

Mary Ann M. DeMario – Remarks to MCC BOT 10/28/2020

Thank you Pres. Douglas, Chair Lovenheim, Trustees, and colleagues for allowing me this time to speak with you today. My name is Dr. Mary Ann DeMario & I've worked in the Institutional Research Office at MCC for close to 15 years. Over the past few years, I've been able to focus my research on an important group of students, Student-Parents, who make up 18-31% of MCC's student body each year. Now John Delate, Associate VP of Student Services, is known for saying "always start with a story," so that's what I'm going to do.

I'm going to tell you a brief story about a woman named Samantha. (That's not her real name.) Samantha was a wife, & a mother. She had a GED, & a job, but not a career. One day she told her husband that she wanted to go to college, get a degree, & have a career.

He left her.

Unwavering in her resolve, Samantha enrolled at MCC & earned a place in one of our most competitive programs. She lived below the poverty line, as 93% of MCC's single moms do. But she went to class, took care of her kids, & worked part-time off-campus. In order to make it to the various clinical settings she needed to go to as part of her academic program, Samantha took out a loan to pay a babysitter to come to her home a few days a week at 4:30 am. It was the only way she could make it to her clinical sites on time & still make sure that her oldest child made it to school. Samantha once told me, (quote) "I really don't have much of a social life. All I do is school & work & come home & do housework & stuff for the kids. I mean that's it" (unquote).

Fast forward to May 2020. Amid a global pandemic, MCC's shift to remote classes, & parenting 3 kids under age 10, one of whom she now had to home-school, Samantha graduated from MCC with a B+ average. When asked what the best thing about MCC had been, she stated, "MCC made me!!! I grew so much. I really thank MCC for my professional identity."

By coming here, to MCC, Samantha not only improved her life, but the lives of her 3 kids. Samantha's drive & hard work are typical of Student-Parents. But unfortunately her success is atypical.

"Student-Parents," college students who are parents, are hardworking, dedicated people who are here not because someone told them to be, but because they want to make a better life for themselves & their families. They spend more time on their schoolwork than our students who aren't parents & earn higher grades their first semester here than Non-Parents, but they have a lower chance of ever graduating from MCC because they're pulled in so many different directions.

Before COVID, Student-Parents were at a high risk of dropping out because of financial poverty, time poverty, and a host of other vulnerabilities. In COVID, however, their risk has escalated.

As a colleague & friend of mine at the Institute for Women's Policy Research recently said:

“The coronavirus has compounded the financial and time-management challenges facing parenting students, making an already steep climb to graduation even steeper. Along with a sometimes difficult transition to remote learning — for themselves and their children — student parents are coping with the loss of income and child care that made attending college possible for many. Student parents sit at the intersection of so many vulnerabilities. All the things that make it difficult for parents to study in normal times are even sharper now.”

I'm confident that MCC can help our Student-Parents and their families through the pandemic & beyond. But we have to keep them on our radar which I feel like we haven't done as we've gotten deeper into the pandemic. The loss in August of so many of the great people who made MCC what it is, particularly in Student Services, concerns me. There are things we can do that cross MCC Divisions & offices, but we have to act soon. The future of multiple generations rests in our hands. It would be a dereliction of duty to allow our Student-Parents to fall between the cracks now, when they & their kids need us the most.