



“I Didn’t Know...”

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I didn’t know the odds were stacked against me...

I didn’t know there were tracks in school...vocational school, military, or college. Sure, those were the options after graduation but it never occurred to me that students were actually placed on those tracks.

I didn’t notice how much I stood out within my graduating class: 5 Latinos, 1 African American and about 150 Caucasians...It seems obvious, right?!

But because that was the way I grew up, it was never odd to me or my friends.

Sure, it was easy to see in my sports team pictures that I was the only “brown” one. It did become more apparent when I started playing tennis in high school. I did see other “brown” kids but they were not like me, they were of Indian decent...not native if you are wondering.

As a public high school, we did not have many tennis teams in our conference, so we had to play larger schools, outside of our conference. So we played against several private schools and schools in bigger cities than ours, which, as teenagers, we would joke we played the “rich kids.” But even then I didn’t realize the true magnitude of our joke.

My ignorance was bliss because I didn’t see the judgment.

I was fortunate enough to have an amazing support system and great teachers throughout my years in grade school and high school.

But even my support systems didn’t tell me everything.

I didn’t know I should have felt like a fish out of water, as a first-generation college student.

I didn’t know it could have been hard for me to find a niche at a school of 60,000+.

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I didn’t know how hard college would be...I learned that one pretty quick. After a few days of classes, I felt sort of prepared, but I didn’t have the study skills.

Maybe my teachers didn’t tell me because they didn’t think those things would happen, or they didn’t want to discourage me.

My university was not too big, I got involved and that made a huge campus feel small.

I didn’t feel like a fish out of water or lost...because I was in my home state and only two hours away from my hometown, but I would feel homesick sometimes.

I did have friends who felt lost sometimes on campus, some were thousands of miles away from home. But over time, we made our university our second home.

I did reach out for help; some of that was required by scholarships and some was self-driven, but it never occurred to me that I was doing something out of the norm. I just wanted to make sure I would reach my goal of a college degree.

I didn’t know that I floated across many stereotypes, until I got to know people who were similar yet different than me. I was born and raised in Ohio so I was able to see “the world” from a different perspective than my friends who were from other states.

I was blessed to find my niche in college and with that support system and numerous advisors and mentors I finished my bachelor’s degree in four years...as “I planned.”

I am glad I didn’t know these things. It seems it’s not the lack of knowledge that affects students the most; it seems to be the preconceived notions from others that are the most damaging. Maybe if I had known and believed that the odds were stacked against me, I would not be standing in front of you today.

About the Author

Mrs. Amanda M. Sánchez is a graduate student in the School of Education at CSU Channel Islands. She received her bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University in International Studies with an emphasis on Latin America. She is the mom of a two year old, and works as the Administrative Support Coordinator for the Dean of Arts and Sciences and the Program Analyst for the History and Chicano/a Studies departments at CSU Channel Islands.