

## *A Message for Students*

Dear Student,

Welcome to Delaware County Community College (DCCC). I congratulate you on deciding to begin, or continue, your college education. I am certain that your experiences at our college will be enriching and rewarding. I share my story hoping to convince you that if I can do it, then you can do it. I was born in Greece and emigrated to the United States at the age of eight in 1972. I was placed into fourth grade without knowing an ounce of English. Thus began my problematic journey in education. I attended school in the Chester Upland School District and by the end of middle school, I closely approached the advancement level of most students – regardless of the bullying I endured.

Although I had no idea at the time that I was “neurodivergent,” it would not be for another 50 years before I was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a neurodevelopmental disability that begins from early childhood. ADHD has been referred to an “invisible condition,” yet one that manifests in various psychosocial ways, such as the inability to concentrate and focus, forgetfulness, social anxiety, extreme shyness, depression, social isolation, employment difficulties, trouble establishing meaningful relationships, anger, impulsive behavior, and possibly obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). In hindsight, the aftereffects of ADHD were much more impactful on my life than many people close to me realized. Moreover, peering back from the lens of an older version of me, I can finally acknowledge how these symptoms explain much of my behavior throughout my life, both in school and personal.

In high school, I began ninth grade in the college prep track but switched to vo-tech in tenth grade. I felt as if I was not smart enough to be enrolled with the other students in college prep courses. Truthfully, I did not have the requisite academic qualifications to pursue the college prep curriculum at the time. Meanwhile, the schoolwork in the vo-tech track was much less comprehensive than the college prep track – or even the general track – further hampering my educational development. After graduating from Chester High School, I decided to join the military to help me move forward in life. I enlisted in the United States Air Force, receiving an Honorable Discharge after four years of service.

I spent the next few years deciding on what to do next with my life, working various uninspiring jobs. A couple of months shy of age 26, I decided to try college. That college was DCCC. The math portion of the placement test indicated that I needed to brush up on basic mathematics before attempting a college level math course. That did not surprise me given my weak intellectual foundation from school. At the time, the developmental math course at DCCC was MAT 060. In Summer II of 1989, I registered for the course, attended class each day, took lecture notes, did my homework, hung in there, and received a High Pass (HP) grade. I eventually completed my degree at DCCC with High Honors in May of 1991. One year later I transferred to West Chester University, as many of you plan to do. Like most students today, I too worked full time while pursuing a college degree. Nonetheless, I chose to sacrifice a higher income for a lower-paying job, but one that allowed me some time for homework within my work shift.

A recent statistic showed that only 10% of Chester High School students scored at or above the proficiency level for math. Hence, like many of you who come to DCCC from a challenging educational background, I was once in your shoes and understand – even if just a little – the academic struggles you might be going through now or may confront in your future studies, including math. DCCC estimates that about half of all new students are so-called first-generation, which means both parents did not acquire a four-year degree. In retrospect, I was also a first-generation student. Furthermore, education was not emphasized in our household. I tell others in jest that the only books kept in our home were phone books, which, in fact, was true.

In spite of that, my parents have their own story to tell, as well. My mother was illiterate, having been withdrawn from school at a young age by her father who was concerned about her safety in World War II. My parents got married after the war and immediately began to have children. My father worked as a cabinet maker. My mother stayed home to raise a large family. My parents lived a simple life and did the best they could in the upbringing of their last of eight children during financial and other hardships. They also took a huge risk to leave behind family, friends, and our home to migrate to a foreign land with little money, and without knowing any English, hoping to find a better life. For this reason, I will always cherish their love and support.

So now here you are, a student at DCCC with the goal of earning a degree, or perhaps a certificate. You may wonder if there are personal characteristics a student must possess – or develop – to be successful in math, and in college. I believe there are. Probably the most important one is motivation. How bad do you want your degree? Are you determined to make the sacrifices that college will demand of you, such as to block off time in your personal schedule to attend classes and dedicate hours of study, commit to be present at every class and on time, find a way to commute to campus each day of class, secure a dependable babysitter, and adjust your work schedule if needed?

Additional key personal attributes essential to perform well in college are self-discipline, complete the strenuous homework you will surely be assigned, being patient with yourself, not become upset when the coursework gets overwhelming, show resilience in the face of adversity, and persevere onward in spite of any temptation to give up. The college experience will, at times, feel like an overbearing grind. Are you willing to work through the hard times, persist to finish the college marathon, to ultimately actualize your degree?

If I was able to obtain a degree at DCCC – despite my scholastic deficiencies and barriers I encountered as a student – there is no doubt in my mind that you can do the same. As your instructor, my goal is to help you become an independent learner by using the resources I provide, such as video lessons, lecture notes, handouts, etc. If you get stuck, I am there to nudge you. So put your cell phone away, prepare to do what must be done to overcome your own obstacles, and reap your reward of walking on stage at the DCCC Commencement Ceremony. There is a proverb that states, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear. When the student is truly ready, the teacher will disappear.”

I am here, are you ready?

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