

Mellisa Clemons
Statement of Purpose

My mother always told me, “You can do it the easy way or the hard way.” Boy, did I chose the hard way.

You should see the look on my classmates’ faces when they hear what it’s taken to earn my degree. In total, I have commuted a fifth of the way to the moon, from my home in Coeur d’Alene (Cd’A), over the past four semesters to attend class. I have studied long hours in the car and on weekends. I have paid for tuition by teaching evening science labs at North Idaho College (NIC). I’ve paid for fuel with my income from the two businesses I own and solely operate. And I also have four children.

I want to show my children that if you work hard, you can do anything. My mom put herself through nursing school as a single mom of three girls while working nights. I always told myself, “If she could do it, so could I.” She had a support system that helped her accomplish her goals, and I consider myself lucky in that department. I have an amazing support system. My family motivates me. My friends cheer for me along the way. And my instructors, both past and present, continually push me.

I always loved science growing up. But that love blossomed when I returned to NIC in 2010 to earn a degree. I fell in love with biology. Coursework had its challenges with three small children at home and one on the way, but my instructors kept me focused. During my associate’s degree, I excelled and earned an award in cadaver dissection which opened up the door to teach Anatomy and Physiology labs. That’s when I realized some of my potential.

Dr. Cheri Zao, my supervisor and former instructor, pushed me to further my education. She once told me, “To stop now, would be a waste of what you’re capable of.” I ran with it. I transferred to University of Idaho (UI) to finish my bachelors of science in biology. Attending UI has come with its own set of challenges. Getting up extra early to get kids off to school and babysitters, making my own lectures of material to listen to on my two hour commutes, and finding time to plan lab material for my students are just a few. But I have grown leaps and bounds. I have found what I am truly made of.

My research started when I earned an INBRE fellowship in summer of 2017 that had me working under Dr. Peter Fuerst. I studied the neural pathways and synapses of the mammalian retina. His satellite lab allowed me to do my research in Cd’A. I continued my research in Dr. Fuerst’s UI lab the following fall. By spring, I took on a lead role working with yeast proteins that influence cell growth. This role has allowed me to think critically about aspects of research. It’s also given me the opportunity to teach other undergraduates that take an interest in the lab.

I’ve had various experiences teaching in the past, and with every experience comes more fulfillment. I tutored classmates from grade school through college. I’ve instructed piano students of all ages for 13 years. I volunteered in STEM schools teaching elementary kids about science. I currently instruct college students from Intro Biology through Anatomy and

Physiology. Completing a graduate degree would allow me to expand on the things I am passionate about: science and teaching. Through all of the challenges that I have faced earning my degree, my instructors have helped shape me into the person I am. They have pushed me, inspired me, and opened doors that I didn't know were there.

I plan to continue my current research under Dr. Fuerst and help in further developing his satellite lab. He has played a valuable role in my education. I have been challenged working in the lab. I have overcome complications and failures by learning to utilize my resources. I have matured into stronger scientist and have learned to put more faith in myself in the process.

I am not your traditional college student. I did it the hard way. I faced the challenge of balancing family, work, and school, all from a distance. I can't think of a more perfect example that shows my sheer determination in reaching the goals that I set for myself. I have had to be creative in the ways I've accomplished those goals. Did I have help? Of course I did. I could not have done it without. My goal is to set an example. I want to be the kind of instructor for my future students that all of my instructors were for me. I want to inspire, push, and nudge the door open. Earning a graduate degree is just the next step in realizing my full potential.