



FUTA NEWS

OBINNA MICHAEL OKPARA..2013/2014 BEST GRADUATING STUDENT INTERVIEW IN THE PUNCH

It took me three years to gain admission – Futa best graduating student

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The best graduating student of the Federal University of Technology, Akure, Ondo State in the 2013/2014 academic session, Okpara Michael, 27, graduated from the Department of Biochemistry with a 4.84 CGPA. He tells TUNDE AJAJA about his experience as an undergraduate

Did you ever plan to be the best student in your set?

I never had such plan. My simple desire was to graduate with a first class; but I started seeing the signs that I could do better than lead my class when my CGPA stood at 4.84 in my 400 Level.

What will you attribute your success to?

I always put God first in everything. However, the only one way to attain academic excellence in a school like FUTA is through hard work, so I developed a working timetable for every semester, which helped me to be hardworking. I also sacrificed some pleasures to concentrate more on my academics. I realised that understanding what works for students is essential in attaining excellence. I discovered mine, applied it and it worked.

What was your performance in your previous schools?

I led my class throughout my elementary and secondary school days. I drove myself to be so excellent because I believe so much in attaining excellence in whatever I engage myself in. I never wanted to be an average student. I passed my O 'level exam at a sitting but it took me three years to gain admission into the university. In fact, I was one of the last in my set to gain admission.

Why did it take you so long to gain admission?

I wanted to study Medicine. So, in 2006, I chose Medicine as my first and second choices and I scored 65 per cent in the post-UTME but I was not admitted. In 2007, I chose Medicine again, and scored 75 per cent in the post-UTME but wasn't admitted. Since I made Medicine my first and second choices, there was nothing else or nowhere else to go, so, once I was denied admission, that was the end for that year. In 2008, I decided not to apply for UTME because of the disappointments I had in the previous years, so I took a break. Incidentally, I was on the hospital bed the day UTME held that year. However, in 2009, I sat for UTME again and I was offered admission in FUTA to study Biochemistry.

Even though I resumed late because I was still pursuing Medicine in another school, God helped me to catch up.

What do you feel when people say a course like Biochemistry is feminine?

Some of my colleagues have made such comments before and I made them to understand that Biochemistry is a course for any gender. It's about chemical reactions that take place in living things as a whole, so it has nothing to do with gender. Also, I don't believe that some courses should be attributed to a particular gender. In fact, in my department, the ratio of male to female students was approximately one to one. What matters should be individual's interest and efficiency in the course. Some people still find it difficult to believe that a man can be a nurse, which should not be.

Is the course truly abstract as some people see it?

It has to do with the chemical reactions that take place in living things, not just human beings. For example, there are complex reactions that occur in the body, such as the food we eat and the air we breathe. These things take processes before they manifest and are utilised in the body. So, Biochemistry is a study of all those reactions and processes in living things.

Since your course has a lot to do with practicals, did you ever get tired of that?

I never found practicals or being in the laboratory boring. I even prefer it to the theoretical class because the things we do in the laboratory are easier to remember because of our active participation in the process. During my project in 500 Level, some of the things I learnt in the lower levels were more real to me when I did them myself. Practical help us to understand what we learn in the classroom. So, I love practicals.

Were the six prizes you received on your convocation day as best student the first you received throughout your stay in school?

No. When I was in 200 Level, I received a scholarship award by the Federal Scholarship Board in 2010. As you can imagine, I was happy but my parents were happier. It helped them to concentrate on taking care of my siblings' bills.

How big was the scholarship?

I was receiving N150,000 per session from 200 Level till my 500L when I graduated. The money really helped me and it sustained me till I graduated. Before then, I was squatting and could hardly feed to my taste and satisfaction, but the money made things easier for me. It opened my eyes to see how much scholarship would have helped many people and made life easier for them. It was a major shift for me, and it has been my happiest moment ever.

Who introduced the scholarship programme to you?

I learnt about it online and since it covered all levels, I applied, just as many others did. The requirement was a 4.0 CGPA, so I had no problem. I went for the exam and to the glory of God, I was the only undergraduate among 10 students who won the scholarship that year in FUTA. The other nine were postgraduate students.

What were the challenges you faced as a fresh student?

My first year was the toughest, as I had to 'squat' with friends, so also was the start of the second year. I didn't have my own apartment until I got to 200 Level. Apart from the fact that it was my first time of spending months away from home, there were days that I could afford to eat just once so as to manage my pocket money, which was not even regular. I had to do serious calculations before I could spend money and I was always drawing a scale of preference to make sure my spending was in order.

Can you tell us about your background?

I was raised in a family where I learnt that regardless of what we achieve, we could always be better. That influenced my performance in school because I would always strive to do better than my previous performance. My parents were of much help too; very caring and honest. My dad is a very hardworking man who values time and frowns at laziness. So, I grew under him to imbibe those qualities. We were not very rich but my parents did their best.

What was your reading pattern in school?

I read for as long as my brain could assimilate, usually in my room at midnight because that was the best time for me to read or do my assignments. The average number of hours I read was three hours and I set daily target for myself. On the average, I slept for about seven hours daily. Beyond academics, I was a bit social and at my leisure, I used to listen to music and discuss football with my friends.

Do you still remember some of your results?

I may not be able to remember all the GPAs and CGPAs, but the lowest GPA I had throughout was 4.71, and that was my 100 Level second semester. My lowest grade was a 'C' in 100 Level second semester. I wouldn't know if the inconveniences, the squatting and inadequate pocket money for basic needs, were partly responsible, because I had better performance subsequently. In fact, the least grade I had after that was 4.80 and I had 5.00 sometime.

What are your aspirations?

I hope to go for my Master's Degree and PhD in Biochemistry, preferably in Europe. Biochemistry has totally replaced the love I used to have for Medicine. I love to further my studies and be involved in some groundbreaking research works in my field, and then impart the knowledge in others.

Where would you like to work?

I'm hoping to work either in an educational institution or a structured organisation where I can utilise my knowledge of Biochemistry to impart and improve lives. If it's an institution, I like a federal institution like FUTA, but if it's an organisation, I would like to work with the United Nations or its subsidiaries like the World Health Organisation. That would be touching lives and be involved in research works on a larger scale.

What is your advice to students who want to attain excellence?

Students should realise that their 100 and 200 levels are very crucial, because those are the formative years in the higher institution. A good start is crucial for an overall good performance. They should also put God first in everything they do, attend lectures regularly, never miss practical classes and be careful with the kind of company they keep. Hard work is a vital ingredient for academic excellence.

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Contact: editor@punchng.com