



Donald Fleming

TRIO SSS

Today, I work for The Boeing Company as an industrial engineer, but my path to this career was a struggle. During high school, I worked part-time for my family's business. I planned on obtaining a 2-year degree from Green River Community College (GRCC) while working for Mom and Dad. It seemed to be the perfect plan until the business started to get into financial trouble and head toward eventual bankruptcy. My dream of becoming an industrial engineer started to slip away. I made the decision to drop out and leave home in hopes of finding a better way to succeed. At this point, I could have used student loans, but I didn't feel safe doing that with an uncertain future ahead of me. I decided to work and save money for tuition. I knew GRCC would always be there for me whenever I had the opportunity to return.

After some tough times, bouncing from job to job and place to place, I became a concrete testing technician for a construction material supplier in Auburn. I worked long hours, but they paid tuition expenses that allowed me to return to GRCC. This situation didn't last long though because I expressed what I now know to be symptoms of bipolar disorder during a major "episode" at work. Shortly thereafter the company fired me and I was left without any ability to continue to attend GRCC. Unfortunately, I dropped out of GRCC for a second time.

In an effort to get stability in my life, I joined the Navy, but that was short-lived. While at boot camp I was formally diagnosed with bipolar disorder, years after my early struggles with the disorder and not knowing I had it. I was given a general discharge, some medications, and \$1500.

The money I received from the Navy was enough for me to return to GRCC for one quarter. The following quarter I was awarded a CSEMS (S-STEM) scholarship, with funding from the National Science Foundation. In this third attempt at finishing a 2-year degree, I chose to be involved in the community of GRCC and its TRIO – Student Support Services program. There was no longer a big trail of dust behind me when classes were over. I stayed to tutor, learn from, and connect with other students. GRCC and the TRIO program taught me that community is more important than self-reliance.

GRCC and TRIO helped me channel and focus my energy on realizing my goal. I attended college like never before. I never missed a quarter and continued that streak through to graduation at the University of Washington. GRCC and TRIO gave me the support that I needed so badly which set me on the right path to finally achieve my goal.

Student Success Services

Through a grant competition, funds are awarded to institutions of higher education to provide opportunities for academic development, assist students with basic college requirements, and to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education. Student Support Services (SSS) projects also may provide grant aid to current SSS participants who are receiving Federal Pell Grants (# 84.063). The goal of SSS is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants.

All SSS projects must provide: academic tutoring, which may include instruction in reading, writing, study skills, mathematics, science, and other subjects; advice and assistance in postsecondary course selection, assist student with information on both the full range of student financial aid programs, benefits and resources for locating public and private scholarships; and assistance in completing financial aid applications. Education or counseling services designed to improve the financial and economic literacy and assist students in applying for admission to graduate and professional programs; and assist students enrolled in two-year institutions and applying for admission to, and obtaining financial assistance for enrollment in four-year programs. The SSS projects may also provide individualized counseling for personal, career, and academic information, activities, and instruction designed to acquaint students with career options; exposure to cultural events and academic programs not usually available; mentoring programs, securing temporary housing during breaks for students who are homeless youths and students who are in foster care or are aging out of the foster care system.

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