

14-year-old honor student surviving in college



Most students might spend their Friday evenings out and about, but on many weekends, Clark chooses to stay home and study.



Clark usually stays up studying or watching television well into the night.

"People ask me if I stay in my room all the time and study. I just tell them I'm not a total nerd just because I'm 14."

RAMONA CLARK

14-year-old UNL student



With a trigonometry class at 7:30 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and a biology lecture at 8:30 a.m. the rest of the week, Clark's day starts before a lot of students get out of bed.

Photos by Travis Heying/DN

Home-schooled teen doesn't want to be labeled a prodigy or nerd

By Melissa Hasek
Staff Reporter

Ramona Clark leads the normal UNL life. She lives in a single room in the Piper section of Neihardt Residence Center. She has a trigonometry class on Tuesday and Thursday mornings and attends biology lecture and lab, University Foundations and an honors section of sociology on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

In her spare time, Clark likes to read books on computer-generated "chaos pictures." She also spends her leisure time swimming in the Abel-Sandoz residence hall complex pool. She can't swim at the Campus Recreation Center pool unsupervised until she turns 16, about two years from now.

Ramona Clark is only 14. "People ask me if I stay in my room all the time and study," she said. "I just tell them I'm not a total nerd just because I'm 14."

Although not an official freshman until she takes the GED high school equivalency test at 16, Clark is taking a full load of classes at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as a student at large.

Clark's parents taught her at a home school in Milford, and she completed her studies in the fall by taking the American College Test. Clark said her scores were above average — high enough for the admissions department to allow her to take classes and enter the Honors Program.

"It wasn't really hard for me to decide what to do," Clark said. "I basically had to decide if I was going to come to college or just sit around doing nothing, being a no-good bum."

Clark's formal education began at the age of 5 like most other students. Clark entered a traditional kindergarten classroom — for one day.

On that day, the rest of the class participated in story time, and she disappeared to study the root system of plants.

From then on, her father taught her mathematics, and her mother taught science, English, history and other subjects.

"My mom said it (home-schooling) was because she was selfish," Clark said. "She didn't want anyone else to have all the fun."

Her first week of classes at the university was uneventful; other students and professors did not notice she was younger until she told them.

At times people have patronized her, Clark said, but overall, students and faculty have been accepting.

Clark plans to move to the international floor of Neihardt with Oxana Bendous, a Russian student, within the next few weeks. She said the arrangement would bring some different and interesting experiences to her life.

Clark said she embraced different experiences.

"Being different is one of the things that makes life interesting," she said. "If everything was the same it would just get boring. Do something different, and it makes people think and gain a new perspective on things."

A new perspective is what Lisa Schmidt, director of high school and college relations at UNL, had to use to admit Clark into school.

Schmidt said she could not remember a student as young as Clark trying to enter the university.

"It's been difficult because she's entering a system not specifically geared to her," she said. "We hope we can take care of her needs."

To gain admittance, Clark had to cut some "red tape," because she did not graduate from an accredited high school and could not take the GED. She took her first two college courses last summer.

Clark said she should graduate in four to five years.

After graduation, Clark plans on doing something math-related, perhaps as a university professor. In the meantime, she will live a normal college life — a life that includes clubs, classes and extracurricular activities.

She began her own math club this semester that anyone may join regardless of major or number of math classes taken. About nine people attended the club's first meeting, and another meeting is planned for November.

Clark also enjoys "reading, board games, playing around with numbers and messing with my computer." Some may call her a child prodigy, but Clark shrugs off that label.

"I don't care what people call me; just don't call me late to math class."