Toni Alexander On Being a Mom In The MPA Program
She Tells Us What Keeps Her Going

By Julia C. Dancer, February 10, 2016

When Toni Alexander tells people her children’s ages, she is always met with disbelief: “But you look so young!” Toni and her husband, Reggie, have three children: Jaydon (16), Kaelyn (12), and Kaedon (5). With only months left until graduation, she reflects here on the challenges of being a mom and a graduate student.

She admits it wasn’t easy, “you struggle, daily.” “When you’re worrying about the program,” she continues, “I’m worrying about my kids. It’s an added stress.”

How did she hold on? “I have an entire village,” she says about her mom and her sisters. But it is her husband that is the key support in her life. Toni and Reggie, who is an educator, have been together for 18 years and married for 14. “When I walk across that stage,” she says, “this is not just my degree. This is my husband’s degree. This is my children’s degree. This has changed my life in so many ways, and it’s the same for my children.”

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Toni believes her parenting experience actually helped her with graduate school. “You can feel discouraged about an assignment, and parenting is the same,” she says. “You step away, come back, knock it out, even when you feel like you’re not at your best.” And she noted you use some of the same skills in both areas, like mediation, negotiation, and problem solving.

Why an MPA degree? “MPA degrees are not a degree you just want to get to get,” she says. “You want to get it to effect change. It can’t be about the next best job. It has to be a thing where after you get the degree, your passion and your paycheck meet up. It’s not just a degree, but a profession. Show your kids that they want a career.”

Toni spent a lot of time thinking about which MPA program she would attend. At other schools, she felt she would walk away without much more than a diploma. “They felt too much like MBA programs with a different name.” She chose the Colin Powell School’s MPA because of the people. Toni says she “managed to develop relationships that will last me a lifetime.” She met people here that she “wouldn’t mind working with.”

When asked if she had a favorite saying, she quoted from Corinthians: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” After our hour-long interview about her life and her challenges, it’s hard to imagine anything striking Toni Alexander down.