

L&C Student's Stage Experience Provides Competitive Edge

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GODFREY – As it turns out, in 2021 You Have A Voice! Humanities Speech Competition winner Grace Costello delivered more than a well-crafted and presented speech – she brought years of performance experience to the virtual stage.

In her winning speech, Costello spoke of the importance of self-acceptance.

“Take time to understand yourself. Reintroduce yourself to you. And when you have, I hope that it is the most positive, negative, selfish, full-of-love introduction,” she said. “Because it is only when you have accepted yourself unconditionally that you will be able to make any sort of positive life changes.”

Costello’s You Have A Voice! experience not only included a second-place finish in last year’s competition, which was held inside the Hatheway Cultural Center’s Ann Whitney Olin Theatre, but many years of performing in front of live audiences.

“Before the pandemic, I often performed on stage,” Costello said. “From stages around our community to bigger ones in St. Louis, I was determined to fill my free time through theatrical outlets.”

Costello, 19, of Bethalto, is in her last semester at Lewis and Clark Community College, where she plans to earn an Associate in Science, specializing in elementary education.

“I was able to finish high school a semester early because I took courses at L&C,” she said. “After I graduated, it made the most sense to finish my associate degree here. I could not find an alternative that beat the convenience and quality L&C offers.”

After graduation this May, Costello plans to transfer to a four-year school to pursue a bachelor’s degree in elementary education.

Costello sees her career choice as a way to give back.

“Choosing a career in education, even with my passion for musical theatre, was a no-brainer,” she said. “Everybody deserves a chance at happiness and a future filled with whatever they choose to do; I believe that dreams start and grow in a classroom.”

In particular, L&C’s small class sizes were an advantage to Costello.

“I have been very lucky to develop great connections with professors thanks to the small class sizes,” she said. “Each student has the chance at L&C to be seen and heard and that is partly due to the great professors, but also due to the one-on-one interaction that is commonly missing at other colleges.”

L&C Speech Professor and Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) sponsor Elizabeth Grant has had a positive impact on Costello.

“She is incredibly inspiring and truly connects with her students,” Costello said. “Despite her already busy teaching schedule, she’s always involved in community and campus events.”

The admiration goes both ways.

“Grace is an enthusiastic and motivated speaker who is flawless in her delivery,” Grant said. “She has an acting background that makes her shine at the podium. I was lucky enough to have her as a student and a member of PTK, and I feel blessed each time she enters our contest or gets involved in campus events.”

Costello touts a long list of honors, including the 2020 Broadway Bound Award through the Schmidt Vocal Competition, 2020 State Vocal champion through the Missouri Federation of Music Club, and a 2020 Outstanding Supporting Actress nomination from the Arts for Life Best Performance Awards. She also participated in the Savannah College of Art and Design’s 2019 Rising Star program.

Costello ultimately wants to help others realize their full potential, fight for equality, and, personally, never stop learning and growing.

“I hope I will always strive for social justice in the classroom and promote high academic achievement for students of all backgrounds, specifically liberating those who have been historically overlooked,” she said. “I am always up to take a new opportunity so I am not sure where exactly my career will take me long term.”

For more information on the annual You Have A Voice! speech competition or PTK, contact Grant at (618) 468- 4725 or egrant@lc.edu.

For more information on transfer degrees at L&C, contact Enrollment Services at (618) 468-2222 or enroll@lc.edu.