time later in life, probably in sports.

"I liked the professors and the peer mentors," Rauppius said.

For more information, contact **Judy Longshaw**, news and media services manager, at 803/323-2404 or e-mail her at longshawj@winthrop.edu.

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