



# CCBA Essay Contest Winner

CCBA sponsored this contest to find out what students think about community colleges offering baccalaureate college degrees on their campuses, the challenges of finding degree programs close to their homes and obstacles students must overcome in order to earn a baccalaureate degree.

The winner is:

**Zuly Fernandez**

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Edison College • Ft. Myers, FL

## The American Dream

by Zuly Fernandez

I came to America as a child aboard an old wooden boat, fleeing Castro's dictatorship. Today, a decade later, I continue to pursue the promise of a better life. The journey toward higher education, and eventually a Baccalaureate degree, is fueled by the same determination. My parents, as refugees, forfeited successful professional careers in the fields of law and medicine to offer me a chance at freedom. They risked their lives on the hope that their children would profit from their sacrifice.

I know that the only way to achieve my full potential is through education, and I am certain that my community college will enable me to do this. I follow with pride my parents' example of dedication to their convictions.

As a teenager, I attended New World School of the Arts, a Miami conservatory for the performing arts. There I immersed myself in creative expression. Through my performances, I realized I had the capacity to deliver joy to others. Serving as president of the Cultural Heritage Club, I choreographed productions for Black and Hispanic community events, drawing a diverse group together in pursuit of a common goal. These experiences illustrated for me the value of each person's contribution. I decided to dedicate my life to serving others.

It is imperative for me to earn a Baccalaureate degree while living at home because my family cannot afford the expense of dormitory housing. Furthermore, I can continue to work, help with the family and contribute to household expenses.

Originally, community colleges were designed to assist students like me, who came through the door already burdened with financial need, language barriers and family adversity that made admission to a university inconceivable. I am among thousands of students who not only succeeded in the supportive environment of the community college, but far exceeded their wildest dreams, and consequently aspire to a baccalaureate. It has thus become incumbent upon the community college system to broaden its mission to embrace those students inspired to further their academic careers while managing all other duties of life.

Leaders often attain clarion visions. I consider myself a servant leader, molded by memories of my father treating other refugees aboard our weather beaten vessel. *My* vision encompasses opportunity for all, that one day every individual will have a chance to triumph through accessible education. There is no time to waste. I know my purpose in life. Although barriers have constrained me in the past, my family and I have been liberated and have overcome many obstacles.

The Baccalaureate Program serves as my next challenge, a challenge that derives from hope and demands persistence. I believe "The great aim of education is not knowledge but action" (Life 101). It is crucial that Community Colleges act now in defense of higher education. As for me, I will do anything in my power to be given the opportunity of acquiring a Baccalaureate degree. My American Dream begins at the Edison Colleges' Baccalaureate program.

### Resources

Walker, Kenneth P. Community College Review, "Opening the Door to a Baccalaureate Degree". Fall 2005 <<http://www2.ncsu.edu/ncsu/cep/acce/ccreview/ccreview.html>>