



SIUE non-traditional graduate Brandi Jackson exhibits boundless strength and potential

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EDWARDSVILLE - What does it take for a wife, mom of three and first generation college student to achieve a bachelor's? One might say expert juggling skills. But more than that is dogged motivation, undeniable strength and relentless passion for achieving dreams and influencing others.

At Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Dec. 19 commencement ceremony, **Brandi Jackson**, a woman possessing all these attributes, will move her tassel from right to left and celebrate the completion of a bachelor's in accounting from the SIUE School of Business.

"My parents instilled in me a strong work ethic and the importance of having a degree, so that my siblings and I could have opportunities in life," Jackson said.

The former stay-at-home mom says she relied heavily on the strength and support of her **husband, Joseph**, extended family and friends to help her through her studies.

"I managed to juggle my personal and academic lives," she explained. "There are days where maybe I'm a better student and others when I'm a better mom. The support is what's helped me get through."

As a **student speaker** during the 9 a.m. commencement ceremony, Jackson intends to applaud her fellow graduates' success, talk about transformative lessons learned while at SIUE and share in the excitement of the bright futures awaiting them all.

"Being a non-traditional student, by age and responsibilities, it took my peers embracing me to help me realize that it's a difference that I should be proud of," Jackson said. "My experience brought something different to group projects, like being able to organize assignments and conflicting schedules."

"Students looked up to me, but I also looked up to them," she continued. "They could be doing so many things at their young age, but they were here. They were focused on achieving their degree. There's a lot to be said about that. I think we shared a mutual respect and admiration."

She also plans to share with students the invaluable advice she received from an accounting instructor. It was advice that served as her inspiration to pursue accounting.

“I’ll never forget when Steven Brant told me ‘Learning begins after struggling,’” Jackson recalled. “It sounded so simple, and he didn’t think anything of it, but that has really helped me. If I get frustrated with a concept or doubt creeps in and I just want to throw up my hands, I remember those words. You might have to struggle through something, but you’ll be fine.”

Both inside and out of the classroom, Jackson treasured the encouragement she received from faculty.

“At the end of the day, they’re getting paid whether you succeed or fail,” she said. “But to know that they were cheering me on, they were invested in me and sent multiple opportunities my way, was amazing.”

In January, Jackson will begin an internship at **Grant Thornton**, a public accounting firm in St. Louis. She also plans to study for the CPA exam and enter graduate school. Ultimately, she says, she would like to become a professor.

“I’ve been inspired by my professors at SIUE to become a professor myself,” Jackson said. “I enjoy teaching, and I’ve found that it’s a strength a lot of my peers have made me aware of.

“One day, I would like inspire other students. My advice to students now is to set your goals and pencil out a path to achieve those goals. Periodically look at them for encouragement. Also, look for opportunities to establish a mentorship. Find people who are excited about your potential and will be your advocate.”



