

Candice Coulter speech for Board of Regents meeting – April 2015

Good morning everyone. My name is Candice Coulter.

When I was a child, I loved reading and learning. I would raid my aunt's library for her books, and I was always full of medical facts, so my family called me "little doctor."

But as I grew older, I stopped caring about education, for many reasons. Watching my parents struggle to make ends meet weighed heavy on me. Two of my uncles were murdered on my street. And we moved around a lot, staying with different families and friends when we could not afford a place of our own. I attended seven elementaries, three middle schools and three high schools. With so much instability, it was no wonder that I began acting out, slacking out in my school work and not going to class – I even considered dropping out.

Then one day in my school's office, I saw my mom cry because I was told that I would not graduate on time. I decided to make it my purpose to graduate and to go to college so I could see my mother smile ... She worked so hard, and went without food and sleep, so I could have opportunities that she could not. From then on, I made As and Bs, took extra classes and even did work study. I graduated on time ... and my mother smiled.

After graduation I was headed back to Detroit, but my mom had heard of this new college. We came to GGC for a tour, and then I fell in love with its vision and potential, and I wanted to be a part of that.

Of course, my GPA was not the best from high school, but to my surprise, GGC gave me a chance.

Even though things went well my first semester; I had a 3.7 GPA, I still felt out of place. I had planned to drop out. Then one day after English class, my professor asked me could she have a word with me. I thought, "Oh goodness, what did I do wrong?" But the words she shared with me touched my soul. She looked me into my eyes and she said, "Candice, this is for you! College was made for people like you who crave knowledge."

I had never had a teacher or anyone acknowledge, you know, in the academia, acknowledge my academic efforts and encourage me so much. She would be the first of many here at GGC. But I had still planned to leave her class and never return. I heard her words play over and over in my head as I walked from A Building to the Residence Halls. Once I reached the Library, I broke into tears and changed the course of my thinking. I was going to be the first member of my family to go to college and I was going to graduate.

And from that point on, my life changed. I sought every opportunity to make the most of my college experience. I built leadership skills serving in the Student Government Association as treasurer and senator representing the School of Science and Technology. I supported myself as a resident assistant, a work-study student in the Office of Public Affairs. I participated in many campus activities and to my amazement, of someone with such a background could have such an opportunity... I studied tropical biology in Costa Rica and service learning in Ecuador.

I would not be the person I am today if not for my GGC family and the experience I have gained here. My professors care as if it were their degree I was working towards. The staff and administrators are my cheerleaders. The student body, my fellow Grizzlies, they are the hardest working students in the South and they continue to inspire me and to continuously grow. And I have.

While at GGC, a sense of self-motivation emerged within me. I was no longer just doing this to see my mother smile, although that's still top of my list. I began doing this for me – as well as my entire family. I now have six younger family members attending Georgia Gwinnett College because they were inspired at how I have evolved in my experience here, and they want that as well.

After graduating this May, I plan to serve in the Peace Corps and obtain a graduate degree and can pursue a career in medical research.

Leaving here will be so bitter-sweet. I love this place; this is the longest I have stayed somewhere in my entire life. GGC is home.

At one point in life, I had everything figured out. But now, instead of ending up at a dead-end job, the possibilities are endless and I want to do them all!

To the baby who almost died of pneumonia in a homeless shelter, to the woman who is living an abundant life and traveling across nations, the ceiling has been lifted off my dreams. Because of Georgia Gwinnett College, there is no limit to me!

Thank you and God bless.