

James A. Colunga

Hello, my name is James Colunga and I am enrolled as a student in the ASN Nursing Program at Austin Community College. I am a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation US citizen and the first in my family to attend college. As a life-long resident of Austin, it pleases me to be able to attend Austin Community College to obtain an education that will help me to contribute to the community that I have been a part of my entire life. I have worked in the medical field for more than 10 years and have reached a point in my life where I am able to further my education to advance my career so that I may better serve my community.

I feel that being enrolled in a community college with others gives someone a very good insight into the community that not only they will be serving, but also whom will be serving alongside you. Community college is for everyone, and I feel that Austin Community College excels not only in inclusivity, but accessibility. As someone who is older than 90% of the students in my cohort, this became more important to me than I initially realized. I have discovered that both my generation and the current generation have much to teach each other regarding modern methods to achieve success, tried and true methods of success, and overall outlook on life in general. Despite our diverse backgrounds, everyone in my cohort have come to respect and love each other in this short time together.

Our instructors also serve the community. Not only do they provide us with the tools we need to be successful, but they also give us career advice that is valuable as it comes from those who work and serve in the community. I have talked to classmates who have sought advice from their instructors for their current career path and came away not only with a better understanding of the path they were on, but in some cases an entirely different career path.

Our instructors have been in our shoes and have had the same thoughts and ambitions we have. They are very quick to share their personal experience in the field both as a teachable moment as well as to offer their own personal insight on the situation and how maybe they could have done things differently.

Over the years I have learned that my program at ACC has an outstanding reputation among clinical sites at hospitals and long-term care facilities in my community. We are allowed much hands-on experience throughout our program, more so than similar programs at more “prestigious” and expensive universities. I feel this has to do with the fact that ACC has been dedicated to the community far longer than other universities. We are also offered many opportunities to volunteer for our community through the college.

I feel that I have been given many tools to succeed from ACC. I personally have taken advantage of the extremely well equipped ACCelerator facility. I have taken advantage of scholarships, job fairs, mental health assistance, as well as tutoring and open lab facilities. Assistance is very easy to obtain for everyone. A few of my classmates have taken advantage of free use electronic devices such as laptops and tablets to help with schoolwork, even printers and facsimile. A few of my classmates have also taken advantage of the free childcare as well as assistance programs for young single mothers. The college goes out of their way to inform us that these programs not only exist for us, but that they are easy for us to obtain should we need them.

It cannot be understated that the knowledge that these programs exist for us goes a long way in providing mental stress relief. Knowing that there are programs that will often provide you with money for school free of charge as well as other means of support help us to focus on

our schoolwork and further advance our careers and make better lives for ourselves and our families. I can personally attest that the stress of not having to worry about paying for school has benefited me greatly in reliving anxiety and helping me to be calm and focused not only on the classroom but in the clinical setting as well. I have spoken to other classmates that have greatly benefited from the free electronic equipment and software rental. ACC goes out of their way to make our lives easier so that we can better focus on success.

I feel as though ACC has done their best to prepare me for the real world when it comes to my future in nursing. We are provided with many opportunities to experience real-world situations and participate in discussions regarding real-world scenarios and decision making. Our instructors have many years of experience and often incorporate them into lecture topics. I will often recall in class discussions when I'm in the clinical setting and use that knowledge to help me make better decisions when providing care for my patients. We have access to a state-of-the-art simulation facility on campus that helps us to build communication skills with each other and help us to develop our critical thinking skills.

Although it may not seem as significant but is more significant than some may understand, we have access to food on campus that is good, somewhat healthy, and reasonably priced. We also have access to on-campus food drives that not only benefit us as students, but our community as well. Having access to food when we need it is often understated when it comes to the needs of students. ACC makes sure that our basic human needs are met. We routinely fill out surveys to assess for need, whether they be financial, healthcare, or food and shelter. These are basic human needs that can greatly affect someone's success in college.

I am proud to be a student at Austin Community College. I love that it is affordable, all inclusive, and that they also serve the community as well as the students and staff. This solidifies my decision to pursue a new career later in life. Although it is hard work and can be mentally and physically taxing, I do not regret any of it. I am lucky to have a very supportive wife who is also very proud that I am taking the big leap later in life. I do my best to reciprocate my positivity to my other classmates and especially to let them know that they are not alone that there is always help available, all they need is to seek and ask.