

Reflections on Nassau Community College

by

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It took ten years to muster up enough courage to walk onto the campus at Nassau Community College. Ten years after my high school graduation, that is. Back then, at the age of 17, I had been told by a high school guidance counselor that I wasn't college material. That conclusion was reached as a result of my poor SAT scores.

In retrospect, I have often wondered why was I categorized as not being "college material." SAT scores should not have been the sole deciding factor in determining success or failure at the college level. After all, I was in ARISTA, the national honor society. I was an above average student throughout high school. I graduated tenth in a class of over 600 students. I was active in extracurricular activities such as Senior Class Treasurer, Cheerleaders, and Sophomore Class representative. But, because of those SAT scores, I was labeled "not college material."

Why is it that the bad things that are said to you seem to remain in your memory bank longer than the good? There was always a voice in the back of my head that kept insisting I prove that guidance counselor wrong, but it took me ten long years to gather up the courage to do just that and take those steps onto the campus of my local community college.

I did not go alone, however. Along with me on that first day were my two sons, David, age 5, and Steven, age 2. I sat in the admissions office filling out the application form with Steven securely on my lap and David wandering about the office and occasionally pulling at my arm asking, "Mom, what are you doing?" Little did David realize that I was asking myself the very same question, "What am I doing?" I didn't stop, however, and I completed the application and met with a counselor. I really didn't know what I wanted

to major in initially, but the counselor advised me to take one or two courses, just to get my feet wet and then to take it from there. As is usual with me, I jumped right in and signed up for 12 credits. It was sink or swim. Luckily for me, I swam.

Nassau was a different campus back then. The fancy buildings that you see today were only a dream. The college was on an old army camp and classes were held in barracks. It's ironic that today so much emphasis is put on the learning environment and the importance of the learning environment for the success of the student. Well, maybe for some that might be the case, but for those of us who attended Nassau back in its "barracks days," the environment was not important. What was important was the teaching and learning that was taking place in that environment.

There were many cold winter nights when we would sit in those barracks wearing jackets, mittens, caps, and taking notes against all the odds that Mother Nature threw at us. I wish I could recall each professor by name but I can't, and that is so unfortunate because I know that it was their teaching and encouragement that made me take the next step and move onto a four year college to finish up my degree. It was a professor in an Educational Psychology class who gave an assignment that made us research various programs and innovative approaches to teaching and learning that put me in contact with the ultimate field that was going to be my career in education for the rest of my professional life. It was in writing this paper in which I compared a school in Nassau County with a school in the Bronx that I became aware of a pedagogical and instructional education program entitled, bilingual education. It was that assignment given by a professor at Nassau that put me in touch with my professional love.



Nassau Community College opened up the world of education for me once again. It was at this institution that I learned to have faith in myself and courage to become a risk taker in my field of dreams. As the president of a community college today, I share my story with many young women who attend my school in the Bronx because I see myself reflected in their faces. I make a point of going up to them during registration week when I see them on line with their children in tow and tell them that it is not going to be easy but that they must persevere. They must persevere for themselves, and just as importantly, for their children. I promise them the services and the support systems that were in place for me when I was in their shoes because if it wasn't for the counseling and support of my professors, I really don't know if I would have had the courage to believe in myself and to complete that first rung on my education ladder, my Associate in Arts Degree-cum laude, in December of 1974.

Thank you Nassau Community College for opening your doors for me and for all the others who came after me and who will continue to come seeking their college degrees.

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