



**Wharton County
Junior College**

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE

WCJC's LaPan believes education to be the foundation of a prosperous society

WHARTON, TEXAS – Dr. Amy LaPan's road to Wharton County Junior College has been far from straight. From growing up in Los Angeles to working in the healthcare industry in Baltimore, LaPan has followed a singular path that presented numerous twists and turns that quite literally could have taken her anywhere.

That her journey brought her to southeast Texas and a position as WCJC's Dean of Vocational Instruction has been something of a surprise – though a pleasant one, LaPan says.

"My being a dean is very serendipitous," she said. "The community college system is one of the best options for many students."

Her initial love, after all, was music. An ardent devotee of classical music, LaPan nurtured hopes of playing French horn for a symphony orchestra while growing up in her native Los Angeles. But as she grew older and became more experienced in her skills, she realized her dream was a common one shared by hundreds of her fellow musicians.

In 1986, she found herself faced with a life-altering decision: continue in music and hope for the best or switch gears and pursue an educational degree. She chose the latter, enrolling at the University of California Los Angeles.

"For me it was a pragmatic decision," LaPan said. "It was very difficult to make a living in the fine arts."

LaPan graduated from UCLA in 1991 with an English literature degree. She found a job in the healthcare field, working in both California and later in Baltimore, Md., where she discovered that a bachelor's degree was far too limiting. It was one of LaPan's administrators that suggested she go back to school.

"This mentor realized what was best for me and was willing to support me in getting into graduate school," LaPan said.

LaPan soon obtained a master's degree in social work from California State University in Sacramento. From there she applied for the doctoral program at UCLA and was accepted. LaPan obtained a doctorate in social work in 2005.

She initially worked at the prestigious University of California, Berkeley. But LaPan quickly found herself at another crossroads. Not interested in spending her career in research, LaPan made a somewhat unexpected move to the community college system, landing a job as Dean of Health Occupation at Napa Valley College in California.

Though it was a move some of her colleagues questioned, to LaPan it made perfect sense. Her time in social work had proven to her that the key to success was obtaining an education – and, for many, that pathway began at the junior college level.

“The community college system had great appeal for me because you can really impact change,” she said. “The foundation of a civil society is a solid middle class, and the only way to achieve that is by having the right skills to enter the workforce.”

LaPan remained at Napa Valley from 2006-2010 and then served a brief stint with Corinthian College as a director of allied health curriculum. After that, she relocated to Florida where she obtained a job with South University in Tampa. In January of 2014, LaPan accepted the position of Dean of Vocational Instruction for WCJC.

In her current role, she oversees the college’s Division of Vocational Science, a varied and broad area that encompasses everything from the WCJC Police Academy to automotive technology. LaPan has been impressed with all that WCJC offers.

“I think we have a good cross section of courses,” she said. “For a college this size, we have quite a breadth of offerings on the vocational side.”

Attending a smaller college can also be a great introduction to higher learning, LaPan said.

“When you are smaller, you can be more efficient in meeting students’ needs and can develop more programs that are responsive to the community,” she said. “You can also better develop a common vision.”

Although her personal educational journey included higher-level degrees, LaPan remains convinced that associate degrees and certificate-based programs serve a critical role in today’s society.

Not everyone needs a traditional four-year degree, after all.

“Everybody has different strengths in different areas,” LaPan said. “There is a variety of work out there requiring a variety of educational backgrounds. We have to make sure that we provide opportunities for everyone.”

For more information on WCJC’s vocational science programs, visit the college’s website at www.wcjc.edu

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