

*"It's cool for my students to know I'm a Shaker grad.
I loved it (here) so much, I wanted to come back."*

Halle Bauer:

Instilling Shaker Pride

"We can talk about race in Shaker, but at college, no one wanted to talk about it," says Halle Bauer (SHHS '06). Bauer loved her high school experience at Shaker, playing varsity softball, leading a team of peers in SGORR, competing in National History Day and other clubs. Among her friends at Northwestern University, she felt like the only student coming in with a positive high school experience.

Her African-American studies classes were the most diverse of any in college, and they were where she felt most at home.

"People from Shaker share something," says the daughter of Mary Bauer and Joe Bauer, "a common appreciation of humanity, a celebration of diversity."

Bauer majored in African-American studies and an interdisciplinary program at Northwestern called "Human Development and Psychological Services" ("It's like majoring in people," she explains), which gave her the opportunity for an internship at author Dave Eggers' 826 Valencia, a writing and tutoring center.

But perhaps the biggest influence on Bauer came from The Aspire Program at Hathaway Brown School. The summer program pairs girls from low-income homes with high school and college peers for academic and social support.

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A passion for social justice brought Halle Bauer back to Shaker, first as advisor to the Student Group on Race Relations, now as an English and Social Studies teacher.
Photo by Kevin G. Reeves





After graduation in 2006, Halle Bauer attended Northwestern University where she found that few of her fellow students had any experience with diversity. It was in her African-American Studies classes that she felt most at home.
Photo courtesy of Halle Bauer

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"I felt the potential to help students and I loved it. I would wake up excited to go to work every day," she says. Bauer started as a junior teacher and added more responsibility every summer, working her way up to dean of students. Through that experience, she realized she wanted to be a teacher.

After college, she cobbled together three jobs in Shaker: staffing an after-school program at the Middle School, serving as staff advisor to SGORR, and teaching an International Baccalaureate class in anthropology. On top of all that, she was taking education classes at Notre Dame College.

Starting as a full-time English and social studies teacher at Shaker Heights High School this year, she observes, "it's the first time I've only had one job." Teaching five classes with three preps isn't an easy workload, but Bauer feels prepared and well supported by her mentors, English teacher Carol Boyd and Tim Mitchell, social studies teacher and the International Baccalaureate coordinator. She can – and does – ask for advice informally from two former teachers, Sarah Davis and Kim Owens. They're always glad to help.

Being 26 and in her first year as a full-time teacher, she wants to get parents on her side, so she called to introduce herself over the phone. On parents' night, she was a bundle of nerves.

Bauer teaches Theory of Knowledge, an International Baccalaureate course in critical thinking that asks, 'how do we know what we claim to know?' This intellectually stimulating philosophy aligns perfectly with her theory of educating the whole person.

"I feel like Shaker did that for me. The environment was academically and socially rich. That's the whole point of International Baccalaureate: how to be a critical thinker, a change agent, and a global citizen," says Bauer.

She also teaches freshman Honors English and a popular Shaker social studies class called "Human Rights and Conflict." She likes it because it's the most diverse class, attracting kids from all ranges of academic achievement and motivation. Nothing is off limits in the lively class discussions, which might touch on race, culture or current events. When she was SGORR advisor, the group's literary magazine published an anonymous essay by a student who felt being ashamed of being poor. "That's an aspect of Shaker's diversity that isn't discussed as openly," she notes.

"It's cool for my students to know I'm a Shaker grad. I loved it (here) so much, I wanted to come back," she says. "I hope it instills the same Shaker pride for them."

"It says a lot about this school environment when people are attracted to come back," says Griffith. "It's powerful for teens. It speaks to possibility. Every time they see a Shaker grad who is successful, it reminds them that what we're doing here leads to success." **SL**