

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE From probation to Ph.D

*SOU grad Sudy Storm teaches midwives
in Africa while continuing her studies*

By Hannah Guzik
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After 34 years on academic probation, a career as a midwife and a research stint in Africa, Sudy Storm is finally graduating from Southern Oregon University Saturday.

The 59-year-old anthropology major first enrolled in the university in 1970, but instead of attending classes, she played cards in the Student Union and partied with friends. At the end of her freshman year, her grades included an F and two D's, so she was placed on academic probation.

Her file sat in an SOU basement for three decades, during which time she became a midwife, delivered about 500 babies and began teaching at health clinics in Africa. In 2008, after realizing that she needed more education to better help the Sierra Leone villagers she had come to call her family, she decided to re-enroll at SOU.

"There's something to be said when you have a direction and a goal and you know why you're here," Storm said. "You're focused."

The Ashland resident would spend two or three terms attending classes and then head to Africa for three to six months each year to do field research.

Now, she's among the university's top graduates. Having raised her grade point average from a 2.16 to 3.48, she's graduating with honors in Saturday's ceremony. Storm's also been accepted into SOU's prestigious McNair Scholar's program, which will offer her guidance as she pursues her PhD in anthropology.

"She's been able to integrate — as well as anyone I've seen — her academic work and what she does in the field, in Africa," said James Phillips, SOU assistant professor of anthropology. "What's exciting to me is that not only is she helping individual women and children in Africa, she's working on a policy level there to make changes."

Storm has been accepted into Oregon State University's graduate program and will start classes in the fall to earn a dual master's degree in applied medical anthropology and international public health. This summer she plans to travel again to Africa where she will stay in a remote village in Sierra Leon



Nontraditional student Sudy Storm is graduating from Southern Oregon University after being on academic probation for more than three decades. On Wednesday, she reflected on her time spent at the university and in Sierra Leone, Africa.

Julia Moore / Daily TidingsJulia Moore

and continue her ethnographic studies of the region.

She's particularly concerned about Western culture disrupting the traditional African culture, so she wants to help the villagers learn to sustain themselves.

"I've begun to look for ways to support them out of poverty and teach them to live more sustainably," Storm said. "The Western way is not the best way for them."

She'll also do humanitarian work in Sierra Leon, by teaching midwives to save the lives of mothers and infants. The African country has the highest infant mortality rate in the world, according to the United Nations World Population Prospects 2010 update.

"A lot of times we're working in the clinics with flashlights, because there's no electricity, there's no aspirin and the only sutures are the ones I've brought with me on the plane," Storm said.

To help reduce the transmission of disease, Storm is raising money to build latrines in the remote villages. At the site of her research last summer, a remote village in Sierra Leon, 37 percent of the population didn't have access to a toilet.

She's asked that anyone who wants to give her a graduation gift instead donate to her latrine project. A latrine for one family costs \$25, she said.

"This is a huge health concern," Storm said. "I want to do something about it because I want to see the villages grow and become sustainable and prosperous. That's why I'm getting my PhD."

For more information or to donate, visit www.themoonlodge.biz/sukuli.html or call 541-488-1444.

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