

EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

Alex Smith Graduates Oklahoma City Community College *by Alex Smith*



Alex Smith

HÔ! Nihkanetike! My name is Alex Eugene Smith. I am an enrolled member of the Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma as well as a descendent of the Pawnee and Otoe Tribes. In May of 2014, I graduated from Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC) with an AAS degree in Graphic Communications with a Multimedia emphasis. I have been waiting many years to actually call myself a "College Graduate" so sitting here now typing this letter, I feel very proud and extremely blessed to have this opportunity to share my achievement with those of you (young and old) who may think a college degree is out of reach or impossible.

I want to share some of the thought processes and challenges I had leading up to my degree as I think it may help those who are thinking of going to college for the first time or those adults who are thinking of going back and may be in a similar situation such as myself having a child and a full time job.

I first enrolled in college straight out of high school at a time when technology wasn't so dominant in everyday life. Back then, I had the dream of being a big time computer animation artist that worked at Walt Disney, Pixar or DreamWorks. I set my goals high and had every intention of going to Junior College and moving on to a 4 year college and beyond, but I soon realized that trying to go to classes during the week and party on the weekends wasn't going to get me anywhere near my goals. I really didn't have the right mindset and did not spend my time wisely, so eventually that led me to bowing out of college and finding myself buried in loans with no money to pay them back.

In 2003, I decided to "try" it again. I had been traveling a lot with my family drum group all summer, the Young Bird singers, and really decided it was a good time to go back to college so I enrolled in Seminole State and really excelled that first year into college even getting a 4.0 GPA and getting on the President's Honor Roll. Before going into that second year though, 2 very important people in my life passed away—my step dad and my grandpa. I tried to hobble through my courses, but my mind wasn't in it anymore and I had a hard time going to class eventually choosing to drop out. I do want to point out that although it was a very hard time in my life, I CHOSE not to go to class and I CHOSE to bow out from adversity. If it was the same circumstances today with me being a daddy, I don't believe I would have quit....I know I wouldn't have.

After years of putting off college, the opportunity to enroll and finish finally presented itself in 2011 when I went to visit with an OCCC admissions counselor. The counselor helped me wrap my mind around the courses OCCC offered in regards to finishing my Graphic Communications degree and how much money it was going to take for me to pay tuition, books, etc. From there, I had my mind set on passionately dedicating myself to finishing what I started some years ago straight out of high school. That essentially meant separating myself from a

lot of social activities that I loved doing such as powwows and singing, going to sporting events and concerts, and even some family functions due to project and homework deadlines that needed to be done during late nights and on my time on the weekends. In my mind the third time around was DEFINITELY going to be a charm. I remember telling my fiancé, "NOTHING is going to stop me from getting that degree this time". All that was really left to do was start researching ways to pay for college.

On the day of my graduation sitting there in my cap and gown, I kept thinking of how difficult it had been to get there, but at the same time how happy I was to be achieving such a huge accomplishment. It's funny to look back now and think of the different kind of perspective I had from the age of 18 straight out of high school and now being a full time daddy and family man with a career. What's funnier was I felt like I had a conversation with my 18 year old self in one of my classes. This young guy I had a class with, who was a journalism major, used to make snide remarks to me under his breath because I turned in my assignments early and he turned his in after deadline or not at all which basically led to him receiving subpar grades. On the last day of class he said, "This dude, the overachiever (that still makes me giggle because I've never been called that) over here making everyone look bad in here..." I finally said, "You know what man, I used to be just like you, young, no kids, all the time and potential in the world to be an "A" student, but chose to do other things rather than what I should be doing. But if you really want to know why I choose to study till 3 or 4 in the morning or do homework on my weekends? It's because I have to. I have a special needs son with epilepsy who needs his daddy—even more, he needs a daddy with a good head on his shoulders because I am essentially laying the path that he is going to take behind me. When I get an "A" in this class, I don't see it as just an "A". I see a better life for me, my son and my family. That's really all the motivation I need."

Today, I am an accomplished Multimedia Graphic Designer with over 10 years of industry experience having had the privilege of working and designing for companies/enterprises such as Sac and Fox Nation Casino, Shawnee News-Star, CopyFast Printing, and Clevyr, Inc. along with freelance designing for many different businesses in Oklahoma. I believe receiving my Graphic Communications degree only strengthened my resume and opened many more doors of opportunity in the near future. I'm pretty excited about that.

I want to thank my beautiful fiancé Stacey who has been my biggest supporter through all these long weeks of studying and grinding through long sleepless nights. I could not have achieved my goal of receiving my college degree without you! I also want to say thank you to my now-four-year-old son Nathan Eugene. Even though you don't know it now, you are and always will be daddy's biggest motivation and inspiration to succeed and be a better man. The word "epilepsy" is always going to be my least favorite word, but you have taught me to make the best of a bad situation, which is the best kind of outlook on life! Lastly, thank you to the Sac and Fox Education Department for helping fund my epic journey to a college degree. Ketêpihipwa!

"Your time and how you spend it dictates the quality of your life. Nothing increases the quality of life as much as the freedom from those things that have us entrapped." ~Unknown author

View my full portfolio and connect with me online at www.alexsmith.com

Three on Three Basketball Winners

Photos by Harriett Nanaeto



First Place 18+ "Shortcallers"



Second Place 18+ "M.O.B."



Third Place 18+ "Waylan's Team"



First Place 17- Under "Wolfpack"



Second Place 17- Under "Wolfs"



Third Place 17- Under "Big Enough"

Business Committee Meeting Minutes

are now accessible on the Website and Facebook

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