

Community Colleges

Section B

October 26, 2007

Dara M. Taylor, 28
Anne Arundel Community College,
Arnold, Md.

Graduated: spring 2002
What helped: a professor, an engaging program



Dara M. Taylor, a graduate of Anne Arundel Community College's filmmaking program, now works in New York.

YUNGHI KIM FOR THE CHRONICLE

A WHITE CAR rounds a curve and stops beneath an overpass. A guy casually strolls across the road above and drops a drug-filled bag through the car's open sunroof. It's a simple scene, shot at a distance, as if it could be almost anywhere in the United States.

It's from the documentary *Opiated: Life Beneath the Eyelids*, which Daryl W. Gonder, a professor at Anne Arundel Community College, plans to show in his filmmaking class this year. The documentary was filmed and produced by one of his former students, Dara M. Taylor, which is telling in its own way.

Mr. Gonder started the film program at Anne Arundel in 1998. Just eight years later, *MovieMaker* magazine named it one of the best two-year programs of its kind in the country. Ms. Taylor is one of its successful graduates.

By her own account, she "didn't do so well" in high school and assumed that college was not an option. But a year working in a minimum-wage job persuaded her to try a few classes in the fall of 1999. She chose an introductory film class with Mr. Gonder.

"I had always been interested in movies," she says. "And I was like, 'Oh, it's a film class. It's going to be easy.'"

Of course, she was wrong. (One of Mr. Gonder's favorite student critiques said he "eats slackers for lunch.") "His class was the only one that I really loved, and it really changed my perspective on the academic world," Ms. Taylor says.

She went on to take more classes with Mr. Gonder, including several in film and one in English. In 2002 she graduated with an associate degree in general studies and transferred to the visual-arts program at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County. Just before graduation, she decided to apply to graduate school at the School of Visual Arts, in New York City.

She used Mr. Gonder as a reference. And she got in.

Ms. Taylor finished her master's program this past spring and now works as a video artist at a design agency in New York. And this fall she is doing a mini-tour for screenings of her documentary. ■