9-29-2017

Alumni Unscripted: The WMU Opportunity

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Western Michigan University took a chance on me.

I started off high school with some bad grades. I was basically failing all my classes. Towards the end of my sophomore year, my family and friends really started to pressure me about my poor grades and lack of motivation in school. I can clearly remember the night when I finally realized that if I didn’t start getting my life together I would become a failure, not achieving what I was capable of. One of the motivating factors was when one of my high school teachers told my mom, “Brett is basically not going to amount to anything unless he gets it together.” After I learned about what he said, I was suddenly motivated to think differently about my life and the direction I wanted to take, realizing that there was only one person that could decide my future—me!

I did well my junior year getting straight As across the board—no joke! By my senior year, my GPA had improved significantly but was still lower than desired due to my poor grades in my freshman and sophomore years. My low GPA made it difficult when I started applying to colleges around the state—and receiving rejection letters became the norm.

Then something amazing happened. I had a locker next to the teachers’ lounge my junior year, and I always had good interaction with my teachers, and even some teachers that I didn’t have as instructors. There was a science teacher that I never had in class, but we chatted frequently about school and life. He was aware of my academic turnaround and motivation to attend college. One day, the teacher called me into his classroom and said, “Hey Brett, have you ever considered Western Michigan University?” It turned out that his mom worked in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at WMU and one of her responsibilities was the Martin Luther King Probationary Program. The MLK program was developed for incoming first year students that didn’t have the best grades but had the potential to be great students. The MLK program required that students met GPA minimums, attended frequent meetings with a student counselor and took specific classes to help them transition to college life. I immediately applied to WMU in the winter of 1999 and was accepted as a MLK student! This was a proud moment for me and my family.

I did very well in the MLK program my first year at WMU, and I ended up finishing my first two semesters with a 4.0 GPA. The WMU Office of Diversity and Inclusion even recognized me with an award at the end of the year for my academic success during my first year. Looking back, the MLK program
really helped me get comfortable with being a college student. The student counselors were great and the administrative staff was always there to help with anything I needed to make my college experience successful.

Semester after semester I kept pushing hard, and my grades remained excellent. Even though I was clear of my probationary program, I stayed extremely motivated and disciplined with my coursework. I can’t tell you how many hours I spent at the Waldo Library studying or in the Haworth College of Business study lounge, but this behavior paid off in college and has benefited me throughout my professional career. During senior year I began challenging myself with advanced math classes that weren’t required, but would prepare me for graduate school. One of my favorite accomplishments was getting a BA in calculus. I can honestly say that advanced math has helped me in my career and everyday life! I graduated from Western Michigan University in the fall of 2003 Summa Cum Laude with a GPA of 3.93. In 2011, I also received my Masters in Business Administration from WMU. My advice to all WMU students and alumni is to challenge yourself daily. Life is full of challenges and you’ll be challenged in college, professional life, and your personal and family life. You will not succeed in life if you don’t face a good challenge head on and work through the problem. Sometimes you overcome challenges and other times you don’t, but it’s important that you learn from every outcome and become a better person because of it. One of my favorite sayings is that there is a solution to every problem, some solutions will be better than others, but there is always a solution.

I will be forever thankful to the instructor at my high school for seeing my potential and introducing me to Western Michigan University. I have had so much success in my professional career and in my personal and family life because of my opportunity at WMU.

GO BRONCOS!

*Brett McGovern graduated from the Haworth College of Business in 2003 with a bachelor’s degree in finance, and in 2011 with an MBA. He has held several positions in the area of operations at Martin Transportation Systems, and is currently the vice president of operations.*