

Telling Our EOP Stories

April 2011

Educational Opportunity Program



40 years of service



The Value of Education

By Nu Vang

When Alemseged Asrat arrived to the United States in 2004 he was entering a whole new world, literally. Asrat grew up in a town called Jimma in Ethiopia, where he was the third oldest out of 11 children. He spent most of his teenage years helping out his mother while his father had to work 335 kilometers (around 208 miles) away from their home. While his brothers went into the military forces, Asrat kept to his studies and prepared for the national exam in 12th grade.

Asrat's passion for reading books and studying led him to obtain a diploma to teach English to students and eventually led him into the tourism industry, but a war between Ethiopia and Eritrea pushed Asrat back into the education field again.

In August of 2004, Asrat was sponsored by a church which gave him the opportunity to travel across the world and eventually get to America. Asrat started his educational journey at Fresno City College. He had learned English back in Ethiopia, but when he came to the United States, he discovered that Americans did not speak the same English as him, British English. "Everything thing was hard," Asrat said. "I had to start all over again. I had to learn English prepositions all over again." Although it was hard to communicate with others, Asrat pushed forward to improve his English.

One of the biggest trials that Asrat recalled as he became a student at Fresno State after transferring from Fresno City College, was having to adapt to all the work he had as a nursing student. "I didn't have anybody," Asrat said. "I didn't have friends. So I didn't know what to study. Oh my gosh, I was stressed out."

Asrat said that one of the great things about Fresno State was that there were many resources on campus that assisted students, but for him EOP was his backbone. "I was shy and soft spoken, so I couldn't make friends in my classroom," Asrat said. "So the only friend I had was my counselor, Dennis Padilla. Every time, I had a problem, I would go to him and he would guide me."

Now though, in Spring 2011, Asrat has moved very far from where he started when he first arrived to America. He is happily married with a son and daughter, and will be graduating with his bachelor's degree in Nursing this semester. He hopes that his children will follow in his footsteps and see the value in education as he does.

Looking back, Asrat has seen how far he has come from the lives of his family and friends back in his home country. "I am very proud," Asrat said. "It is not because I am ready to graduate from this program, but when I look back at my life. I am the only one here."



Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)

California State University, Fresno

5150 N. Maple Ave

Fresno, CA 93740

Call: 278.1787 or Visit: www.csufresno.edu/eop