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MIZZOU

Twins' Tales of Serving Others

Twins take away degrees and memories of service



Theresa, left, and Sophia Mullineaux graduate from Mizzou with business degrees this weekend. Photo by Rob Hill

Story by Dale Smith

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Among the 5,452 capped and gowned participants receiving diplomas during

Commencement May 16–18 is a set of identical twins, Sophia and Theresa Mullineaux. Individually or as a pair, they would make any short list of Mizzou’s most-involved students during the past four years.

In their hometown of St. Louis, the twins earned community service awards for volunteering more than 150 hours and were involved in extracurricular activities at Pattonville High School, where the graduating class in 2010 was just 345 students.

A few months later at MU, with its 32,415 students, the sisters felt “a bit apprehensive about whether they would fit in at such a big university,” Theresa says. So, they set out to “shrink” the campus by joining groups and making friends, in addition to their studies in the Trulaske College of Business. Both are scheduled to graduate with bachelor’s degrees in business administration this weekend. Theresa plans to attend MU’s School of Law in fall 2014. By then, Sophia will be a new employee at JPMorgan Chase & Co. in New York.

Now that their undergraduate careers are over, both have resumes plump with honors, leadership experience and service to others. For instance, when it comes to honors, both were in the top 30 for Homecoming royalty in 2013, and Theresa was crowned queen. Sophia was honored when the Mizzou Alumni Association picked her for Mizzou 39, a list of 39 seniors who are top students with a record of leadership and service to MU and the community.

But the sisters say they have been most transformed by their service experiences in the Mizzou Alternative Breaks program. After first participating as freshmen (Theresa) and sophomore (Sophia), they led other groups of about 12 the following years to various U.S. cities to help children and homeless people. Theresa has risen through the ranks to lead the organization, which offered 69 trips this year, including the first collaboration with other SEC schools. The students volunteered at the same Habitat for Humanity site in Alabama.

Sophia's senior trip was to Billings, Montana. "Most people don't think of Billings as a spring break destination," she jokes, "let alone a place you might go for service work. But they have one of the highest poverty rates in the United States." Through Head Start, Sophia's group helped disadvantaged children prepare to enter school. Sophia remembers Elijah, who had been in seven foster homes during his four years of life. "He was always so lively and friendly, and his spirit was such that, no matter what challenges he faced, he was going to be this sweet little boy who showed up for class. It showed me that, although we that can think about stressors that come with being in college, there are students who are just trying to make it to kindergarten."

During commencement weekend, MU will award 3,814 bachelor's degrees, 1,009 master's degrees, 268 doctorates, 128 law degrees, 111 veterinary medicine degrees, 97 medicine degrees and 25 education specialist degrees. Some students will receive more

than one degree. More than 270 students are receiving their degrees after completing online degree programs.

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