

By Aida C. Miles, EdD, RD

I will share my "story," which informs my opinion:

I came to the US as an international student because my country was going through a civil war and the school of nutrition was closed. I attended a college that gave me a half scholarship - something that was not common back then (in the 80s) for international students. My family could not cover the rest of my expenses. My mom lost her battle with cancer when I was a college freshman, and my dad had been disabled for many years before then. I didn't have family support and I was living in a different country, away from all the people I knew. To make ends meet I had 3 on-campus jobs (at the time, international students could only be employed on campus) and also cleaned houses and got paid under the table.

I went from being my high-school's valedictorian, to being a "good" student, but not outstanding. All I did was work and study; I barely slept, and it was exhausting.

I did my masters/internship at another university that also gave me a half-scholarship. My program was very tough and demanding, yet I still worked 20 hours a week on campus (absolutely not recommended by my academic advisor) and also cleaned houses. My grades did suffer during my masters. I was barely hanging on.

It grieves me when we evaluate students based on their grades, and assume that someone is not going to be a good dietitian because they did poorly academically. Whereas this is true in many cases (some students do not try, have little motivation, etc.), there are students out there who are barely hanging on, who don't have parents or relatives that can help them financially, but who will make great RDNs if given a chance. Many students of color, first generation students, and students living in poverty have to work MANY hours to make ends meet, and some of them also help their families financially. Some of them may still maintain excellent grades, but some/many will not.

I have had a great career. I am grateful to the faculty and mentors who believed in me. Most of them never knew that I was working so hard to make ends meet. They valued me as a person and recognized my potential.

Given my background, of course I would say that we need to evaluate the whole student, not just the grade. This is, of course, much harder to do.

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