

From GED to Degree at Joliet Junior College – Fredy Rodriguez

Written by Melissa Lachcik

Four years ago Fredy Rodriguez came to Joliet Junior College with one need, and that was to pass his General Educational Development test. The Joliet resident not only needed to pass a high school equivalency test to meet employer requirements, but he also wanted to explore opportunities to advance his career. Little did he know that a stop in JJC's Adult Education Department for a GED would lead him down a path to earn an Associate in Applied Science degree.

Fredy already had several years of work experience when he came to JJC, but the thoughts of going back to school were a bit overwhelming. He explained that his teachers in the GED program eased this transition. He said, "My experience was great! I hadn't been in school for 20+ years, and the instructors made it so relaxing to learn but they held us accountable."

He explained that mid-way through the semester staff from Adult Education's College/Career Transition Services came to meet with his class. Michelle Lyman college & career transition specialist met with the group, explained the various services available and asked students what they planned to do next. Fredy indicated that his primary plan was just to get back to work. However, Michelle inspired him to think about taking the next step into college-level courses.

With Michelle's encouragement and support from his family, Fredy decided to go for it. Michelle assisted him with filling out all of the required paperwork for admissions and financial aid as well purchasing books. She even offered to give him a campus tour to help make the transition to college courses as seamless as possible. He explained how this really made a difference in deciding to pursue something more than his GED. Fredy stated, "I don't think there would've been a next step if it wasn't for her [Michelle]."

Fredy had such a positive experience that he also encouraged his wife to complete the GED program. Michelle said, "I am so proud of Fredy's accomplishments and honored to have helped him begin his college career at JJC. To be honest, I was completely overwhelmed when Fredy told me that I had impacted his and his family's life as well. It's accomplishments like Fredy's that inspire me to be the best Transition Specialist and Advisor I can be. Our Adult Ed. students deserve it!"

His first semester of college went well and Fredy was ready to learn more. He began to envision how combining a degree with his professional work experience would help advance his career into a management role. At that moment, he decided to continue towards earning an associate degree. However, the road wasn't always easy. It was a balancing act to juggle working full-time, taking classes and being there for his family, which includes three children. He even had the unique aspect of having some of the same general education classes and instructors as his daughter who was also a JJC student at the time.

Fredy took several technical courses in areas related to electrical and robotics. His experience in industry also helped him through some of the coursework. He described how one of his instructors encouraged him to bring in a motor he repaired at work and explain to the class how he fixed it.

He also appreciated how much the instructors worked with him to help them succeed. He said that one day he was coming to class right from work and had a paper due. He didn't have a printer available but the teacher helped him find a printer on campus to make sure his assignment would be turned in on time. On another occasion, Fredy had to leave class early to tend to his job and repair equipment that broke. His teacher allowed him to leave class and worked with him to figure out the best solution so he could still complete his assignment. Fredy added, "How is the program not helping you try to succeed?"

Another source of inspiration actually came to him from a poster that's in one of the technical labs. It says, "Don't give a man a fish, teach them how to fish." Fredy explained how taking classes at JJC has helped him to grow professionally. He said, "Before all I did was replace parts, but never knew why. Now I know why and I can even troubleshoot down to the board level. It has given me more perspective."

In May 2016, Fredy earned his Associate in Applied Science degree and Certificate of Achievement in Industrial Electrical/Electronics. He also earned a Certificate of Completion in Electrical/Electronics the previous year.

Since then Fredy has been continuing to work in industry as a Biomedical Technician for a local dialysis company and is ready to take his education another step further. He is planning to attend the Southern Illinois University weekend program at JJC to earn his bachelor's degree. It has taken a little time, but now he will be ready when an opportunity presents itself to advance his career.

The Adult Education's College/Career Transition Services program at JJC has trained advisors available to assist eligible students with making the transition from adult education classes to college-level courses and programs. Michelle added, "The best advice I have given students is not to let fear of the unknown stop them from achieving their goals. My job is to help them navigate the college transition process. This helps de-mystify college and reduces the anxiety many students feel when they are getting started."

For more information about this and other Adult Education programs at JJC, call (815) 280-1300, email jjcdafs@jjc.edu or visit [Adult Education](#).