

Completing A Degree

PATTY SALINAS

A goal without a plan is just a wish... and that is what I had at 29 years old, a wish to get a college degree. I was taking classes at a community college but had no set plan. I hoped to transfer to a 4-year college and secure a bachelor's degree. But how would I get there, what college, what degree? I had wishes and questions but no plan.

Eleven years earlier things had seemed much clearer. After graduating from Parlier High School, I enrolled at Fresno State and majored in liberal studies while working part-time. The plan was to graduate in five years, with a minor in psychology. That plan was thrown off course when I got pregnant before the freshman year was completed. Working full time now took precedence over going to school. Time passed quickly and at age 21, I was divorced and raising a little girl on my own. I was barely making enough money to support us, and I knew that I needed a college degree to have a career that I loved and that paid better.

I was lost in the community college system. Every time I talked to a counselor (usually a new one each time) I would be advised to take courses that I did not really need. I wasn't getting anywhere. One fateful day in late summer, while working at the Fresno County Office of Education, I met an admissions counselor from Fresno Pacific during an informational lunch. This encounter changed the course of my life. He (the counselor) told me about the degree completion program and how it was designed specifically for working adults. At first, I was super skeptical about a program that would allow me to work full time, where classes met only one night a week for six weeks. I would complete the bachelor's degree in 18 months. This sounded too good to be true and I quickly asked, "What's the catch?" Understanding my hesitation, he invited me to visit the North Fresno campus to see the site for myself and get to know more about the program.

Two weeks later, I was enrolled in my first FPU course with Don Diboll (Concepts of Wellness) since I still needed a few general education units. I don't think Dr. Diboll remembers me as a student but the impact he made during that first class is one I will never forget. He made the short-term course concept feel achievable and this was my first introduction to how Fresno Pa-

cific is more than just a university but in fact a community. I quickly enrolled in a second course and ultimately, in a cohort of the Business Administration degree completion program.

For the next 18 months I was in class every Tuesday night from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m. I turned in every assignment and earned good grades. The program was set up for the working adult. My life was valued in the classroom and I was able to draw on past experiences in assignments and class discussions of assigned readings. I made many friends and created a network of colleagues from working classmates. The learning process was different than anything I had experienced before. It was academically challenging but also rewarding. I worked tirelessly for those 18 months. I stayed up long hours working on papers and other assignments. In the required biblical studies course I repeatedly asked questions about Bible verses that I didn't understand. I struggled to complete a 72-page thesis. Nevertheless, I did it.

Most colleges and universities are equipped to meet the needs of traditional students but as the nontraditional student population increases, the programs and classes available for these students with varied needs will have to adapt and accommodate them as well. Fresno Pacific University's degree completion program did this for me.