First Generation College Graduate Finds Passion as Special Education Teacher

“Teaching is not something you do because you can’t find a job, or to continue your education. You should have drive and passion for educating youth.”

Nicole Houston, M.Ed. ‘14

I wanted to become a nurse
Originally, I majored in nursing at a technical college, but after enrolling at Georgia State to complete my bachelor’s degree, none of my prerequisite courses were transferable. As I pondered what to do next, I became a substitute teacher and noticed several open positions for special education instructors. Over the next several months, I taught students with special needs and realized I had a niche for it. That experience convinced me that teaching children with behavior and learning disabilities was my calling. Fortunately, Georgia State’s Network for Enhancing Teacher Quality (NET-Q) teacher preparation program recently launched at the time and I received a full tuition waiver for the Special Education master’s program.

Student teaching for one year was invaluable
One of the most rewarding experiences I had as a graduate student was being a student teacher one full academic year at the same high school. This aspect of the program was extremely beneficial because it allowed me to build stronger relationships with students, teachers and faculty. Other teacher preparation programs require you to switch schools every few weeks, which can make bonding with the school community more challenging. As a testament to my preparation, I received the teacher of the month award two months into my first year of teaching!

Don’t teach if you just need a job
Looking ahead, I would like to teach in Puerto Rico to learn another language, and work with students who fall under similar types of oppression that African-American students I teach are faced with in their communities. Given the fact that teachers play a critical role in the development of a child, I don’t think teaching is something you should do because you can’t find a job, or to continue your education. In order to become a successful educator in any part of the world, you should have a drive and passion for educating young people. It’s more rewarding than any other profession I can think of.

THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT GRADUATES ABOUT 900 STUDENTS EACH YEAR
OF THOSE, MORE THAN 400 ARE TEACHERS