How the Pandemic Handed Me My Bachelor's Degree

Cheri Anchondo

cda9@humboldt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/humboldtgeographic

Part of the Environmental Studies Commons, and the Spatial Science Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/humboldtgeographic/vol2/iss1/8

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Humboldt Geographic by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. For more information, please contact kyle.morgan@humboldt.edu.
How the Pandemic Handed Me My Bachelor’s Degree

Cheri Anchondo

I am a single parent of a special needs immune-compromised child, a full-time employee of E&J Gallo Winery in Modesto, California, and a returning—and now graduate!—Humboldt State Lumberjack. I started my journey toward a double major in Geography and Dance Studies in the spring of 2006. In passionate pursuit of both majors, I proudly represented HSU on stage at American College Dance Association, on tour in Spain, and as a student-geographer at annual California Geographical Society meetings.

I was on target to graduate in the spring of 2009, but by then had exhausted my financial aid. Though working full time, I no longer could afford to continue living in Humboldt County and wait until the following spring to enroll full-time for the additional seven units required to complete an undergraduate education at HSU. Therefore, I moved back home with the intention of finishing my bachelor’s degree at a later point in my life.

As more time passed, the more distant that possibility seemed.

Living 358 miles away from HSU presented the first obstacle. Finances another. Also, I became a single parent, the sole provider for my child. My priorities shifted. Throughout the years, I inquired into how I might finish my degree. However, attending a local California State University requires residency (meaning additional units). And not all HSU units I earned transfer because not all CSUs are the same. Thankfully, my employer values higher education. I received critical support from managers, supervisors, and coworkers. For years, they encouraged me to make calls and send emails. So I kept at it, every few months contacting various offices at Humboldt and asking how I could finish up, hoping the answer would somehow change.

Enter COVID-19.

I last inquired in January 2020. Per usual, there was not much hope. In March-April 2020, as news broke that universities were transitioning to full online delivery, I found the courage to send one more email and make another round of calls, asking if the courses I needed would be available online. The opportunity to complete my degree arrived as a confluence of luck, a pandemic forcing widespread online instruction, employment at a company providing me with the equipment to work...
Although a little embarrassed, I feel the need to tell my story. It may contain a huge lesson for other people. Furthermore, it is probably one of the few good things resulting from the pandemic.

I started attending Humboldt State University in the fall of 2011 and “graduated” in fall 2016. I walked the stage a semester early because I discovered if you do not graduate in May you do not get to walk on stage and my family wanted to see me walk on stage and celebrate graduation with me. The following semester, I thought I had completed the final requirements for my bachelor’s degree. My family and friends were so proud of me. As a first-generation Guatemalan-American, I managed to be the first person in my family to graduate college. And I did it while working, being a full-time student, and raising my daughter as a single mother.

My ultimate hope is that others like me will also be able to return and finish what they started, that HSU will reimagine access to higher education.

Fortunately, I was able to capitalize on the moment, completing three units during the summer and four units during the fall of 2020, finally earning my double-major bachelor’s of arts!

Finishing my bachelor’s degree has been an incredible bright spot for me during the pandemic. If not for COVID-19, I may never have completed my BA. I am grateful for the online infrastructure and support systems that made it possible. I am also thrilled to be able to model success in the face of obstacles for my daughter, Olivia, who has taught me what is possible when hard work meets optimism because she is thriving with Arthritis and Autism.

Quarantine has taught me so much about being present, being grateful for good health, opportunities to travel, learn, and connect with other humans. Most of all, this strange time in history has taught me to take moments as they happen, never quit, gather myself and coil my strength so I can spring forward. The pandemic has taught me never to give up—it is never too late to try again. My ultimate hope is that others like me will also be able to return and finish what they started, that HSU will reimagine access to higher education and retain the online options for students with stories like mine.

COVID-19 Gave Me a Second Chance

Erendira “Elly” Hernandez

Although a little embarrassed, I feel the need to tell my story. It may contain a huge lesson for other people. Furthermore, it is probably one of the few good things resulting from the pandemic.

I started attending Humboldt State University in the fall of 2011 and “graduated” in fall 2016. I walked the stage a semester early because I discovered if you do not graduate in May you do not get to walk on stage and my family wanted to see me walk on stage and celebrate graduation with me. The following semester, I thought I had completed the final requirements for my bachelor’s degree. My family and friends were so proud of me. As a first-generation Guatemalan-American, I managed to be the first person in my family to graduate college. And I did it while working, being a full-time student, and raising my daughter as a single mother.

My ultimate hope is that others like me will also be able to return and finish what they started, that HSU will reimagine access to higher education.

Fortunately, I was able to capitalize on the moment, completing three units during the summer and four units during the fall of 2020, finally earning my double-major bachelor’s of arts!

Finishing my bachelor’s degree has been an incredible bright spot for me during the pandemic. If not for COVID-19, I may never have completed my BA. I am grateful for the online infrastructure and support systems that made it possible. I am also thrilled to be able to model success in the face of obstacles for my daughter, Olivia, who has taught me what is possible when hard work meets optimism because she is thriving with Arthritis and Autism.

Quarantine has taught me so much about being present, being grateful for good health, opportunities to travel, learn, and connect with other humans. Most of all, this strange time in history has taught me to take moments as they happen, never quit, gather myself and coil my strength so I can spring forward. The pandemic has taught me never to give up—it is never too late to try again. My ultimate hope is that others like me will also be able to return and finish what they started, that HSU will reimagine access to higher education and retain the online options for students with stories like mine.

COVID-19 Gave Me a Second Chance

Erendira “Elly” Hernandez

Although a little embarrassed, I feel the need to tell my story. It may contain a huge lesson for other people. Furthermore, it is probably one of the few good things resulting from the pandemic.

I started attending Humboldt State University in the fall of 2011 and “graduated” in fall 2016. I walked the stage a semester early because I discovered if you do not graduate in May you do not get to walk on stage and my family wanted to see me walk on stage and celebrate graduation with me. The following semester, I thought I had completed the final requirements for my bachelor’s degree. My family and friends were so proud of me. As a first-generation Guatemalan-American, I managed to be the first person in my family to graduate college. And I did it while working, being a full-time student, and raising my daughter as a single mother.

My ultimate hope is that others like me will also be able to return and finish what they started, that HSU will reimagine access to higher education.

Fortunately, I was able to capitalize on the moment, completing three units during the summer and four units during the fall of 2020, finally earning my double-major bachelor’s of arts!

Finishing my bachelor’s degree has been an incredible bright spot for me during the pandemic. If not for COVID-19, I may never have completed my BA. I am grateful for the online infrastructure and support systems that made it possible. I am also thrilled to be able to model success in the face of obstacles for my daughter, Olivia, who has taught me what is possible when hard work meets optimism because she is thriving with Arthritis and Autism.

Quarantine has taught me so much about being present, being grateful for good health, opportunities to travel, learn, and connect with other humans. Most of all, this strange time in history has taught me to take moments as they happen, never quit, gather myself and coil my strength so I can spring forward. The pandemic has taught me never to give up—it is never too late to try again. My ultimate hope is that others like me will also be able to return and finish what they started, that HSU will reimagine access to higher education and retain the online options for students with stories like mine.

COVID-19 Gave Me a Second Chance

Erendira “Elly” Hernandez

Although a little embarrassed, I feel the need to tell my story. It may contain a huge lesson for other people. Furthermore, it is probably one of the few good things resulting from the pandemic.

I started attending Humboldt State University in the fall of 2011 and “graduated” in fall 2016. I walked the stage a semester early because I discovered if you do not graduate in May you do not get to walk on stage and my family wanted to see me walk on stage and celebrate graduation with me. The following semester, I thought I had completed the final requirements for my bachelor’s degree. My family and friends were so proud of me. As a first-generation Guatemalan-American, I managed to be the first person in my family to graduate college. And I did it while working, being a full-time student, and raising my daughter as a single mother.

My ultimate hope is that others like me will also be able to return and finish what they started, that HSU will reimagine access to higher education.

Fortunately, I was able to capitalize on the moment, completing three units during the summer and four units during the fall of 2020, finally earning my double-major bachelor’s of arts!

Finishing my bachelor’s degree has been an incredible bright spot for me during the pandemic. If not for COVID-19, I may never have completed my BA. I am grateful for the online infrastructure and support systems that made it possible. I am also thrilled to be able to model success in the face of obstacles for my daughter, Olivia, who has taught me what is possible when hard work meets optimism because she is thriving with Arthritis and Autism.

Quarantine has taught me so much about being present, being grateful for good health, opportunities to travel, learn, and connect with other humans. Most of all, this strange time in history has taught me to take moments as they happen, never quit, gather myself and coil my strength so I can spring forward. The pandemic has taught me never to give up—it is never too late to try again. My ultimate hope is that others like me will also be able to return and finish what they started, that HSU will reimagine access to higher education and retain the online options for students with stories like mine.