

Kathryn  
Wharton County Junior College  
Pathways to Success Essay Contest

How did community colleges change how you thought and felt about your future?

---

The eyeball lay on the table, staring intensely into the depths of my soul. I stared uneasily back at it. After a couple moments, the giant cow eyeball's gaze was too much for me, and I averted my eyes. I couldn't do it. It was too...gross. From the front of the classroom, my seventh-grade teacher looked disapprovingly at me. I was supposed to be doing the dissection but was too squeamish to even lift the scalpel. Ten minutes later, the teacher had come to my table, opened up the cow eye and was urging me to look over at the parts, as I stared with great interest at the floor tiles. In humiliation and disgust, I vowed to myself, If there is one career I'll never do, it would be a medical career. However, little did I know how community college would significantly change the way I thought and felt about my future, by developing my interest in the medical field and establishing my confidence in my intended degree and future career.

"Hey Kathryn, have you considered becoming a nurse?" I sat there in a moment's surprise. I was four years older, now in my junior year, but only slightly less squeamish since the cow eye incident. I was on the phone with my cousin, who is a nurse, and the conversation had moved to the topic of my plans for the future. "Well..." I replied slowly. "No, not really. I hadn't thought of nursing. I did do pretty well in high school biology though. And it was sort of interesting... except the dissections." With neither of my parents in the medical field, the concept was foreign to me. I was unsure that I would have enough interest to take on this profession and that this degree was where my skills were pointing. But, running out of dream jobs, I added nursing to the list of possible majors. After some research, I decided to give nursing a trial run by taking an anatomy and physiology class at my local community college. Since the class was affordable and accessible, I reasoned, I could easily try out part of this degree at a low cost to determine if nursing was a viable fit.

Months later, I opened the door of the college, stepping into the vast lobby. Right. I'm here. Now to go to the Anatomy and Physiology lab. I eventually found the classroom and sat down as the

---

professor was handing out the syllabus. My eyes scanned the page, then stopped on “Dissection: Cow Eye and Sheep Brain.” Well, I guess I couldn’t run from the cow eyeball for very long. Still, this situation was to be expected. Dissections are part of a biology-based subject. It was time for me to face my fears, cow eyeballs included.

Several weeks passed. We hadn’t gotten to the dissections yet, and I found myself enjoying the class—far more than I expected. I was amazed by how intricately the human body was organized as a harmony of parts and systems, all working in sync to keep the body functioning. Every class, I understood more deeply how so many critical systems constantly work, imperceptible to us in our day-to-day lives. One October day, my professor animatedly explained the movement of skeletal muscles. He explained that on a micro-level, tiny filaments called myosin reach out and attach to the actin strand, contracting the muscle. So, in grabbing a ball in our hands, we have microscopic, little “hands” grabbing another muscle filament to contract the entire muscle. And all this happens without our realizing it, I mused. The body’s systems are simply incredible. This community college class showed me fascinating concepts I had never encountered before and filled my mind with excitement about the future I could have with a nursing degree. I began to picture myself as a nurse someday, securing a comfortable income for myself, and deeply caring for others, all while immersing myself in the study of such interesting topics.

The day of the dissection finally arrived. Instead of dreading it, I was cautiously excited. I still hadn’t forgotten how I had been immobilized at the sight of the cow eye in seventh grade, but I hoped that I had progressed beyond that fear. The lab started with the dissection of the sheep’s brain. It was squishy and smelled of

2 | Minotti

formaldehyde...but it was cool. Unfortunately, because of our schedule, we were not able to get to the cow’s eye. Although I had escaped the cow eyeball, I found myself somewhat disappointed. I really enjoyed the lecture unit that covered the function of the eye and was hoping to get a second shot at the dissection. However, the lab experience I did have helped me find that squeamishness was no longer a barrier to me becoming a nurse.

With the potential obstacle of squeamishness overcome and sparked enthusiasm for the workings of the human body, I also needed to confirm that I have what it takes to master the material. At the end

---

of the semester, I opened up the college learning platform and saw that my final grade had been posted: Anatomy and Physiology I - A. I leaned back in my chair, relieved, my mind full of new possibilities. I had potential; I could succeed in nursing. I had successfully completed one of the harder nursing classes and proved my worth. I had a skill that I could one day use to help others in a deep and meaningful way.

The deadlines for college applications had come, and I was at my laptop, inputting my details for the college. I toggled the major “Nursing,” then paused a moment. Nursing. I smiled to myself. If only my squeamish, uncertain seventh-grade self could see me now, so sure of my career path, and so excited about joining the world of nursing. This is what I wanted, and I could not imagine my future any differently. Nursing was my calling, and the community college class helped me to take the first step.