

## Essay

For most students, entering college is a terrifying and an overwhelming experience. It's a case of when the fear of the unknown is the greatest fear of all. We don't know if we adjust to a place where every single student has to stand on their own two feet and take responsibility for our education and future. This transition from high school to college is the most significant in our lives. Sadly, some college students believe that college is only about finding a job. I admit, I was one of those students. But my college experience has helped me realize that college is about finding yourself; who you are as a person and the type of person you want to be.

In high school, I had no clue what path I should take. Should I go to college, join the military, or continue to work? It's a life-altering decision that kept me awake for many nights. I had excellent grades and my classmates either admired or joked about how smart I was. But I felt that college wasn't for me. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life and because I was part of the post-9/11 generation, paid more attention of what was happening in the world. I came close to enlisting in the Army until I found out I physically couldn't . College seemed like the logical choice. Until two people very close to me were taken away before I turned eighteen. The last thing on my mind was my future. My grades slipped, my spirit broken, and my life torn apart. I managed to graduate, but didn't believe college was the answer to my problems.

I moved out on my own, worked at a restaurant, and just hung out with my buddies in the neighborhood. Everyday, I felt I was wasting my potential and life away into being a "regular" person. Then, I went to my sister's high school graduation and listened to the valedictorian speech. He quoted a line that has stayed with me since: "Our greatest glory in life is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." That single line changed my outlook on my life. I made the decision that the only way I was going to move forward in my life was go to college. However, money was scarce, not to mention that I had no clue what I would study. I knew that community college was my one chance to put my past behind me and take a step towards the future. I just didn't know how much it would change and influence my life.

Community college is all too often portrayed as a safety net for high school graduates that don't have enough money or the grades to get into a four year university. But from the first day, I recognized that community college meant something more. It helped the transition of going from high school to a larger world full of different people and different experiences. You don't have to live in a dorm, make your own

schedule, and have plenty of resources at your disposal. Libraries, computers, tutors are all within reach. During my first semester, I did feel slightly overwhelmed by the college experience. But I began to become comfortable when I connected with other students. They might have been from a different state or country, but they have the same problems and fears as I did. Whether it was having enough money to pay the bills, spending sleepless nights to study for a test, and having a job on top of going to school, helped my image of community college as a place where a student can take a deep breath and enter comfortably into the daunting world of college. As I got became relaxed in my new environment, one question remained: "What do I want to do with my life?"

Ever since middle school, I've been told and complimented about my writing. I didn't notice at the time how serious I took every essay I received or every story I conceived. Every word I wrote was personal and had a hidden meaning beneath it. In high school, I was forced to have others read my work, who always praised it. They would even have me help them with their paper. Not to write it, but to guide the direction it should take. Starting freshman year in college, I began to take every paper seriously. I would always take the criticism of my professors as opportunities to improve. I once took a creative writing class my second year, and it was the best class I ever took. To have the entire class read my work and critique it was inspiring. It allowed me to have others see my strengths and weaknesses. It was in this class that I decided that writing was for me. I decided to have my major focus on journalism and English. Writing to me was a release from my busy schedule and gave me the fortune to express my views about people and where we are in the world today. Never before has something touched me in a profound way. More importantly, writing has made me look internally at a person that has been through so much, and yet still finds the strength to get up in the morning and face the world. But I wouldn't find this if I didn't go to community college. I was able to make my own schedule, meet some fascinating people, including a special friend that motivated me along the way, and assisted me into following a special path. I'm proud to have one of my works on the verge of becoming a reality. If you told me that five years ago, I wouldn't believe it. But now, I can see that community college is a significant institution that can lead you into looking inside yourself and revealing the true person within. Maybe the best thing about community college is that it's only the beginning.