



Class of 2012

Maria Pagan
Associate in Arts Degree in
Liberal Arts / Psychology



Awards/Nominations

Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities
Student Government Association: Most Dedicated Part-Time Employee Award
Student Government Association: Student Leader of the Year Award
City of Paterson: Mother of the Year Award, 2011

Mother of the Year Receives Her College Degree.

When Maria Pagan graduated from Bushwick High School in Brooklyn, where she grew up in a family of five sisters, she had no plans for college. "I had a baby and being a good parent had to come first," she said.

This week, four years after moving to Paterson for a fresh start in life, the mother of two young sons will receive her A.A. degree in Liberal Arts/Psychology. She was named to Who's Who in American Students and plans to attend Rutgers University next Fall to prepare for a career in social work.

"I came to Paterson just to live, but my life has completely transformed," said Maria who works in the PCCC Center for Student Success where she assists other students on their educational journey and has become a role model for the single mothers who struggle to balance work, school, and parenting.

“It was very difficult sometimes,” admitted Maria. She was so overwhelmed during her second pregnancy she nearly gave up, but her professors and colleagues wouldn’t let her. “PCCC supported me 100 per cent,” she said. “They grabbed me by the hand and told me I could do it.”

Maria gave birth to her second son, Dylan, in May 2009 and was back in her PCCC classes within two weeks and at her CSS job in two more weeks. “I was more determined than ever,” she said.

Her efforts paid off. In addition to her academic achievement, Maria was named Mother of the Year by the City of Paterson last year. She even managed to make her studies an asset to her parenting.

“After having dinner with my boys, I would get my homework out and they would see me study,” explained Maria. Her 9-year-old son, Jacob, followed her example with good results. “Jacob had always been a B student in school,” said Maria. This year, though, he earned only one B. “All the other grades were A’s,” beamed Maria. “He told me, “Mom, I’m going to study and go straight to college.”

Though Maria will no longer be a student at PCCC, she intends to continue working in the CSS while attending Rutgers. “My job isn’t done here yet,” said the woman who believes she has a calling to encourage and support other students.

When Human Services professor Michael D’Arcangelo observed Maria at her job, he advised her to consider social work as a career. “Maria follows through with helping students,” said Professor D’Arcangelo. “She knows her job and has the personality to be a social worker---strong, caring, helpful, and pleasant.”

Maria agrees. “I really like helping others,” she said. “That’s what I was meant to do.” Her resolve was strengthened when students she had worked with told her they were inspired by her. “Especially the single mothers,” said Maria. “They said when they saw what I was accomplishing, even while I was pregnant, they knew they could do it too.”

Though she has achieved much, the new alumna has even bigger goals. She plans to eventually pursue a Ph.D. “It would be a dream come true to be a professor at PCCC,” said Maria. “I am in awe at what PCCC enabled me to achieve,” she said. “I tell everyone what a great school this is and that if they never give up, they can succeed, too.”