



SUCCESS STORY

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Single Mom Gains I.T. Qualification And Restores Her Self-Esteem

Up until the end of last year, single mom Amanda Brewster had absolutely no idea how to use a PC. But now, only a few months later and thanks to Tidworth College, she has completed a highly specialized course in IT Networking.

Amanda, 33, from Thruxton, is only the third female student to enroll in the Cisco Networking Academy Program since the program began 18 months ago. She heard about the course through a friend and was impressed by the equipment and resources available to students at Tidworth, "It's a very nice, modern facility", she says, "and the tutorial support I received kept me motivated. It was so encouraging to hear ongoing, positive feedback about my progress. At first I found the thought of going back to College quite intimidating but the friendly atmosphere at Tidworth soon put my mind at ease."

Not only did Amanda overcome her own concerns about going back to learning, but she also had to cope with the added pressure of being the only female in a male-dominated environment. "When I turned up to the first lesson and saw that all the other students were men, I was sure they'd think I'd come into the wrong class!"

Amanda recalls. "IT Networking is traditionally a very male-orientated field and I didn't know even know how to open a Word document, let alone how to network a PC! On top of that I'm a single mom, so I was worried that others would expect me to fail. But in the end these fears just made me even more determined to succeed."

Juggling her studies alongside looking after her two sons Christie (age eight) and Dino (age seven) proved to be quite difficult, "At one stage I was working from 9 until 4 at the College, then studying for 4 hours at home in the evening and working at weekends too. I had to forget all about the housework and there were a lot of late nights! Meeting deadlines was sometimes difficult, especially in the beginning when I wasn't used to having 'homework'. But I was extremely lucky that I had friends who were able to help take care of the boys and offered support whenever I needed it."

Amanda now has to face a final examination – the Cisco Certified Networking Associate exam – after which she hopes to land a job in IT Networking. Asked





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whether she would recommend the Cisco Networking Academy Program to others in her position, she nods enthusiastically, "I would say to anyone considering a return to learning to go for it – have a little faith in yourself! There's no doubt that studying is much more difficult as a single parent because of the drain on both your finances and your time, but it was important to me that I did this and that my children could see me succeeding and improving myself. Gaining this qualification means a lot more to me than just a piece of paper; it's about restoring my self-esteem and proving myself, not only to my classmates but also to my children."

Amanda has certainly managed to prove herself to her tutor, Dave Hone, who marvels at how easily she appeared to sail through the course, "Here was someone who knew nothing whatsoever about IT and yet I've just heard her deliver a wonderful presentation on Networking! She really impresses me."

Tidworth College is one of a handful of Cisco Networking Academies and it boasts a state-of-the-art £15,000 IT workshop facility. The course is made up of both practical and theory modules and provides students with the skills to manage PC Networks and understand the working processes behind computer programs such as e-mail and the Internet.

Gender Initiative

The Cisco Learning Institute (CLI) and Cisco Systems, Inc. established the Gender Initiative in 2000. The Gender Initiative, a project established to address the gender digital divide, seeks ways to increase women's access to IT training and career opportunities. The Cisco Networking Academy Program presents an excellent opportunity to help narrow the gender gap and increase female participation in the Internet economy, thus providing a useful "research laboratory". To read more about this Cisco/Cisco Learning Institute Gender Initiative, please go to: <http://gender.ciscolearning.org/>

