

de Sereville spreads 'Girl Power' in science before heading to U of T



By Brock Weir

As she set her sights on the University of Toronto's engineering sciences program, Aurora's Yvette de Sereville wasn't quite sure what to expect.

Rising through the ranks at Aurora High School, where she was recently named top scholar of this year's graduating class with a mark of a whopping 98.3 per cent, she did more than enough to secure her place in the program, plus a few scholarships to boot, but getting into the program itself wasn't the only thing on her mind.

'Girls are still a minority in my program, but I find it is a growing community,' Yvette explains. 'I find during the adolescent years there are a lot of insecurities, especially for women, and everyone feels shy to maybe approach that sort of field because it is so male dominant.'

Those 'insecurities', she said might be at the root of the problem, but there has been a concerted effort to shift those tides. U of T, for instance has hosted an all-girls weekend which Yvette says 'inspired us to appreciate how much we are being welcomed into this field.'

'It is great because they really encouraged us to feel comfortable,' she says.

It was a lot of hard work to get there. In making the grade by a very comfortable margin, Yvette graduated Aurora High School this June not only with the top mark, but also special scholarships from U of T, as well as the Governor General's Academic Achievement Award, and scholarships in math, physics, chemistry, and French from the York Region District School Board.

'I chose to study science principally because I like to discover how the world works and the nature of things,' she says. 'When I approach something that is always my first question. Whenever I try to understand, I ask why, and I felt science is the best way to answer all of my enquiries.'

This interest started in elementary school. By Grade 8 she says she was already feeling a connection with math and, eventually, science. The 'logic' of the fields appealed to her and she eventually fell in love with the subject. Although she was always a good student, she says 'I stepped up my game' when she got to high school.

'You just figure out what works best for you and it is different for each student,' she says. 'For me, I knew which subjects I wanted to spend more time on and then I knew which ones I could get by just doing a little bit less work on. I did a lot of work during my lunch hours and I could get that out of the way to spend more time at home just to rest and relax.'

?It is really important just to be healthy, exercise, and do a few extracurriculars as well.?

Those extracurriculars were the AHS band as well as their Robotics club. At AHS, Yvette says she is thankful they always ?offered opportunities for all kinds of people to excel? and it was there she found her niche. Teachers were always available for extra help, particularly in Grades 9 and 10, which are often formative years for students figuring out what they want to do, develop study habits, and other methods to help them move forward.

With just a few weeks left before her big move to Toronto, Yvette is taking a well-earned rest before beginning the frantic process of packing up and settling in. She has been keeping in touch with those in her program over Facebook and through U of T chatrooms and although this will be her first time away from home, she is ready to get down to business.

?I am most looking forward to the challenge because it is a very challenging program, and I am looking forward to learning time management skills because of all the work I will be doing,? she says. ?The most important thing is to keep healthy and happy. When you are in Grade 9 and 10, it's time to explore what works for you, and getting to know your strengths and weaknesses is really important to your success in senior years.?