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Getting with the Program in College

by Yolanda Garcia

Editor's Introduction: Yolanda Garcia is an involved Federationist from the state of Texas. She has served the federation in many capacities, including serving as a counselor in a children's summer program at an NFB training center and assisting with the NFB Corps. In this article Yolanda shares her experiences with educating her peers and getting involved in campus life. Here is what she has to say.

"What the heck is that chick doing with that stick? Looks like she's gonna beat down somebody if they try to break into her room. Oh wait a minute she's... oh my word she's blind!"

Yes, these were the heart warming, welcoming words that I received on the first day when I moved into my dorm. I'm sure that we have all heard lovely phrases such as these from the uneducated and sometimes ignorant stranger passing along on the campus. I simply shrugged her comments off because I had to help continue moving my stuff. Later that week I heard some friends of mine talking about a house council meeting that was going to be held in our lower lobby. They asked me if I was going to attend the meeting. "Is it mandatory?" I asked? "No," they said. I pondered over it for a minute and decided to say yes, seeing that this would be a wonderful opportunity to get involved as a freshman on campus and meet some more girls from my dorm.

The next night I went to the meeting with my friends, when low and behold I found to my astonishment that the president of house council was the girl who gave me my friendly greeting. Her name is Shene. She was very humorous and energetic, making the meeting interesting and entertaining. I quickly became fond of her and was intrigued about becoming involved. She announced that she and the dorm director would be conducting interviews for house council officer positions in a couple of days if anyone was interested. She started taking girls names down and what position they were interested in holding. In my heart I really wanted to interview for the position of secretary, but I was nervous that she would not accept me because of my blindness. Eventually I mustard up the courage to say my name and for what position I wanted to interview. She gave me my interview time for the following day. After the meeting was dismissed my friends told me that she had a very surprised look on her face when I spoke to her. I knew I was going to really have to prove myself the next day in

the interview.

I had rehearsed and prepared myself for any question she was going to ask me prior to the interview. I found that doing this helped me relax and feel very confident about myself. When my name was called I walked with a confident posture and greeted them by shaking their hand firmly and saying hello with what I hoped was a winning smile. I made my way to the couch where they had been sitting. And so began the hot round of 20 questions with my dorm director, Beth, and Shene, asking if I had ever been in any organizations before and about my previous experience. I answered by listing all of the organizations I had been involved with in high school, and that I had previously been the secretary for the Texas Association of Blind Students and was currently acting as secretary for the NFB chapter of Temple. Finally, we got to the million-dollar question. They asked how I would go about taking minutes and producing them in a way for the president of the residential house association to keep record for later reference. I told them that I would simply use my Braille lite to take notes during the meeting, which I could then transfer to a floppy disk. Utilizing a screen reading software I would use my computer to edit and print my files to an ink printer. They were quite enthusiastic that technology had come so far and were grateful to have been educated on this subject. The very last question they asked me was why did I want to be a part of house council and what I could offer to the dorm? I responded by saying that I felt that this would be a great way to meet and make friends with a lot of the girls in our dorm, and would be a constructive way to use my free time. I explained that I also hoped to make dorm life an exciting experience for everyone and by doing so, insure that campus life would leave a joyous memory in their hearts. I said that I am pretty creative and that I could brainstorm some diverse activities for our dorm. I'm very energetic and a perfectionist, qualities that are beneficial in order to make sure that activities operate smoothly and still are fun.

The following day Shene called me and told me that I received the position of secretary of our dorm. I was so thrilled; I knew there was tough competition. Achieving this position made me realize that I had changed her views on blindness and now had the opportunity to change the misconceptions of others, both on the committee and in the dorm.

This was just the beginning, though. Curious to see what other organizations, were on campus I asked my upper classmen friends, looked on our website, checked my mailbox frequently for flyers, and heard things by word of mouth. I joined our Campus Activities Board, which is responsible for planning dances, contests, game shows, coffeehouse nights, and other social events on campus. I also joined freshmen fellowship, which is a Bible study and community service organization. I also participated in our school's annual Easter Pageant, playing the role of a crowd member.

If your schedule does not permit you to become a full time member of an organization, I would hope that you participate in eclectic programs. One of many programs that are offered on our campus is a weekly Bible study for women called IMAGE, which I attend. Through all of these organizations I have benefited by meeting some of my closest friends, and have engraved countless memories that will last a lifetime. Experiences like these are essential to

college life, because it is at this crucial point where one begins the gradual transition from narrow-minded adolescent to a well-rounded and mature individual. When you join any campus organization you are not the only one who benefits, others do as well. By joining or attending school clubs or functions we are helping to reshape the public's misconceptions about blindness and their lowered expectations for us. Our federation philosophy tells us that our ultimate goal is to strive for equality, and in order to do this we must seize opportunities such as these to educate the public, demonstrating that we are capable to hold board positions, carry out responsibilities, spearhead or develop committees, and participate in arduous labor just like everyone else. If we do not become involved, we are subjecting ourselves to poor standards of equality and allowing the ignorance of some people to continue, due to lack of educating on our part. People are willing to be informed and educated about blindness, therefore we must take responsibility to grasp any opportunity such as campus organizations to exercise and instill a positive blindness philosophy within them. So, if you have been wondering what to do with that little bit of spare time of yours, I highly encourage you to take the plunge and get involved with a campus organization and make a difference!

Now five months later, strolling through the quad, I over hear someone hesitantly ask; "Doesn't she need someone to help her get around?" I started to answer when a voice suddenly said, "Girl! Yolanda don't need no help." All I could do was laugh to myself. Because of my involvement, Shene had finally learned, and was now helping to educate others.

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