

Professor Nana Quaicoe: At Home in the Classroom

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Dr. Nana Quaicoe's teaching focuses on macroeconomics, microeconomics, international economics, development economics, and econometrics. His research interests are in the areas of general macroeconomics, monetary economics, and development economics.

PROFESSOR NANA QUAICOE: AT HOME IN THE CLASSROOM

Any number of his former professors at Dordt might well be pleasantly surprised that Wartburg College, all the way across the state in Waverly, Iowa, awarded Dr. Nana Quaicoe ('12) the 2022 John O. Chellevoid Student Award for Excellence in Teaching and Professional Service.

Any number of those former professors likely had little idea that this slight, unassuming, and studious kid from Ghana would eventually stir up classrooms with vigorous enthusiasm for his subject and special care for students.

"He is able to teach the material in a way that students can truly grasp," one of his students says. "If a student is struggling, he is always willing to find time to help. He also is great at relating to students and is able to help us to be successful."

Back in 2008, Quaicoe chose to study at Dordt for several reasons, one of which

was cost. He'd studied up on Christian colleges, done all kinds of homework, then applied. Both he and his parents saw an American education as an investment of sorts. In fact, he says, when his plane lifted off the runway at the airport at Accra, he claims his mother and father were probably just a bit more thrilled than they were heartsick. To them, and to Nana, an opportunity to get a degree from a college in the United States was a blessing, even an answer to prayer.

He filled out applications and some correspondence before he came to the conclusion that a place with a very strange name, Dordt in Iowa, offered the best financial deal. He knew Dordt was a Christian college, and he also knew it wasn't a Catholic college, not that such designations made much of a difference to him. As a kid, on Sundays Quaicoe accompanied his father to his father's

Roman Catholic church, as is family custom in Ghana, he says.

After a fashion, you might consider Quaicoe as half-Protestant. His mother and her family were all Presbyterians, so every Sunday his parents went off to separate churches. Still, both were devout believers. He was aware that he'd been raised in a Christian home, despite parental differences. They were always loving and supportive of their son, the youngest of four children in a middle-class, suburban family.

Mostly there were smiles at the airport when he left, and lots of prayers and hugs. It wasn't the first time his parents had seen him travel and not come back home for a time—in Ghana, many kids go off to boarding schools. But this time it was different: he was going out of the country, all the way to the United States, and the chances of his returning soon were not good. Still, he says, "My mum

was slightly worried about me leaving," but then, "most mums worry."

It took some time, he says, to get adjusted. Like any other Dordt kid a significant distance from home, he suffered an occasional bout of homesickness. "I was not used to the food, and I quickly realized that being an international student and making friends with the domestic students can be very challenging," he says.

In those early weeks, did he ever regret coming to school a continent away?

The answer, clearly, was no. "For me it was an opportunity to grow and be out of my comfort zone."

Then again, he'd never seen Iowa before, a place that looked far different from anything he'd ever seen on television.

"I knew Sioux Center was not a big city," he says, smiling as he remembers. "But I think I underestimated how much of a small city it is!" The admissions counselor who picked him up from the airport drove him into town, but what he remembers best was endless cornfields. Not until they pulled up to the college did he convince himself he'd reached his destination.

First impression? Great! "My first impression of Dordt was very good. Aesthetically, I thought the campus was very beautiful. I remember calling my mum when I arrived, telling her that the lawn is so green, and the buildings are brick and orderly." Ghana didn't have such meticulous planning and landscaping, so what he found on campus was amazing. "I was utterly impressed!"

What thrilled him that first week was that he was, in fact, going to college in the States, a place that offered so many opportunities. He didn't know exactly what to expect as classes began, and missing his family became more and more real. "It felt surreal, to be honest," he says.

Like most freshmen, he was undecided about a major. And, like many others, he had dreams. Perhaps the most vivid of his "druthers" for reasons that had to do with his long-time interests was that he could somehow become a writer.

When he was a kid, he was a big reader. In Ghana, "most boys my age used to do a lot of socializing, but my world was in the books I read"—books he was given, he says, for completing household chores and as presents for doing well in school. First, *Goosebumps*—he loved every one of them. Then a host of classics: *Treasure Island*, *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, *Kidnapped*, *Robinson Crusoe*, anything featuring Harry Potter; later, African classics such as *Things Fall Apart* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame*.

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But writing was speculative. He took a course in finance and another in money and banking, and then economics. He found both the field and the classwork as challenging as it was enjoyable.

"I wanted to do something that would get me a job where I'm coming from." So, he asked himself, why not discover all that can be known about economics? It seemed to come very easily to him.

After graduation, he enrolled in a graduate program at Eastern Illinois University, where, once again, he knew absolutely no one. Soon enough, he says, he realized that he loved what he

was studying: "I loved the logic behind economics—and the math."

He loved it all so much that he decided to continue to get the Ph.D. Two years later, off he went to Southern Illinois University.

"I've always been a shy and introverted person," he says, not necessarily someone inclined to be a classroom teacher. But in a teaching assistantship at Eastern Illinois, he discovered something he'd never thought much about—that he could be and, it seemed, was quite a successful classroom teacher. Just as surprising, he enjoyed the interactions that occurred in a classroom. So much so, in fact, that when he finished his Ph.D., his first thought wasn't to work for the Fed or find a big bank in downtown Chicago. His first thought was teaching.

Today, he's at Wartburg College, in Waverly, Iowa, where the accolades just keep coming. With doctorate in hand, he found himself with two solid job offers from two Iowa colleges: Wartburg and Luther. He chuckles about it now: he was totally unaware that the two schools, both Lutheran, were fierce rivals.

Today, he's at home in Waverly, an Iowa burg not all that different from Sioux Center. He has an apartment just off Main, and a favored coffee shop just a couple of blocks away.

The Chellevold Award, which Quaicoe received this year, is named for a longtime Wartburg mathematics professor and administrator and is given annually for outstanding classroom work. It isn't the award that he has received; in August of 2020, Wartburg named him the recipient of the James A. Leach Chair in Banking and Monetary Economics for embodying the philosophy and values of Wartburg and demonstrating strong leadership in the teaching profession.

And should you ask, Quaicoe is happy. He's doing well, his mother calls him to make sure he goes to church, and yes, he's loving the classroom.

That novel he always wanted to write? Well, it's on hold, but it's not been remaindered. Right now, he has plenty to do. Maybe someday.

JAMES CALVIN SCHAAAP ('70)



WARTBURG COLLEGE

In recent projects, Quaicoe has examined taxation and fiscal policy in developing countries and a reexamination of the crowding-out effect.