

Nicole Dipirro

Dr. Stein

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Finding Our Place: First Time College Students as a Discourse Community

Throughout high school, it felt as though my teachers made it a challenge amongst themselves to get as many students to sign up for college as possible, as if there was a prize for the one with the most sign-ups. But without knowing what I wanted to major in, it seemed like a waste of time and money. But what I didn't know, or fully understand, was what college actually is. It isn't about knowing everything about yourself, it's a major tool to assist you in finding yourself. It's about trial and error, trying new things, learning that you either love it or hate it. What I didn't know was nothing in college is permanent, I can change my major one hundred times until I find the career I want to do for the rest of my life. But it was intimidating to think I needed to know what I wanted to do right now, at just seventeen years old. So instead, I was hired at an insurance company and became an insurance broker for NYS right out of high school, but that wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I figured that out pretty quickly. After that, I worked at Burger King three different times. I've worked at Subway. I've worked at three different Tops locations. I've worked as a housekeeper at a few different hotels; the list seems to go on and on. But what I have never done, was find where I belong, where my heart told me, "You're where you're meant to be." It took me fifteen years and multiple dead-end jobs to realize there is more to working than just having a job. Finding where you belong, where you fit in, doing something you love to do, is why building a career for yourself is so important. Those

entering college have made the decision to better their future selves; to learn, to graduate with hopes of finding a career in their field of study. My professors at Jamestown Community College will provide me with the knowledge I need to succeed, my fellow students share my values, goals and strive to become their best, which makes me a solid member of this community.

Following my admissions to the college community, I had to learn new words and sayings. Jamestown Community College, also known to many as JCC, has a motto, “Come as you are, leave as you want to be.” As the student body, we are called Jayhawks. A Jayhawk is simply a former or current student at JCC, because once you are a Jayhawk, you’ll always be a Jayhawk! Our college has a website for all students and employees, it is called MyJCC. I learned how to navigate the website within the first week of school. It is a great tool for students and professors to communicate; we are issued a student e-mail, students and professors can make contact directly, making it easier to ask questions and get the answers before the next class. Another term I learned on the website was “Brightspace.” Brightspace makes it difficult to miss an assignment, or its due date; it lists each course syllabus. A syllabus is just a plan for the class, it shows what we are doing today, tomorrow, what each assignment is and when they are due. Another term I learned was “Starfish,” which most people think of a sea creature. However, in my community, Starfish is another link in MyJCC, it has a clear calendar set up, making it easy to understand your schedule, view class times, room numbers, instructors' names, etc. There is a nice feature in Starfish, it is a “raise your hand” button at the top right of the page, where your instructor will see you have a question, and they will reach out to you!

Being a part of the college discourse community, our attempts at balancing family responsibilities, work, and schooling while trying to stay motivated is extremely overwhelming,

and at times, discouraging. As a mom of three little girls, they are my motivation, but the sacrifices are heavy—the family dinners I miss, all the stories my girls tell, that I only get to hear second hand is heart wrenching. So then doubt comes creeping in: *What if I fail? What if this is all for nothing? Do my girls know I'm doing this for us, to better our lives?* The feeling of guilt sinks in; I should have done this sooner; I shouldn't have waited fifteen years. But as the saying goes, better late than never! The values my fellow students and I share, being to class on time, participating and getting good GPAs are so important to us. And through all of the struggles, all of the guilt, I have never been as proud of myself as I am now. I am doing the college thing, I am facing my fears, learning new skills, mastering a new craft and hoping to be irreplaceable to a company with my welding skills, someday.

I have never welded before the first day of class, and let me tell you, it was intimidating! But even with it being intimidating, my professors make it very easy to learn, as I do my best with hands on learning. My professor dropped his welding helmet over his face, yelled “eyes” as a warning to drop mine, and began showing me how to weld. He then handed it over to me and said, “your turn!” Now for me, there is no easier way to learn than that! But there is so much more to it than just welding, or fusing metal together. I must learn the machine, the proper amperage, the type of current required for each welding process, which gas to use. For example, stick welding or shielded metal arc welding doesn't use gas at all, but MIG uses Argon and CO2 and TIG uses 100% Argon as a shielding gas. What kind of metal I am welding and what kind of material I am using to weld matters as well. There is so much I must learn, but I have faith my professors will get me there and I'll be a professional in no time!

College students are a true discourse community. Every one of us shares the same values, similar goals and strives to become the best version of ourselves. By joining this

community, I have become more resilient, more focused, and more determined than I've ever been. Through the hardships and stress, we wake up with optimism every morning, hopeful for our futures. When your high school teachers try to push college on you, please understand that it's not about them, it's about 'future you!' So, instead of spending fifteen years jumping from job to job, thinking you'll never be somebody, think again. College is a great tool to get you to where you want to be, where you're meant to be, no matter how long it takes.