

Esmeralda Ramirez

Esmeralda Ramirez: an amazing success story still in the making. Her journey literally began even before she was born. Esmeralda's mother already had small children and was married to an extremely abusive man when she made a hard decision about her unborn child. She would get to the United States where this new baby could be born. Finally, on her fourth try, she made it to San Antonio. There, she found help from some compassionate people who helped her and managed to get a job taking care of dogs. (She now jokes about Esmeralda's inexplicable love for dogs!) With the infant Esmeralda, she decided to go back to Mexico, not wanting her other children to think she had abandoned them.



It was there in Mexico that Esmeralda would grow up. Her mother was very strict, teaching her children to be good people, to be responsible. When Esmeralda began English classes, her mother demanded that she pay attention to everything the teachers said; and Esmeralda did. Try as she might to be “a good girl”, she endured continuous bullying at school. Her mother was limited in what she could do about such sad days but encouraged her little daughter, as best as she could, saying it wouldn't go on forever, that it would be temporary, that someday she would be respected. “Respect deserves respect”, she often told her. School remained difficult, not just because of the bullying. Being born in the United States became a mixed blessing. The principal of the school had issues with her documentation, at that point only a migration document that had expired. Her having only two names, Esmeralda Ramirez, was also a problem. He said she could not have a certificate from the high school. Once again, “Mama” did what she could. Intervening for her daughter, she convinced the principal to let her finish. Her next step was college, but it was short-lived. Her parents could not afford it, so Esmeralda stopped and looked for a job. Again, without required Mexican documents, she couldn't get the necessary ID to enable her to work. For two months, she had to stay home, doing nothing, feeling useless.

One day, her uncle called and suggested that she come to the United States and live with his family. She made the huge decision, and her world began to change. Legal documentation was established, and doors started opening. She began ELA classes through Surry Community College and got a job at McDonald's. After studying the DMV handbook, she passed both tests in the same day; she began to feel some pride in herself. She had saved enough money to buy a 1996 Toyota Camry for \$1,200, which she says was money very well-spent. Suddenly, she was able to go and come as she needed, whether to SCC or McDonald's. She was becoming self-reliant, self-respecting. In her ELA English classes, she excelled, often being a “teacher” to her classmates when needed. In her job, she was respected for her work ethic, her responsibility; promotions came. Even with other job opportunities being mentioned, she wanted to complete a year at McDonald's; it was a personal goal to finish a full year well-done, and that she did. From there, she was hired by Chick-Fil-A, where she is thrilled to be surrounded by such good people who are so supportive, encouraging and offering educational opportunities.

Even while she worked faithfully at McDonald's and progressed quickly in her ELA English classes at SCC, her instructors encouraged her to be thinking of her next steps, new challenges. She started working on her HSE and graduated in less than a year. Once she received her HSE at SCC, she was gaining courage to go even farther; however, she was still somewhat fearful that she wouldn't be able to understand course work for a professional certification. After much personal deliberation along with encouragement and help from SCC ELA faculty and staff, she began working on her degree in Medical Office Administration. The early days were a bit of a baptism of fire, learning the fine points of computers and on-line courses. There was

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understandable trepidation along with some tears, but they were wiped away as she gained confidence and success. It didn't take any instructor long to see the potential and heart of this young lady; therein, her educational support system broadens weekly.



Recently, a situation arose that perfectly typifies who Esmeralda is and is still becoming. After a day of classes at SCC, she got into her Camry to go home and get ready for her job at Chick-Fil-A. The almost 20 miles trip was cut short when her car broke down, still at least 3 miles from home. She parked it at a church and started walking. It just so happened that one of her teachers was driving by and thought she saw Esmeralda...walking! She turned around; and, sure enough, there she was. Pulling into a side street, she motioned for Esmeralda to come. Backpack on her petite, sweat-soaked body, Esmeralda climbed into the car, and off they drove to her home. Once there, she said she had to hurry and get a shower; she had to get to Chick-Filet for her shift. She assured her teacher that she could borrow her uncle's truck to get to work. Once more, case in point of her determination to be responsible, even under difficult circumstances.

While at SCC, Esmeralda has been afforded various “hands-up” opportunities in her on-going journey to success. Between faculty and staff, she has been guided toward different sources of help, whether financial or instructive. Facets of her instruction have been tailor-made for her, fulfilling course requirements while providing skill-specific tutoring experiences. Her chosen path of study is carefully coordinated between college and community business experiences; the academic and clinical aspects will work together hand-in-hand more and more as she advances toward graduation. With faculty guidance of her ELA instructors, she was able to attain a Pell Grant, which is crucial to her completion of her degree.



Those of us at SCC always look for the potential in every student; with Esmeralda, it was not hard to see. We have combined our resources and searched out various avenues in CCR that will enable Esmeralda to realize her goals, achieve those things she only dreamed about while still in Mexico and become an inspiration to all who know her, especially other adult learners. Indeed, her mother's words are being lived out: “Respect deserves respect.” Esmeralda embodies that principle: her own respect for learning, her respect for opportunities, her respect for others and the respect that will be continually reciprocated in her life's journey.



College and Career Readiness Student Success Story:

Esmeralda Ramirez

Esmeralda's Instructors: Rosa Torres, ELA Coordinator / Instructor, Anna Callaway, ELA Instructor, Hernan Torres, HSE / Computer Instructor

Comment about Esmeralda written by her Curriculum Math Instructor: Mrs. Torres:

I wanted to take a moment and tell you about one of your students- Esmeralda Ramirez. This past semester, I enjoyed having Ms. Ramirez in my MAT 110 class. She was a tremendous benefit to the entire class. This young lady demonstrated a desire to learn and willingness to achieve that actually inspired her classmates to raise their own academic efforts. It is true!!

Esmeralda Ramirez consistently raised the level on her submissions. Not only did she demonstrate accuracy and clarity with her calculations, but she presented her work in a *professional academic fashion* that I rarely see in my classes. In the first few weeks of this past semester, I offered a lab that requires students to summarize their work in a portfolio -style presentation. Ms. Ramirez's work was of a such a high level of quality (*demonstrating depth, clarity and accuracy*) that I plan to use it as an example in my future classes.

Regards,

Mike Faulkner

Math Instructor

Surry Community College