

# From Arizona to Upstate: Karryann Kohlbeck finds her path

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Karryann Kohlbeck's academic journey has led her from Arizona to Upstate New York, and across the disciplines.

A few weeks before graduation, she decided to follow her love of writing and change her major from health sciences to Teacher Education – English. While she developed a love of the classroom during her time at SUNY Broome, she can envision herself someday ending up in a courtroom as an attorney.

“Probably with women’s rights and public policy,” said Kohlbeck, who was born on the Navajo Reservation and grew up in Flagstaff, on her future law career. “There’s a lot you can do.”



## **Cross-country move**

During her junior year of high school, her family offered her an opportunity: move in with her aunt and cousins in Vestal, New York, to obtain a New York State diploma and aid her chances of getting into a good school.

New York's educational standards are more rigorous than Arizona, and Karryann spent the summer before her senior year studying for and taking the state's Regents exams. She then caught up with her studies during her senior year at Vestal High School and graduated on time.

From there, she attended Ithaca College for a year, majoring in pre-medical studies. It seemed like a great opportunity – but it didn't turn out to be the right one.

“I said, ‘This is not for me.’ The first year of college was the hardest. It was hard to fit in with the group,” she

explained. "I was about to go home and my parents said, 'Try community college first.'"

She headed to SUNY Broome and found it a better fit.

Still majoring in Individual Studies – Health Sciences, she found herself involved instead with the Broome Educators of Children Association (BECA) on campus, an unusual role for a health sciences student, noted Professor Lisa Strahley, chair of SUNY Broome's Teacher Education and Early Childhood Education Department.

Kohlbeck learned more about education through her involvement with BECA, which also gave her a chance to work with the community and local children.

However, it was her English class that lit the literary spark and helped her finally decide on her major. Writing didn't come easily at first, but she began improving with writing courses and found that she truly loved putting her thoughts on paper. English involves more than the study of literature, she added; the critical thinking and analytical skills involved in any successful piece of academic writing are also highly useful in law school.

## **Civic Engagement**

Kohlbeck also became involved in SUNY Broome's Center for Civic Engagement, which fosters community involvement in important issues through a process known as public deliberation. Unlike the popular image of argumentation, public deliberation isn't adversarial in nature and instead invites participants to explore possible solutions to an issue, weighing both positives and negatives.

Karryann began as a note-taker, recording participants' views and discussions, and is now working to become a public deliberation facilitator.

The deliberations she participated in this year have been focused on racial and social justice, and she has also aided a deliberation on mental illness. Many students also attended a recent public deliberation on substance abuse in the local community, which drew a standing-room audience of more than 500 people.

"I never knew what a public deliberation was at first," she said. "It's a deep conversation with people and it's interesting because it deals with both sides of an issue."

Her experience in deliberation will help her when she ultimately attends law school. First, however, she is aiming to transfer to a four-year school; SUNY Geneseo, Penn State and Binghamton University are all possibilities.

She became interested in law by way of her mother, a speech language pathologist who is currently attending law school in Arizona. The two help each other with their studies, and Karryann's mother mentioned that she could see her daughter pursuing a career in the legal field.

When it comes to her academic journey, Karryann also credits the influence of her professors, including Sarah Weyer of the English Department, Christine Duffy-Webb of Teacher Education, and Scott Corley and Lisa Strahley of the Center for Civic Engagement.

“I met a lot of new people,” she said of her SUNY Broome experience, adding that she discussed career paths and possibilities with her teachers. “The professors are great; they’re mentors for me. They give me good advice.”

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