

From Atlanta, Georgia to VSU: Sade's Story

When you ask a Valdosta State University student who is from the Atlanta area why they came to VSU, the most typical answer is “My parents told me I had to stay in state, and this is the farthest place away from home.” This is the answer I use to have when I first arrived in Valdosta for my freshman year in 2006.

Valdosta is definitely no Atlanta, not even a mini Atlanta. When I first arrived, I questioned my decision and often wondered what the outcome of this journey would be. Flash forward to 2013, a bachelors and a masters degree later, and I am still at Valdosta State working as an academic advisor for the Educational Talent Search program. This journey for me was about growth. Being a first generation college student was difficult for me. I wanted to make my family proud, make myself proud, and also grow as a person. I started off as pre-med major to become a doctor. I thought to myself how becoming a doctor would be a great story for my family to tell, how proud they would be. I discovered that being a doctor was something I didn't want to do, but I also didn't want to disappoint my family. I made the decision, however, that I felt was best: I became a psychology major. It was the best decision I made for my career aspirations, which are ever changing.

College started out as a struggle for me. I lacked the study skills I felt I needed to succeed. At times I felt stressed and somewhat upset with myself because I was not making the grades I wanted and knew that I could achieve. I graduated in the top 10% in high school and came to college with various scholarships and honors, but that was not being portrayed in my school work. I think this is something that many students go through. College is extremely different from high school, and it takes a bit of an adjustment, especially when you are in a different environment. However, once I became involved on campus, things began to change. I joined a community service organization, Alpha Phi Omega, and I also became a senator in the Student Government Association. I also volunteered as much as I could. Once I did these things, everything changed for me. I became more social, met great people, and improved my grades significantly. I graduated undergrad with a 3.1 GPA, not what I wanted, but definitely not bad.

The journey of growth continued after graduation. I took a year off, but quickly enrolled in graduate school at VSU to get my masters in Clinical Counseling

Psychology. I continued volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club when I could, and also at Valdosta High School. I always wanted to give back what was given to me. I continued to meet great people in school and through my internship at Lowndes Drug Action Council. Graduate school was easier for me. I learned how to study and let my knowledge guide me to succeed, graduating with a 3.5 GPA.

So what would I tell a student coming from Atlanta to Valdosta?

- 1) Realize where you are and what you are here for.

Valdosta is definitely not Atlanta. There is no Macys or Bloomingdales. If you are not into football, movies, and a dinner, you may not have much of a weekend. Although all of those things are nice, don't let the lack of amenities that you are accustomed to stop you from meeting great people and having fun with what you do have. The ultimate point of being in college is to get a great education. You will get nothing less at Valdosta State University, and if you are open, you will get much more.

- 2) Get involved.

I didn't get involved nearly as much as I wish I would have as an undergraduate student. I wish I would have joined more organizations and served the community more. It is so important to get involved. You should get involved to meet great people, help others with the gifts that you have, and build everlasting connections.

- 3) Get to know your professors and be professional at all times.

I got to know my professors while I was in school. I wanted them to see that I put in effort at all times and that I really wanted to gain all of the knowledge that they were giving me. This is especially important when you need recommendations for graduate school and jobs. Being professional is also important. There have been times when I have said and done things that were not professional at all. I look at everything in life as a lesson for growth. Being professional encompasses the way we talk and present ourselves on campus as well as the way we dress.

- 4) Have fun.

Getting good grades, being involved, and being professional are all important, but if you have no joy in life, then everything is done for nothing. Find joy and peace in life and have fun doing it.

My journey at VSU would not be what it was without my faith first and foremost, my family, and the great people I have met on this journey. I would like to thank Dr. Katherine Adams for her guidance, being my academic advisor and someone to talk to and aspire to be. She never let me down, and even when I made mistakes that I felt were detrimental, she always asked me if I grew from the situation. I would also like to thank Robin Smith. Her sweet and kind words were always encouraging to me and she is a very good friend. I want to thank Dr. Elizabeth Omiteru for believing in me and motivating me when I was confused about decisions in my life. I would also like to thank Brian Law. He encourages me and sees the potential that I have in life, and he never stopped letting me know that I could be a great school counselor. Last, I would like to thank David Troy. Thank you for giving me a great internship experience and allowing me to be creative while learning and growing. So many people have touched my life at VSU and in the surrounding community, and there is no way I could list them all, but I do thank you.

As I continue this journey of growth I often think about where I will end up. As I stated before, my career aspirations are ever changing. I do know this: wherever I end up, Valdosta State University was a great foundation and paved the way for me to achieve anything I want to achieve.

--Sade M. Miller, VSU Blazer