

Diving in Head First



At first, Aristoi alum Emily Jackson admits she was a bit indifferent when her parents told her they were attending an informational meeting about a new classical school in the Katy area. She had been homeschooling and had already attended other public schools. But, after checking it out and joining the Griffins in the 9th grade, she wound up really enjoying classical education in general and Aristoi in particular.

Finishing up her second year at Abilene Christian University (ACU), Jackson sees a lot of parallels between her high school alma mater and her college. “I’m taking several philosophy classes. I think I’m interested in that because of Aristoi’s Humane Letters. I like the small group discussion. There are some classes here that are 20 people or so,” says Jackson, “That’s similar to Aristoi and its small class sizes, which I really like. It’s similar to Aristoi and I try to get that here whenever I can.”

Jackson (daughter of Lorissa Jackson, 5th & 6th Grade Team Lead and Aristoi’s RTI Coordinator) was part of Aristoi’s third graduating class, the Class of 2020, with 19 other seniors. She was also the first class that graduated during the COVID pandemic. Jackson reflects on her time here and that strange time in the world, “I definitely had senioritis. When online classes came about because of COVID, I definitely missed seeing everyone all the time. Classes were easier, but I missed everyone.”

“I wasn’t that bothered by having graduation outside. Everyone was separated by family and was seated in the carpool line. Speeches were made from the porch by Building D. It was all fine,” she smiles.

Life after Aristoi has been good, too. After graduation, Jackson and three other Aristoi alums, Izzy Birsinger, Thomas Botond, and fiancé, Darius Thompson, all decided to go to ACU. Jackson is majoring in Psychology and is planning to get her Masters in Library Science.

She says, “I knew about ACU for a long time because my cousin and his wife are professors here. I toured it junior and senior years, and I like west Texas and the area in general. I like the size of the school, it’s not huge. It’s a liberal arts school, and I get the chance to take more classes like philosophy even though that’s not part of my major.”

Jackson graduates next spring, after just three years on the ACU campus. Her hard work in high school paid off, “I took Physics C and took the AP test, and I got credit for that and university requirements. I also got credits for English I and US History.”

Jackson accumulated 26 hours of credit from AP tests which equal a whole year of college credits. She is also the recipient of the Presidential Scholarship which is based on her SAT and ACT scores as well as her GPA. As long as she keeps above a 3.5 GPA, she maintains that scholarship throughout her ACU career.

Of classical education, Jackson says, "Aristoi and classical learning emphasizes how to think and be a person as opposed to how to do specific things. I was very well prepared to write essays. It's interesting to see how many kids aren't."

Jackson continues, "I try to understand where people are coming from with their ideas. Classical education and rhetoric have helped me to do that. Aristoi teaches people how to think. It might not be seen as being practical as another high school that focuses on preparing students for med school." She goes on, "People aren't meant to just be workers. Aristoi does a better job of preparing people by giving people the way to think and better express their thoughts through rhetoric and writing skills."

An Aristoi athlete in volleyball, basketball, soccer, and swimming, Jackson now jumps into the ACU pool and is spearheading the first swim club on the ACU campus.

"I met a friend doing laps at the pool and one of us emailed the director of the Rec. We asked how to go about starting a club and if that was even possible. He said, "Yes! When can I meet with you?" We had to get eight people to join and the school would help sponsor us to be an official club sport. We have 11 people signed up. Because of college schedules, we practice on our own. People can show up on their own time and do the sets I write out. A lot of colleges have club teams that compete against other college teams. We're hoping to start competing against other schools next semester. There is a college club swimming organization through USA Masters Swimming, that colleges can join so we're going to sign up for that next semester."

Jackson's favorite Aristoi memories include hanging out with friends, playing cards, and hour-long lunches. She remembers fondly, "In my senior year, we decided to have a surprise birthday for Mr. Slowey. That was fun. I think he liked it. He got cake."

Other Aristoi favorites include Mr. Slowey, Dr. Stepp, and Mrs. Burns. "I enjoyed all of their classes. Mr. Slowey - it's fun to listen to his stories, especially about his kids. I like literature and he taught the literature class. And, I had Dr. Stepp for Physics and I'm not good at Physics. I'm sure he can tell you. I find it really interesting. I like learning about it even if I can't do it without his help. And, Mrs. Burns was a very good Calculus teacher. It was by far my favorite math class. She's a really good teacher."

Jackson returns to the Aristoi Upper School when she can to watch her brother, Aristoi senior, Paul, play soccer and basketball. There are a few changes she sees on campus, like all the new students and the signs on the buildings. She knows the next senior class is twice the size of hers and there are people she doesn't recognize when she comes back to campus.

“It is good to see Aristoi continue to grow and gain better resources that will benefit the students. With Mrs. Locheed as Headmaster of Katy, things are sure to continue improving, “ she says.

Jackson and Thompson are planning a July wedding here in Katy.