

Perseverance

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Abstract: In this narrative, Wendy Coronel reflects on the challenges she has faced as a first-generation college student alongside her mother's determination and devotion to create a better life for her family. Reflecting on her experiences in this writers' workshop, Coronel writes: "It is difficult at times to continue writing about our stories. Throughout these workshops, we all learned how to inspire each other and help each other out when it came to writing. We shared our own narratives and assisted others by reading their stories. In doing so, we brought each other closer. When the workshop began, we were all pretty much lost as to how we were going to write an essay that showed who we are. We learned about the price of college along with writing tips on coherence, clarity, and the importance of re-reading your essay from the bottom to the top. These techniques helped us all to understand how to write effectively, and through the art of writing we learned the importance of sharing our first-gen stories."

"Dale, mija, no pares," or "keep going, daughter, don't stop!" were words that my mother screamed to encourage me to continue pushing to the other side. I never thought I would make it, but the way she held hope in her eyes made me run harder. I knew that it wouldn't be easy, but I had to continue. I never thought that I would need her advice when I was struggling through college.

From personal experience, my first failure at college was something that deeply affected me because I felt like I didn't belong. I met real anxiety during my first year and I had completely lost my positive attitude. I thought I would not be able to get back up, but there she was. My mom, the one that always believed in me and made me lose all doubt that I wouldn't make it to college.

Fear is one of the many things that I experienced when registering for classes as I might fail in choosing the appropriate classes for my major. Sometimes I even fear that I might not be doing my homework correctly because I understand Spanish more than English. My mom helped me realize that nothing is easy, but we have to persevere.

One thing that no one told me about the experience of college is the struggle that some students have with their mental health. Students are not warned about the struggles that they might have such as anxiety and depression, which might lead to worse outcomes. Although some people may not know it, the pressure to do well at school has come to the extreme that many students lack the energy to perform simple things, like taking a walk around their favorite park or simply using their laptop for fun. The lives of students now revolve around using their electronic devices for school. They concentrate so hard on their academic goals that they forget the importance of a healthy mind.

Many first-generation students arrive at their school campus without any type of academic guidance. Sadly, that means that they go through school making continuous mistakes that no one tells them to avoid, but they feel pressure to continue with their education, as it is the only way to find success in life. Students can feel discouraged by their very first mistake as well as the ones coming their way. I felt extremely upset at myself and frustrated at my first errors in college. I thought that I was not a student who was fit to earn a higher education.

The pressure of being academically perfect is hard on young teenagers evolving into adults. I learned that anxiety can affect both a student's academic and practical life as well. My

first instinct was to panic. I was afraid of what effect a small mistake could create. I worried that I would not be able to catch up with my classmates, but soon those worries and that panic turned into anxiety. I began biting my nails, fear started consuming me when I was required to open my emails, and I always lived with the constant worry of receiving an email from school staff stating that I was about to be kicked out of the university due to failure. I would cry if I were to fail my tests and I would not be able to sleep or I would wake up randomly in the middle of the night from all the worries that were stored in the back of my head, but I knew I had to keep trying.

Persevere, I thought to myself, as it was the only way to get out of these thoughts. “You have to keep going,” I told myself repeatedly in the mirror. It was no joke that college was hard, but it is the only way to reach success. I found many ways to help myself through therapy and meditation. I had to keep studying, but the only way was by putting my well-being above anything.

I relieved my anxiety by remembering how far I have gotten. At the end of the day, no one has their life as perfect as it may seem; appearances can fool someone who is just looking in from the outside. No one, including influencers, celebrities, or billionaires, has a perfect life because there is always a risk that at any moment they could lose it all. Having a healthy mental and physical life can help everyone make and enjoy incredible experiences, and even bad news can be a positive thing for a person as there is always room for improvement. Persevere through the worst to enjoy the great feeling of reaching the finish line that one has always awaited.

Still, reaching that finish line can feel almost impossible for some students. They lack self-confidence in themselves and doubt themselves, experiencing imposter syndrome. They do not realize that they have the potential to reach higher achievements and go beyond their perceived limits. Sometimes it feels like there is no way of reaching the end goal.

When I was running to the other side, I felt like my legs were going to give up on me. I felt like fainting, and even returning back to where I came from. I didn’t realize that my little 6-year-old self was going to cross that finish line and reach the awaited destination for a better future: America. My mother kept yelling at me, encouraging me to go faster. I was sweating and tired, hoping and praying that she would just give up, although that didn’t seem likely. She carried me at times, and I knew that I could count on her whenever I felt like giving up. I knew that she would always carry me on her back when I got tired, physically, emotionally, and mentally, and when my hope was draining faster than ever. I knew that she was the person who perseveres through the most difficult challenges, even if she knows that her chances of making it are low. She perseveres through the worst type of climate and through the most difficult of times, never looking back.

I was in awe of my mother as she kept demonstrating her strength. I knew that she had fear and was tired, maybe even more than I was, but that didn’t matter to her. What mattered to her was crossing that finish line. I learned an important lesson that day: it does not matter how challenging or impossible a goal may seem as long as I try with every ounce of strength I carry inside of me because, in the end, no one else but you has the power to choose your own destiny.

I use that story as inspiration to persevere in this new experience as a college student. There will always be internet issues, Canvas malfunctions, and discouraging classmates or teachers. A student might lack inspiration and might want to give up, but one needs to keep going. Sometimes I wondered, “Why aren’t things easy?” Sometimes it is a test for students to take for themselves, checking how much they are willing to persevere to reach the finish line. Some students go faster toward the finish line and others take a bit longer, but those who persevere to the end always make it to the other side, for a better future.