

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course Name/Code

Date

### **Overcoming Financial Hardship as a First-Generation College Student**

Growing up in a low-income household as the eldest of four children, financial hardship was not an abstract concept for me: it was a daily reality. My parents immigrated to the United States with little more than a determination to build a better life, but limited English proficiency and the absence of professional credentials meant that steady, well-paying work was difficult to secure. By the time I reached high school, I had already taken on part-time work to contribute to household expenses. When I decided to pursue a college education, the financial obstacles I faced were significant, but they ultimately shaped the discipline and resourcefulness that define my approach to both my studies and my future.

#### **The Nature of the Hardship**

The financial hardship my family experienced was not the result of a single crisis event but rather a sustained condition of limited resources. My father worked multiple jobs in construction and delivery, and my mother cleaned homes on a flexible schedule to manage childcare. Together, their combined income rarely exceeded the threshold required to cover rent, utilities, groceries, and the recurring costs of raising four children. There were months when a car repair or a medical bill was enough to put the household behind on rent. College savings did not exist. The expectation, unspoken but clear, was that I would find a way to finance my education independently.

#### **Response and Adaptation**

I approached the challenge the same way my parents approached every financial difficulty: systematically and without the option of giving up. I researched every available source of funding before my senior year of high school, submitting applications to fourteen scholarships and completing the FAFSA as soon as it opened. I was awarded two scholarships and qualified for a federal Pell Grant, which together covered the majority of my tuition and housing costs. The remaining gap I covered through a part-time job in the university library, which I chose specifically because it allowed me to study during slow periods.

Managing a part-time job alongside a full course load required a level of scheduling discipline I had not previously needed. I mapped out each week in advance, blocking time for classes, work shifts, study sessions, and the unavoidable irregularities of student life. There were semesters when the balance was difficult to maintain. In my second year, a reduction in my scholarship award following a departmental policy change created a short-term funding gap that I covered by increasing my work hours for one semester before applying successfully for a replacement grant.

### **What the Experience Taught Me**

Financial hardship, sustained over time, teaches practical skills that prosperity rarely does. I learned to distinguish between expenses that were necessary and those that were merely convenient. I learned to read financial aid award letters carefully, to ask questions of the financial aid office rather than assuming I understood the terms, and to plan for contingencies rather than expecting financial stability to remain constant. These are skills I carry into my academic work in finance, where the ability to analyze risk, plan for multiple outcomes, and remain disciplined under pressure is directly relevant to the field I intend to enter.

### **Conclusion**

The financial hardship I experienced did not define my academic trajectory, but it informed it. It gave me a firsthand understanding of how financial decisions, access to credit, and institutional support systems affect the lives of people without financial reserves. That understanding is not something I could have acquired from a textbook, and it has given my interest in finance both a practical and a personal dimension that I intend to carry throughout my career.

