

**First Generation College Student Narrative:**  
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Though neither one of my parent's had earned a college degree, it was always an expectation that their children would. It was never "if I go to college," but always "where will I go and what will I study." I truly believe that this push came from their own experiences. My father started at Ohio University in the 1960's, but quickly joined the Navy when he realized that, at that time in his life, academia was not the right route. My mother, however, never saw higher education as an option until her 40's when she went to school to become a licensed Realtor. With the belief that parents should want more for their children than they themselves had, the message from them was always quite clear - you WILL go to college.

Like many parents, mine were concerned with the reality of paying for my two younger sisters and me to go to college. So, when I was a sophomore in high school, my dad began working at the local community college as Director of Plant Operations & Maintenance. If nothing else, he could guarantee that his children could receive their associate's degree debt-free. Though I took the ACT and SAT and discussed college dreams with my friends, I resolved to begin my post-secondary career at Washington State Community College in Marietta, OH.

Attending a community college gave me a rather different experience. I lived at home, I worked part-time, and I went to class. Not much different than how I had lived in high school. The major difference was that my friends were all away at school and I was forced to find a new kind of social life. Though I was

somewhat active on campus – tutored other students, served as a student ambassador, and participated in Phi Theta Kappa (the two-year honorary) – it wasn't quite as exciting as the stories and experiences of those who “went away.” But, as my friends were taking classes with 100+ other people, I felt comfort in knowing that I was always a name and never a number. I took courses that put me on path to transfer to a four-year institution, and I graduated from WSCC with honors.

Once I learned to maneuver through the application process and figured out the importance of the acronym FAFSA, I was set to transfer to Ohio University. I had my housing forms in, my major decided, and financial aid ready to go. And then I got scared. I liked the small town environment I had grown up in. I liked being near my family – even though Athens was only an hour away. I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do with my life. So, I backed out. I applied to Marietta College and was accepted into the political science program – a complete change from my previous plans - and I assumed that one day I would go on to law school. Again, I had my housing forms in, my classes scheduled, and federal and private loans secured to pay for school. And I got scared, again. Did I really want to be a political science major? Did I really want to borrow that much money for school? So, I backed out again and went back to WSCC for another quarter to try to answer the ultimate life question, “what do I want to be when I grow up?” I took classes in areas that I thought might be interesting, areas that I hadn't tried before. I quickly decided to choose a degree that I would enjoy earning and not necessarily for where I thought it might lead me.

After my quarter of self-discovery, I reapplied to Marietta College and started as an organizational communication major. I loved it! I loved the faculty. I loved the campus community and the fact that I had stayed true to what I needed and wanted out of my education. This time, I decided to live in an apartment close to campus. I had moved beyond my desire to live dorm-life, and though I developed friendships on campus, my social needs were different. While at MC, I worked part-time as a server in a local restaurant. To this day, I consider working there one of the best times of my life. I worked hard, I studied hard, and somehow I still found time to have fun. Since I had graduated from WSCC with small honors, I was determined to do even better at MC. At the end of two years, I graduated with my degree in organizational communication, a certificate in oral communication, and again I earned honors – this time magna cum laude.

All along the way, my parents reinforced how proud they were of me. Though they helped where they could, I had paid (borrowed) my way through school and worked hard to do well. It was a different route than my friends, but it ended up being the right route for me. In the end, I had a great college experience because I made it what I wanted it to be. I changed my major five times, I changed my goals even more, but I earned my degrees and found a love of learning that will stay with me for a lifetime. I've since earned my master's degree, again from Marietta College, and one day I hope to earn my doctorate.

I feel blessed to have parents who, despite never earning their own college degrees, always pushed me and my sisters to see and appreciate the value of education. They never cared what I studied, only that I did.