How My Community College Experience Influenced My Life

By

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It all began with a long, scrutinizing look in the mirror. My life seemed to lack direction and was devoid of any real purpose. Worse, there was a sense of sadness and longing for the lost opportunities to prove my worth outside of the home. The sickening realization came that most of my current friends had no idea that I was once an academic overachiever and upwardly mobile employee. They only knew the stay-at-home Lori who volunteered for fire department committees and had mastered the domestic domain. I no longer recognized myself and wondered what had happened to the strong and independent person I used to be. Once married, there was no need for me to work and my husband had grown accustomed to the convenience of having me at home. Unfortunately, I had lost a part of my identity when I left my job. I came to the decision that it was time to return to the workforce.

My next step was to enroll in the Office Accounting program at Lone Star College (LSC). I didn’t realize how much this endeavor would change my life. Thaddeus Marshall was a great instructor who uncovered my aptitude for accounting and urged me to pursue my degree. The more I researched the educational opportunities available to me, the more ambitious I became. I decided to obtain credits for my first two years at the Montgomery campus while taking advantage of the affordable tuition rates. In the fall of 2010, I plan to transfer to Sam Houston State University to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in General Business and then a MBA.

Through this exciting (and sometimes stressful) process I have learned many lessons – while not a part of my degree plan, they still proved to be valuable.

**LESSON 1: A DEGREE IS MORE THAN JUST PIECE OF PAPER.**

I have come to appreciate a college education and find myself encouraging others to return to school. I feel that I am more productive and better equipped to make judgments. The challenging coursework at LSC provided me with more than just facts; it also taught me how to communicate, research, and think critically. As my knowledge grows, I feel more comfortable participating in meaningful conversations. The ability to speak intelligently about a myriad of topics creates such a remarkable feeling. I often find myself responding to my husband’s everyday ponderings with “Actually, we studied that in school; here’s how it works…”

This has been such a positive experience for me that I urge others to pursue their degree as well. Someday I hope to act as a mentor so that I may empower other women to succeed in college and the workplace.

**LESSON 2: IT’S NEVER TOO LATE TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL.**

My husband urged me for years to go back to school but I always thought my chance had passed. I felt my age would be a problem; moreover, I wasn’t sure how much I would remember from high school. I found, however, that LSC has quite a few non-traditional students and offers resources to help students transition back into school life. I have used the career planning services, the writing tutors, and the online labs. The campuses offer a small, comfortable environment for students who might be intimidated by the larger universities. Also, the flexible, year-round schedule affords an ambitious full-time student the opportunity to complete a degree in a shorter amount of time. This is especially appealing to older students who wish to jump-start a second career. In just twelve months, I have completed 49 hours through a combination of traditional and online courses ranging in duration from three to sixteen weeks.
Today, I am a member of Phi Theta Kappa with a 4.0 grade point average. I consider myself fortunate to have had amazing teachers whom I credit for my success.

LESSON 3: OVERCOME OBSTACLES THROUGH PERSEVERANCE.

I’ve learned you cannot let obstacles keep you from obtaining your goals – success always involves a challenge. Consider my first attempt to return to school last fall. I had to withdraw on my second day of classes because my husband required emergency heart surgery. I knew I had made the right decision but my heart broke every time I thought about school. However, I came to view it as a minor setback and used the time to get a jump on the spring semester. By the time school started again, I had already completed the readings and assignments for two of my classes.

This semester, two of my textbooks got lost in the mail. Fortunately, I was able to use reserve copies from the campus libraries which allowed me to complete my assignments on time. The challenges I’ve faced in college have taught me not to give up when things get difficult. I have adopted a new mantra in the last year: adapt and overcome; failure is not an option. As Samuel Johnson said, “Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance.”

LESSON 4: EMBRACE WHAT SCARES YOU MOST.

My time at LSC has taught me that the best way to overcome anxiety is to embrace it. I had a fear of public speaking but I knew it was an important career skill. A summer course in Business Speech taught me how to control my anxiety and deliver engaging presentations. I have delivered twelve presentations this year and find my confidence level boosted with each one. Writing was another valuable skill that I did not particularly enjoy. A tortuous December mini provided a crash course in effective writing for academic purposes. I have exchanged horror stories with other classmates about crying myself to sleep at night from the stress of completing a 16-week English composition course in three short weeks. Nevertheless, I would later come to bless Bruce Martin for developing my ability to craft a strong argument in a critical analysis. Thanks to him, I have received an A on every paper I’ve written since taking his course. Additional credit is due to the excellent writing tutors in the extended learning center.

In closing, I have learned many things from my time here at LSC – Montgomery. The aforementioned lessons are the most outstanding to me; however, there are many subtle ones as well. I have opened my mind to new ideas and found that even the simplest communication is richer. I have become more effective in communicating my thoughts to others. More importantly, incoming messages are richer because I comprehend the underlying implications of what is being said. I have experienced the phenomenon of interdisciplinary learning and understand that events do not happen within a vacuum.

For me, attending LSC has really boosted my self-esteem and more importantly, I like the person in my mirror again. There are still many challenges ahead for me but my determination will enable me to overcome them. With each semester I will only become stronger and better equipped to handle life. College is the great equalizer; it provides the means to become whoever you wish to be. Whenever I met someone who demonstrates a skill that I admire, I make a note to consult my LSC catalog because I know there has to be a class for that!