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Portland Community College

A Hail Mary Pass for the Hard-Luck Case

Last May I realized that we would run out of money in ten weeks. I had been struggling as an actor in Los Angeles while my wife taught piano lessons. My son was about to start preschool. Although I happened upon success earlier in my career, I hadn't worked in over a year. We had stretched our budget to its limit. My wife and I cobbled together a plan: we would sell our house and bunk up with my in-laws while I churned through the prerequisites for nursing school.

I enrolled at Portland State, but because my parents-in-law lived in Oregon and we were coming from California, I was considered a non-resident. The tuition floored me. I would have to borrow huge loans. If I were not accepted into nursing school, I would have to find a job and start repaying those loans immediately. Having recently clawed our way out from under the debt of owning a house, incurring a new mountain of debt chilled me. I ditched that plan and enrolled at Portland Community College.

The safety net of Community College caught me before I hit bottom. Without the low cost and guaranteed admission at PCC, I would have had to take a minimum-wage job to support my family. Getting into a private school was impossible. Although I had attended the Juilliard School of Drama, my grades weren't stellar, and my old acting teachers wouldn't remember my name, let alone write me a good recommendation. Being a recent transplant from California also decreased my eligibility for scholarships. I needed an inexpensive education that would help me land a job. I needed a place to start over.

Portland Community College offered me the opportunity to improve my academic record and work toward a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing. Because PCC is allied with Oregon Health and Sciences University, OHSU will accept my nursing school credits. The possibility of earning an affordable four-year degree cannot be underestimated. As hospitals strive to fill positions with the best candidates, and nurses take on an increasingly important role in health care, the BSN has become a crucial element in securing a job after graduation. Enrolling in community college is giving me the chance to enter the work force with the training I need to succeed.

As the demand for specialized knowledge in the workplace escalates, the need for a four-year degree likewise increases. Community colleges offer an education to those students who are willing to work hard despite past failures or hardships. By offering a Baccalaureate degree to students, community colleges would be acknowledging the current need for degrees beyond the associate's level. They would also be enriching the community by turning out graduates more qualified to concentrate on and become experts in a particular field. Although I my monetary resources had dwindled to zero, I had the initiative to strike out on a path to self-actualization. Luckily, my community college met me half way.

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