



Pathways to Success: Texas Community College Essay Contest

In recognition of House Bill 8 – which invested nearly \$700 million additional dollars into Texas community colleges – the Texas Association of Community Colleges and the [Commit Partnership](#) proudly announce an **inspiring essay contest to help spotlight and celebrate Texas community college students**. Specifically, the contest aims to showcase how Texas community colleges help prepare students for well-paying, in-demand jobs.

This essay contest not only provides an avenue for students to share their unique stories but also serves as an acknowledgment of the transformative power of community colleges in shaping promising careers. We encourage all eligible students to participate and look forward to celebrating the academic and career journeys that make community colleges the cornerstone of success!

Essay Prompt

Participants are encouraged to provide a detailed account of their personal backgrounds, their educational journey, why they chose to attend community college, and ultimately share how their experience at a community college is shaping their journey toward a fulfilling and financially rewarding career.

Please provide specifics regarding what programs, initiatives, or supports your community college has provided to help you succeed. (For example: your chosen degree and/or certification pathway, any dual credit coursework you have taken or are taking, any industry apprenticeships/internships/other workforce opportunities accessed through your community college).

Participants can choose any of following prompts:

How is your community college experience preparing you... [options:]

- *For a meaningful and well-paying career?*
- *To thrive in the Texas economy?*
- *To thrive in the 21st century workforce?*
- *To achieve a meaningful career with which you can support yourself and your family?*

How did community colleges... [options:]

- *Transform your career pathway?*
- *Transform the trajectory of your career and future?*
- *Expand the possibilities for your future?*
- *Change how you thought and felt about your future?*



TACC Student Essay Competition – Winning Essays

The table below contains hyperlinks to the winning student essays from the recent essay competition. Each link will take you directly to the respective essay, where you can read the full text including names and colleges.

Student Essay	College	Ranking
Yen Le	Wharton County Junior College	1st - \$3,500
Avwersuoghene Etaghene	Houston Community College	2nd - \$3,000
Sarah Morin	South Texas College	3rd - \$2,500
Brandon Payne	Navarro College	4th - \$2,000
Hailey Leichtnam	Austin Community College	5th - \$1,500
Anatupenda Daphrose	Dallas College	6th - \$1,000
Kathryn Minotti	Wharton County Junior College	7th - \$750
Amy Maddux	McLennan Community College	8th - \$500
Ana Toro	San Jacinto College	9th - \$400
Nelsie Nash	Blinn College	10th - \$300
Aws Alezzi	San Jacinto College	Honorable Mention
Kelly Bridges	Panola College	Honorable Mention
James Colunga	Austin Community College	Honorable Mention
Martha Chavez	Panola College	Honorable Mention
Isabella Rose	Collin College	Honorable Mention

Yen Le
TACC's Essay Contest
03/19/2024

My grandmother's room was always fragrant with the subtle scent of Tiger balm, her favorite. She emanated warmth and served as a guiding light during my formative years, sharing stories of her youth, teaching me the importance of kindness, and instilling an unshakable belief in humanity's inherent goodness. Though aged with time, her hands were always extended in love and support. Her passing wasn't just the loss of a cherished family member; it represented the dissipation of my childhood's comforting radiance.

The illness took hold quickly and mercilessly, a sharp contrast to the whole and lively existence she had led. As her final months approached, our roles began to shift. I found myself offering words of solace and holding her hand while being awestruck by her strength and perseverance. Amidst the sterile environment of hospitals and hushed conversations with nurses, I recall the aroma of a Vietnamese delicacy called "bun bo hue" - a dish she craved, even if it was only a tiny morsel - which left an indelible imprint on my heart.

The nurses who cared for my grandmother did more than administer medication; they brought light into the darkest days of our lives. They treated her with dignity, shared in our laughter and tears, and stood by us when the inevitable arrived. In their compassionate care, I found a beacon of hope. The realization didn't come all at once but rather as a growing conviction in the weeks that followed her passing. I understood that my path was to emulate the care and compassion bestowed upon my family.

My nursing journey wasn't just a career choice; nursing meant embracing a life dedicated to the service of others, standing in the gap during someone else's darkest hours, just as those nurses had stood in mine. It's a path that demands resilience, compassion, and a deep-seated desire to make a difference. These are lessons that my grandmother instilled in me, not just through her illness but throughout my life.

As I advance in my nursing career, I carry her memory. It is a constant reminder of her kindness's impact, vulnerability's strength, and care's power. My grandmother may not have set out to inspire this journey, but her influence has shaped every step of it. In every patient I see, I am reminded of the reason behind my choice - to extend the same warmth, care, and dignity my grandmother once showed me.

Having grown up in a community with limited access to healthcare, I have personally witnessed the profound impact that healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, can have on people's lives. This ignited a passion within me to pursue a career in nursing - a path that I knew would be both challenging and incredibly fulfilling. However, there were financial and logistical obstacles along the way. This is where my choice to attend community college became a crucial first step in my journey.

Several essential considerations led me to select a community college as the starting point for my nursing education. The cost-effectiveness of these institutions compared to four-year universities was a major factor, as it allowed me to embark on my educational journey without the added stress of substantial student debt. Additionally, the availability of flexible scheduling options was critical in enabling me to work part-time while pursuing my studies and supporting myself financially.

I had the good fortune of attending a community college that offered an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program, which proved to be an ideal starting point for my career in nursing. The program was thoughtfully crafted to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to pass the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and excel in the nursing profession. The curriculum was diverse, encompassing everything from the fundamentals of patient care to more advanced clinical skills, providing a well-rounded foundation in nursing.

In addition, the community college had forged valuable partnerships with nearby healthcare facilities, presenting a wealth of prospects for industry internships and apprenticeships. These immersive experiences provided invaluable hands-on knowledge in the healthcare field, augmenting my education and equipping me with the skills necessary to become a proficient nursing professional. These internships not only allowed me to put my theoretical knowledge into practice but also enabled me to cultivate a network of professional connections within the healthcare sector.

The community college's support services were invaluable to my success. The academic advisors provided crucial guidance in selecting courses and planning my career, ensuring that I remained on track toward achieving my goals. Additionally, the tutoring services were particularly beneficial in helping me tackle challenging coursework and maintain an impressive academic record.

The time I spent at community college has been nothing short of transformative, paving the way for a fulfilling and financially rewarding career in nursing. I attribute this success to the trifecta of affordable education, valuable hands-on experience, and unwavering support services that have equipped me with a solid foundation in nursing. In losing her, I found my purpose. Nursing is more than a profession; it's a calling to touch lives with the same tenderness and strength that she touched mine. It's a promise made to her memory to spread the light she kindled in me, one patient at a time.

Kathryn Minotti
Wharton County Junior College
Pathways to Success Essay Contest
April 1, 2024

How did community colleges change how you thought and felt about your future?

The eyeball lay on the table, staring intensely into the depths of my soul. I stared uneasily back at it. After a couple moments, the giant cow eyeball's gaze was too much for me, and I averted my eyes. I couldn't do it. It was too...gross. From the front of the classroom, my seventh-grade teacher looked disapprovingly at me. I was supposed to be doing the dissection but was too squeamish to even lift the scalpel. Ten minutes later, the teacher had come to my table, opened up the cow eye and was urging me to look over at the parts, as I stared with great interest at the floor tiles. In humiliation and disgust, I vowed to myself, *If there is one career I'll never do, it would be a medical career.* **However, little did I know how community college would significantly change the way I thought and felt about my future, by developing my interest in the medical field and establishing my confidence in my intended degree and future career.**

"Hey Kathryn, have you considered becoming a nurse?" I sat there in a moment's surprise. I was four years older, now in my junior year, but only slightly less squeamish since the cow eye incident. I was on the phone with my cousin, who is a nurse, and the conversation had moved to the topic of my plans for the future. "Well..." I replied slowly. "No, not really. I hadn't thought of nursing. I did do pretty well in high school biology though. And it was sort of interesting... except the dissections." With neither of my parents in the medical field, the concept was foreign to me. I was unsure that I would have enough interest to take on this profession and that this degree was where my skills were pointing. But, running out of dream jobs, I added nursing to the list of possible majors. After some research, I decided to give nursing a trial run by taking an anatomy and physiology class at my local community college. Since the class was affordable and accessible, I

reasoned, I could easily try out part of this degree at a low cost to determine if nursing was a viable fit.

Months later, I opened the door of the college, stepping into the vast lobby. *Right. I'm here. Now to go to the Anatomy and Physiology lab.* I eventually found the classroom and sat down as the professor was handing out the syllabus. My eyes scanned the page, then stopped on "Dissection: Cow Eye and Sheep Brain." *Well, I guess I couldn't run from the cow eyeball for very long.* Still, this situation was to be expected. Dissections are part of a biology-based subject. It was time for me to face my fears, cow eyeballs included.

Several weeks passed. We hadn't gotten to the dissections yet, and I found myself enjoying the class—far more than I expected. I was amazed by how intricately the human body was organized as a harmony of parts and systems, all working in sync to keep the body functioning. Every class, I understood more deeply how so many critical systems constantly work, imperceptible to us in our day-to-day lives. One October day, my professor animatedly explained the movement of skeletal muscles. He explained that on a micro-level, tiny filaments called myosin reach out and attach to the actin strand, contracting the muscle. So, in grabbing a ball in our hands, we have microscopic, little "hands" grabbing another muscle filament to contract the entire muscle. *And all this happens without our realizing it,* I mused. *The body's systems are simply incredible.* **This community college class showed me fascinating concepts I had never encountered before and filled my mind with excitement about the future I could have with a nursing degree.** I began to picture myself as a nurse someday, securing a comfortable income for myself, and deeply caring for others, all while immersing myself in the study of such interesting topics.

The day of the dissection finally arrived. Instead of dreading it, I was cautiously excited. I still hadn't forgotten how I had been immobilized at the sight of the cow eye in seventh grade, but I hoped that I had progressed beyond that fear. The lab started with the dissection of the sheep's brain. It was squishy and smelled of

formaldehyde...but it was cool. Unfortunately, because of our schedule, we were not able to get to the cow's eye. Although I had escaped the cow eyeball, I found myself somewhat disappointed. I really enjoyed the lecture unit that covered the function of the eye and was hoping to get a second shot at the dissection. However, the lab experience I did have helped me find that squeamishness was no longer a barrier to me becoming a nurse.

With the potential obstacle of squeamishness overcome and sparked enthusiasm for the workings of the human body, I also needed to confirm that I have what it takes to master the material. At the end of the semester, I opened up the college learning platform and saw that my final grade had been posted: *Anatomy and Physiology I* - A. **I leaned back in my chair, relieved, my mind full of new possibilities. I had potential; I could succeed in nursing.** I had successfully completed one of the harder nursing classes and proved my worth. I had a skill that I could one day use to help others in a deep and meaningful way.

The deadlines for college applications had come, and I was at my laptop, inputting my details for the college. I toggled the major "Nursing," then paused a moment. *Nursing*. I smiled to myself. If only my squeamish, uncertain seventh-grade self could see me now, so sure of my career path, and so excited about joining the world of nursing. This is what I wanted, and I could not imagine my future any differently. **Nursing was my calling, and the community college class helped me to take the first step.**