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How is your community college experience preparing you to achieve a meaningful career with which you can support yourself and your family?

In the rural Philippines, where life revolves around farming and electricity is lacking in many mountainous places, my story begins. Growing up on a farm without many basic things, we faced a lot of tough times, specifically during failed harvest where we had to prioritize paying for the farm supplies we owed over our food supply.

There are two events that serve as a quick reminder to myself to not give up my studies whenever it feels too heavy to handle. First, it is still vivid in my memory where my two siblings and I, at ages 4, 7, and 8, were left by our parents for one week by ourselves in our Nipa hut (Bahay Kubo). We were instructed to boil and eat potatoes, plantains, and peanuts for meals, and, of course, “Not to burn the Bahay Kubo” and “No fighting!” It was traumatic for all of us, especially our incredibly young minds were too naive and believed in vampires and witches. At night, I and my 8-year-old sister were taking turns leaning on the door with a knife in hand thinking about fighting when any creature attempts to break in. Those fears are just products of our imaginations. My 4-year-old brother was the unbothered one, while my sister had nightmares because of that experience, even when our parents were already back home. My mom used to say, I was the toughest of the three, and I must agree, at least I was tough to hide my fears. That week without parents felt like they abandoned us, but they did not. That was a serious drought season where every family in our community was slowly starving, adults had to walk long ways away from home to look for jobs on big farms. Another event that made me stronger today was when my mother was ill. It started as a minor health issue, but because we cannot afford to go to the doctor for her checkup, she carries it on. She still worked on the farm for about 3 years until she could not anymore. That is where my aunt took her to the doctor. Sooner, we realized that the minor infection in her lungs became stage 4 cancer. The most painful thing for me is that she died at 44, not because of cancer, but because of poverty. If that minor infection were treated properly at the beginning, there is a great chance that she would be here, congratulating me on every milestone of my academic journey. She has not experienced what it feels like to have electricity in the house and not to worry about where to get food for the next meal. She was born a subsistence farmer and died the same. My ultimate realization is to avoid this history from repeating in my generation and for my future descendants.

My life started with a lot of challenges, at the same time, there are lots of good lessons to learn from it. Those childhood backbreaking farm work and family struggles did not break me because God was and is always with me. The farm was my training ground to prepare for the greater life ahead. My childhood experiences lead me to believe that education is the best way to make life better. Being the first in my family to go to college and moving to the United States as an immigrant with little English skills made the idea of college seem impossible. Fortunately, Community Colleges changed everything for me. Even though it took me about 4 years to learn English as my second language through taking various ESL classes at a Community College in California, I developed enough self-confidence to dream big.

At Austin Community College, I found great support and encouragement from teachers and academic advisors to keep my educational goals going. They helped me navigate through college classes and get my Associate degree in Business with an academic excellence award. It was not easy, but every class I took got me closer to my bigger goal, which is to earn a bachelor's degree in business from Texas A&M University. Studying business is the right step for me to become an outstanding Financial Analyst in the near future. The impact of Texas Community Colleges goes beyond just getting a degree for me. It shows how strong people can be and how much we can achieve if we are willing to learn more, adapt to changes, and work hard. From struggle to success, I moved forward with determination and inspiration to better the lives of people that need my help. I am super excited that one day, I will be able to give my father and siblings meaningful life experiences that they will cherish forever.

Aside from wanting to fulfill my promise to help my family, I want to be a living example to other students who see success as impossible, that it is possible to progress in life. Successful education can change lives for the better. I hope that my story will inspire others who have faced tough times like me. I owe a lot to my family and academic advisors for supporting me and believing in the power of education. Looking ahead, I am proud to be a current student at Blinn College, where I am finishing the requirements to hopefully get into the Mays Business School at Texas A&M University. Blinn College offers hope and opportunities to so many young people, including those in remote areas who might feel left behind.

Overall, I am a resilient Filipino immigrant who is grateful for what Texas Community Colleges have done for me and others like me. They are reliable institutions that help us students, specifically from low-income households, acquire knowledge and strengths to build better lives, starting from humble beginnings to achieving big dreams.

Thank you for your time reading my personal story.