

GED Scholars Initiative

Breaking Barriers • Nancy's Story



Nancy Auquilla de C. and her family came to the United States from Ecuador when her husband began studying electrical engineering in Ohio. She could not speak a word of English. She also did not have a high school diploma, or any idea of how to obtain one in her new country. Each time she passed her husband's university, she was reminded of the fact that she was not pursuing her education. In the meantime, however, she did find purpose and pride in raising her five children.

A chance to procure an education came unexpectedly when her son Diego began attending a Head Start program in Akron. She had the opportunity to attend class, as well, by joining an Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) program. She believed that if she wanted to live in the United States, she needed to learn English. ABLE programs, such as Nancy's, assist adult students of every age and cultural background in basic math, reading and writing skills; GED preparation; English for speakers of other languages; life skills; family literacy; and workplace literacy.

She started to attend class three days a week. Her dedication became apparent when she went to class even when no other students were present. At first, she merely listened to the conversations between

teachers and classmates. After a year, she began to pick up words, then phrases, and, finally, sentences. The optimism offered by her teachers fueled her ambition to learn.

Her teachers continued being supportive by encouraging her take the GED test in 2001. "I was very nervous and frightened when I took my test," she said of the experience. But she passed and graduated in 2002. She was asked to give a speech at the graduation ceremony. She spoke from the heart and members from her church who had attended her graduation said she was an inspiration to everyone in the crowd. She was proud of her accomplishment; it was one of the best days of her life.

After graduation, Nancy was directed to the GED Scholars Initiative (GEDSI) at Kent State University. The Initiative was created to help GED graduates by offering them support and resources to meet the university's academic standards and reach their potential. Nancy still wasn't sure if college was a viable option for her; her husband reminded her that her schooling would be expensive, and they already had a limited budget raising their five children. She decided to attend a Bridges workshop where she learned about the transition from GED student to college student. The Bridges program

is a multi-day workshop designed to educate GED graduates on admissions, college acceptance procedures, financial aid, and other university policies and programs in order to give them the same advantages as traditional university students. The staff at the GED Scholars Initiative gave her the confidence to begin her transition to higher education.

To address Nancy's concerns about her English abilities, she was paired with two GEDSI Peer 2 Peer mentors. Her mentors—fellow GED graduates and successful college students—helped ease some of her fears. One mentor offered Nancy his support and guidance, while another took Nancy to one of her classes so she could observe the atmosphere and difficulty of a real college-level classroom.

Though she knew it was going to be challenging, she applied at Kent State's Stark campus and began attending classes. She found her first class, Psychology, to be extremely frustrating. The vocabulary used in class was intense and a bit discouraging.

"Someone once told me that if you start something, you have to finish it," Nancy said.

She took this advice to heart. Despite the language barriers she faced daily, she continued to go to class. In addition to her schoolwork, she was still a full-time mom and had many responsibilities at home with her husband and children. It

was tough, but she was determined to keep going.

Today, Nancy is a junior at Kent State and attending classes on both the Kent State Stark campus and the Kent campus, where her son Diego is a freshman in architecture. She continues to excel in class and takes full advantage of the tutors available at the university. She also regularly visits the computer lab located in the GED Scholars Initiative building on the Kent campus. Overall, she says that school is much easier now. In fact, Nancy's GPA has made her eligible for scholarships and book stipends. Nancy is also a Peer 2 Peer mentor where she is providing support where she once received it.

Nancy's current goal is to help others who have faced language barriers like herself. Inspired by her own teachers, she plans to become an English as a Second Language Teacher. She wants to help and excite other adult students with their journeys in education. She also wants to be an encouraging example to her children. She has two more years left until graduation. It's been a long and bumpy road, but Nancy is much happier now than she has ever been.

"Someone once told me that if you start something, you have to finish it."

KENT STATE
UNIVERSITY

The GED Scholars Initiative was created by the Ohio Literacy Resource Center and is the first of its kind in the nation. The center works with other programs and offices at Kent State University to meet the needs of GED Scholars. The Initiative addresses the needs of students who earned their GED and attend Kent State University. Through research and development, this initiative provides students with support to meet the university's academic standards, complete programs studies, gain technological expertise and become aware of career opportunities.

www.gedscholars.org



GED Scholars Initiative

Taking the Next Step • Lametris' Story

Lametris was the main caregiver in her family by age 10. By age 14 her first child was born. She moved back and forth between Cleveland and Detroit. Mornings came early as she woke her brothers, fed them breakfast and got them ready for school day by day. As a young, single mom, her responsibilities increased. Now she had to juggle work to provide for her family and attend school. By 18 she had her second child.

Lametris asked, "What do I need to do to graduate?" She was frustrated by the lack of communication from the school in telling her clear requirements to graduate. She juggled summer school, work, raising children, and somehow, she was one credit short of graduating. Her focus became a concentration of PTA meetings, soccer games, coaching cheerleading and work.

Life was hard and it took guts to look honestly at what she could do to improve it. Twelve years later, Lametris heard about the Adult Basic and Literacy Education, (ABLE) program through a neighbor. She went into the room and saw students younger than she was and doubted that anyone could help or identify with her. She stuck with the program and on her second attempt, achieved her GED, now a single mom of four. She was thankful for the kind people that helped her learn more. Her determination was her strength, "As a parent, I wanted always to help my kids." Her work ethic continues to serve her well today at age 41.

Armed with her GED, always looking higher, she knew she had to continue to "expand her knowledge base." She applied for an office position, and was given a custodial position even though she had

the skills for office work. When she questioned why, the company told her she needed to get her foot in the door. After eight years of working the same position, she realized she had reached the ceiling with this particular employer. Lametris believed in being proactive and again searched for ways to improve her life. She felt strongly "If I get my education/degree no one will be able to deny me."

"I saw my first GED Scholars Initiative flyer through a friend who thought this would be a perfect program for me, then she brought me to Kent...I got more folders, flyers, packets and brochures on the program and took them back to Cleveland. After reading all of it, I knew that it was something that I wanted to be a part of." She learned the Initiative was a program of the Ohio Literacy Resource Center and was going to propel her to the next level in her education. For inspiration, she placed the magnet of the GED Scholars on her refrigerator where she and her kids were reminded daily of her goal to get a college education. Lametris memorized the

faces on the magnet that represented who she wanted to be. When she was ready to take on her dream, Lametris walked into the GED Scholars Initiative office and found "friendly faces," and felt as if she was "taken under their wing."

Bolstered by the "one-on-one connection," her confidence grew stronger by the new relationships formed. The vision of the GED Scholars Initiative "addresses the needs of students who earned their GED and attend Kent State University. Through research and development, this initiative provides students with support to meet the university's academic standards, complete program studies, gain technological expertise and become aware of career opportunities."

Lametris attributes the Bridges program funded by the Dominion Foundation and the GED Scholars Initiative as contributing to the "evolution of me." "I am empowering myself and I'll take all of this back

*"If I get my education/degree no one
will be able to deny me"*

KENT STATE
UNIVERSITY

to my community and help my kids." Her dream is to help the kids in the inner city, to be an advocate for them, to stand in the gap to help them chase their dreams as she is doing now.

As with any dream, hard work is the fuel necessary to cross the finish line. One must go through some times of trial to get the prize at the end. Lametris recalls that first time she walked into the classroom on campus. Assailed with self-doubt and afraid, she briefly wondered what she had got-

ten herself into but found the courage to keep going. Determination and dedication took over. An important key to any success is the support of family. Lametris credits her grandmother as a constant voice and her son as he wheeled her around campus when she had surgery and drove her to and from campus. She is willing to do "whatever it takes."

Lametris knows the importance of focus on success in her studies. She moved away from Cleveland to Kent know-

ing this would "enable her to do more." Knowing she had new support system helped her settle and Lametris "stopped doubting that this is where I should be." She is aware of the value of putting first things first and was rewarded by being named to the Dean's list the past two semesters.

Her children now range in ages: 19, 20, 22 and 26. Lametris is proud they have achieved their dreams in different professions. Her 22-year-old son De' Valle is a Psychol-

ogy major at Kent. The ripple effect one woman's passion has on her family is beneficial for all to witness because we are changed by it.

GED Scholar, KSU Junior with a 3.21 GPA, proud mother and grandmother, Lametris offers some closing thoughts, "You don't have to be like everyone else but be the best that you can be." She challenges us to think, "What do you want to be, and how can be the best at it? Whatever you want to do in life, do it, and do it well."

• The GED Scholars Initiative was created by the Ohio Literacy Resource Center and is the first of its kind in the nation. The center works with other programs and offices at Kent State University to meet the needs of GED Scholars. The Initiative addresses the needs of students who earned their GED and attend Kent State University. Through research and development, this initiative provides students with support to meet the university's academic standards, complete programs studies, gain technological expertise and become aware of career opportunities.

www.gedscholars.org

GED Scholars Initiative

Full-Circle • Mike's Story



*I*n high school, Mike Smith dreamed of becoming a rock star. Obtaining an education was the furthest goal from his mind. Instead, he devoted his time and attention to his restaurant job and earning enough money to buy music equipment. Neither of his parents had attended college, and Mike didn't feel the need to either. In fact, the idea of applying to higher education was a process that was both discouraging and confusing to Mike.

For ten years, Mike worked various jobs in factories and service industries. During this time, Mike realized that the menial labor did not satisfy him; he felt like he deserved more than an entry-level position. He wanted a challenging and intellectually stimulating career. His wife, who was a college graduate, encouraged him to return to school and obtain the education he was meant for.

"In a strange way, I felt as if I were a failure to the system. The best way that I could think of to overcome my failure was to return to that system and achieve success."

Through the Maplewood Ca-

reer Center, Mike was able to obtain his GED in September of 1994. He began taking a few classes at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland in order to familiarize himself with the academic environment. He eventually decided to take a major step by becoming a full-time student at Kent State University in 2003.

Mike was directed to the GED Scholars Initiative, a program that was fairly new at the time of his acceptance into the university. The GED Scholars Initiative is a program created by the Ohio Literacy Resource Center to grant GED graduates the opportunity to successfully transition to college by assisting them with financial and academic concerns. The Initiative provides support to students before they make the decision to enter college and while they are university students by offering them services such as help with overwhelming admissions paperwork or on-site tutoring.

Mike was thrilled to be surrounded by a community that was willing to help him with his educational goals and his desire to become a teacher. He

felt lucky to be attending a university with a wonderful education program and a propensity of producing motivated instructors.

"At first, I had a hard time accepting the fact that someone was willing to assist me based on the simple fact that I did not graduate from high school, but I quickly accepted the treasure chest that I had been presented. The GED Scholars Initiative is a community like no other; it has been my guiding force and has helped me on many levels. The friendly and helpful atmosphere creates a strong sense of family among us all. I am proud to be part of this community—it has made me a better person."

During his time at Kent State, Mike worked diligently. He was never absent from class and he listened to every word his professors spoke. He also went to the Academic Success Center on campus and joined study groups; he was not ashamed of actively seeking help when he needed it.

In 2008, Mike graduated from Kent State with a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Educa-

tion/Integrated Social Studies. He began teaching GED prep classes and English for Speakers of Other Languages classes at both the Maplewood ABE and the Six District Compact ABE. Teaching adults was a job that he truly enjoyed; it gave him the feeling of fulfillment and accomplishment.

"As a graduate of the Maplewood ABE program, I was asked to speak at their graduation ceremony. I had come full-circle. I went from high school drop-out, to college graduate, and then to instructor."

With budget cuts to the program and the birth of his son Edison, Mike decided to be a stay-at-home dad. He also continues to write and play music while running a net-label that provides soundtrack music to cinematographers. Mike plans to return to Kent State to obtain a Masters degree in Geographic Information Technologies.

"I had come full-circle. I went from high school drop-out, to college graduate, and then to instructor."

KENT STATE
UNIVERSITY

The GED Scholars Initiative was created by the Ohio Literacy Resource Center and is the first of its kind in the nation. The center works with other programs and offices at Kent State University to meet the needs of GED Scholars. The Initiative addresses the needs of students who earned their GED and attend Kent State University. Through research and development, this initiative provides students with support to meet the university's academic standards, complete programs studies, gain technological expertise and become aware of career opportunities.

www.gedscholars.org



GED Scholars Initiative

Tossing Out Labels • Heidi's Story

Earning excellent grades and obtaining honors student status in high school, it would seem that Heidi Bauer had a successful high school career. But because of constant bullying that school administrators could not stop, she was diagnosed with "school phobia" and quit high school at the age of 17.

"This is why many GED students talk about dispelling the stigma of having a General Educational Development certificate. So many of us left school for a wide variety of reasons, most having nothing to do with our ability to succeed academically."

Bauer quickly began and completed the process of receiving her GED within four months of leaving high school. By the age of 29, she seemingly had everything a businesswoman would want—a steady career in Louisville, Kentucky as a quality assurance analyst for a large credit card processing company.

"I had a good job, my own home, and a new baby but something was just missing. I wanted more out of life and that motivated me to go to college."

*Given this opportunity
If I don't take it
Got no one to blame but me*

Her desires to hone her writing and pursue literature lead her on a journey to Kent State University.

With a father who attended Kent State University in the 60s and a mother who lives in the area, choosing Kent State became an option. After discovering that the university had what she needed as an adult student with specific needs, it was an obvious choice.

*Throw away that old label for me,
"You only got your GED"
I am able*

"I found KSU to offer the most things that I needed as a non-traditional student like family housing, adult student services, GED services, etc."

One of the most important services that Bauer found upon entering Kent State University was the Ohio Literacy Resource Center's GED Scholars Initiative. This program aids students who have received their GED with financial, social and emotional support on their journeys from GED to college graduate.

As a single mother, Bauer found support through the GED Scholars Initiative. She cites the program's most comforting feature as having people to talk to, vent to, and laugh with while feeling an unconditional acceptance and non-judgmental attitude toward GED holders.

"The GED Scholars Initiative understands the challenges that you face and treats you like an actual person and not just another body. I am in their debt for the support structure they provide."

With Bauer's leadership, a student-driven organization was created to champion the needs of students and work with the GED Scholars Initiative.

GUS (GED United Scholars) is a diverse group of students of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds, which meets with one goal in mind: eliminate the negative stigma attached to earning a GED.

"We unite together to share our experience and offer social, academic, and professional support to each other through our educational journey."

GUS is just one of many organizations that Bauer is involved with. Though spare time is limited as a college student and single mother, she works part-time at the Kent campus library's Helpdesk, is an editorial intern at the Kent State University Press, serves as web manager for Women's studies, Sigma Tau Delta, Xi Mu chapter, and the English National Honorary Society, and is a mentor for the GED Scholars Initiative Bridges Program.

The Bridges Program, funded by the Dominion Foundation, supports GED graduates planning to attend KSU. Participants are given advice and information about procedures and processes for being accepted into college, as well as resources on financial aid, academic policies, and programs. Prospective students have the opportunity to ask questions and receive information on anything related to transition-

ing into and attending Kent State University.

Through her affiliations with GED Scholars Initiative and GUS, Bauer was asked to become a Bridge mentor. After completing a series of workshops, each mentor invites one or two participants in the Bridge program to accompany him or her in a day in the life of a college student. Through this opportunity, her two students were able to attend classes and ask questions about her experience as a college student at Kent State University.

"I enjoyed helping people realize they could attain their goals and dreams even in the face of adversity. I see a couple of my mentees from time to time around campus or at events, and it always makes me smile to see them still persevering."

*I'm here to inspire you
But you inspire me*

Her devotion to her academics and these organizations shows in her success. One of her honors includes being named a top twenty-five finalist and honorable mention winner of the 2006 Iris Chang Memorial Essay Contest. She has also earned scholarships along the way, including GED Scholars, Honors Academic, the Richard Torne and Mildred Steiskal scholarships.

KENT STATE
UNIVERSITY

However, the greatest reinforcement in her life is her son, Keagen. Not only does she have to balance school, but she is first and foremost a full-time mother. Mastering time management and having a supportive family have lent to her success.

"I took full course loads and worked part-time as opposed to the other way around. My mother watches my son on the weekends so I can work on my thesis. She and my sister both help out when I need to go to appointments in the evenings when I don't have a sitter for Keagen."

Bauer finds strength in knowing that earning her degree will better provide for her family. She looks forward to the sense of accomplishment she will feel walking across the stage to receive her college diploma since she missed that experience after not obtaining her high school diploma.

"It can be difficult. For me, it is just sheer determination in reaching my goals. When I finally made the decision to go after my dreams, I told myself that failure was not possible."

That same philosophy has gotten Bauer to finally reach her destination: graduation. She graduated with honors, earning a bachelor's degree in May 2009. She is currently pursuing a Master's of Arts in Teaching from Kent State.

"Do not let labels define you. Do not let anyone else define who you are. Define yourself. Educate yourself. Respect yourself."

Able

1. *in position to do something; physically or mentally equipped to do something, especially because of circumstances and timing*
2. *Capable or talented: having the necessary resources or talent to do something*
3. *Good at learning: quick to learn in an educational environment*
4. *Be able to do something: to be able or have the ability to do something*

Synonym: See Intelligent

I'm not changing my tune for you
I'm marching to my own beat
You can not defeat
Me
I am able
to see between the lines and cracks
I've made a pact with myself
Given this opportunity
If I don't take it
Got no one to blame but me
Close that government study book
I am not your statistic
I am able
And if you were my friend
You wouldn't send me on this guilt trip
Teasing me because I want to learn
To be better equipped
To have a good life for myself
And my family
I am learning
I am able to wake up every morning
A day filled with endless possibilities
This tornado in my brain
is taking me to new heights
Showing you what I'm made of
I'm here to inspire you
But you inspire me

Being smart
Takes a lot of heart
Hard as nails but with a soft side
Filled an ocean with the tears I've cried
But I am precious
I am blessed
I have been put to the test
And I am good enough
I am able
I am tough
Out of society's chains
I am set free
Life is hard, let there be no doubt
But I'm trying a different route
Only one I am a slave to is me
I am able to read
Able to write
Forget the sword
The pen has more might
I'm a product not of where I came from
But of where I am going to be
I'm starting to see the forest
And not just the trees
I still have a way yet to go
But listen to how able I am
I am more than my income, my sex, and
the color of my skin
I'm speaking out loud
And writing with words
I will be heard
No longer obscured
I am choosing and perusing
The next course in my life
Throw away that old label for me,
"You only got your GED"
I am able
To learn and discern
I am able
Don't know yet where all I am going
But I know where I've been
Gonna rise up
Take paper and pen
And show you just
How ABLE I am.

—Heidi M. Bauer

The GED Scholars Initiative was created by the Ohio Literacy Resource Center and is the first of its kind in the nation. The center works with other programs and offices at Kent State University to meet the needs of GED Scholars. The Initiative addresses the needs of students who earned their GED and attend Kent State University. Through research and development, this initiative provides students with support to meet the university's academic standards, complete programs studies, gain technological expertise and become aware of career opportunities.

www.gedscholars.org