



Marcus Powell: Former High School Dropout

Marcus Powell has endured. Once a three-time dropout, he is now a Dean's list student and college ambassador at Craven Community College.

He first dropped out as a freshman at New Bern High School. "I liked to learn and going to school, but I just didn't have any concept of the value of education. I was doing everything I shouldn't be doing at that age, and I really did not understand that those decisions could affect my life."

Wanting to make money, Marcus began working as a bag boy at the local Winn-Dixie and enrolled in the Basic Skills program at Craven Community College to obtain his GED. "That would have worked out," he says, "but transportation became the issue—riding a bike, having to catch rides—in high school, I could ride the bus."

Eventually, he went back to New Bern High School as an 18-year-old freshman, but when an injury significantly limited his mobility, it zapped his motivation again, and he dropped out of the education scene for a third time. Eventually,

he ended up at the neighborhood Community Resource Center located in a house once occupied by a local drug dealer, where the services provided include occasional community college classes. There, a counselor talked to him about the Job Corps, a message he was receptive to since his mother was a Job Corps graduate. Within a week, he was on a plane to Washington, D.C. to a Job Corps program. "It was the best experience I could ever have," he says. "I would not trade it for anything in the world. It really opened my eyes."

He returned to New Bern with a GED and an accounting diploma, but found himself in a public housing apartment and working as many as three jobs at one time. After a period of time, he met the sister of his girlfriend who was a graduate of Lenoir Community College, and he marveled at the success she seemed to have found in life. After talking about it, both he and his girlfriend enrolled at Craven Community College.

The developmental courses were his lifeline, and he particularly appreciated the learning communities that prompted a unique engagement with his studies. Learning communities encourage students to approach learning from a "shared rather than isolated" experience. Students enroll together as a group in several courses threaded by a common theme. Instructors function as a team and ensure that the content in one course is related to the content in another and help students make connections throughout. Students in a learning community collaborate in small groups or teams to solve problems, study, or develop class projects.

"I missed a lot in high school," Marcus says. "I had to make up for things and catch up to where I needed to be."

With the taste of academic success now under his belt, Marcus envisions transferring to a university in the University of North Carolina system. "Looking forward is so much different for me now," he says. "I am now on a positive track. I can see myself on Wall Street one day, or maybe a lawyer, but I definitely see myself as very educated and helping others. I see myself making an impact on this country and the world. It is becoming more and more true every day, and last year I made the Dean's List. I am very blessed, grateful, and thankful."