

I would like to share with you a very special story about my personal experience with NEWFDA's Food Industry's Learning Center. I was blessed to have the opportunity to participate in this wonderful program and would hope that many of you will take advantage of this key benefit. Here is my story.

I, like many other eighteen year olds thought that I had my whole life neatly mapped out in front of me. I was a good student going into college with 5 scholarships and the goal to become a child psychologist. It was in the fall of my sophomore year of college that I learned my first adult lesson; life doesn't always happen how you intend for it to. It was during that semester that circumstances dictated that I needed to drop out of school, get a job, and take care of my then 9-year-old brother and ill Grandmother. At that moment, I knew that at 19 years old I had to take a path that was scary and full of uncertainty. I knew that I would have to learn fast how to be an adult, a parent, a caretaker and an employee. Failure was not an option; people were counting on me.

For about 6 years that followed, I went to college on and off when my work and life schedule permitted. It was so hard working full time, going to class, the pressures of homework, and my personal responsibilities at home. I thought that I was never going to finish. Finally, in 2008 my prayers were answered. I became employed by PepsiCo's QTG. Mike Tobia, told me about this online Program that I could take advantage of through the NEWFDA's Food Industry Learning Center, at a discounted rate no less! I was able to enroll in a BBA program at Western New England College that I could finish my degree in two years. Wow, I thought to myself, maybe I can do this!

After I got the information from Mike, I called NEWFDA. They were able to guide me through the entire enrollment process! They got me in touch with the people over at the college to get the admissions process started, and even the often-painful financial aid and registration processes were a breeze. NEWFDA as well as the University knew what my aspirations were and helped me to reach my goal in May 2010.

This is not to say that getting to graduation day was easy by any means. I started classes in Fall of 2008 and by April of 2009, my husband and I found out that we were expecting our first child. I managed to work full time and study up until 10 days before I was due to give birth. I would regularly plead my unborn son, Logan, not to come early and stick to his Christmas due date. Logan happily obliged and he was born on December 28. Just twenty-two days after he was born I started my final semester doing homework and burying myself in textbooks between feedings, sleepless nights and in the final months working full-time.

In the end, it was all worth it. On Saturday, May 22, 2010, I graduated with honors from Western New England College with my Bachelors in Business Administration and a Minor in Psychology. I could not have realized my dream of being a college graduate without NEWFDA's program, Western New England College, the love and support from my husband Rob and brother Brett. For that, I am eternally grateful. Getting my degree through The Food Industry Learning Center will help open many doors for me at PepsiCo. I am hoping that others will embrace this program and it will help to open doors for many other people for years to come. Thank you NEWFDA.

