



SUCCESS STORY

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Cerebral palsy doesn't keep student from completing CCNA curriculum

Don't tell Shelly Grothen she can't do something. The word "impossible" simply is not part of her vocabulary; in fact, she goes looking for challenges. Although she was pursuing a college degree in social work at Minnesota's Fergus Falls Community College at the time—and despite the manual dexterity problems that are part of living with cerebral palsy—Shelly was intrigued by the opportunity to learn more about computers and networking. So when the director of the college's Center for Students with Disabilities suggested she enroll in the Cisco Networking Academy™ Program, she didn't hesitate.

"I thought it would be really interesting to learn something totally different from social work," Shelly explains. "I talked to the instructor, and he encouraged me to give it a try. The hands-on part was pretty difficult for me, but I enjoyed the creative challenge of figuring out how all the network components fit together into a system that would actually run. It was a very rewarding experience."

She expects that her Network Academy training will come in handy once she enters the field of social work. "If something breaks down in my workplace, maybe I can help locate the problem and figure out how to fix it," she says.

Dan Knudson teaches the Networking Academy classes at Fergus Falls, and he was impressed with Shelly's commitment to the program. "She studied hard and did well," he recalls. "Thanks to her interest and dedication, and with outstanding assistance from her classmates, she completed the entire curriculum. In my opinion, she would make a fine networking engineer."

Working together

According to Dan, the Networking Academy provides excellent training for the work world. "One big benefit of the class is that students work together in groups," he says. "Because we have only one router lab here, they have to collaborate to get the assignments and projects done. In this way, they help each other learn. This collaboration was especially valuable in Shelly's case."

Everyone worked together to make Shelly's Network Academy experience a success. Dan videotaped his lectures so she could review them. He allowed her to complete exams orally, reading the questions and possible answers and then clicking the mouse at her direction. Classmates helped with note-taking and hands-on wiring projects. When Shelly transferred to the University of Minnesota, she was able to telnet into the router lab to complete Networking Academy assignments.

For Shelly, who received her social work degree from the University of Minnesota as part of the class of 2002, the experience was extremely positive. "During the first



Academy student,
Shelley Grothen, testing
her networking skills



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couple of classes, I was sitting there saying to myself, 'Shelly, you're crazy. Why are you here? This is so out of my league.' But once I got going, I felt more comfortable. To people with disabilities, I would just say this: You might not be able to do all the hands-on stuff, but you can definitely contribute your problem-solving abilities. And that can be a big asset to the networking team."

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