

Thuzong Xiong (Tuz)  
Received at WAFBLA 7/18/11

At the beginning of my freshmen year I went to the first FBLA meeting Cedarcrest High School had in a long time. A new teacher, Donna Bielstein, had just reactivated the chapter that year. I walked in late. Ms. Bielstein was already well into her introduction into what FBLA is, and I already felt intimidated. You see, my freshmen year I still lacked the confidence in myself and the belief I could do anything I set my mind to. That year I did not join FBLA, but I quickly regretted it when second semester came around and Ms. Bielstein was my Digital Communications teacher. In that class, I got to talk to her more about what you did in FBLA, and I planned to join next year.

My sophomore year, I joined FBLA like I planned but still did not want to take any risk or step out of my comfort zone. I went to the fall and winter conferences and participated in a community service activity that my friend Jake, then VP of Community Service, planned. That was about it. I still refused to step out of my comfort zone and did not grow much that year.

My Junior year was completely different. That year Cedarcrest hosted the fall conference, so Ms. Bielstein asked all the members to help set up and wrap things up at the end of the conference. We had fun with it, singing the Cedarcrest fight song, greeting chapters at the door when they came in, and other things. This was the first time I did more than just the bare minimum, and it paid off. From there I got more involved, studied hard and practiced with my team for Banking and Financial Systems, and took third place at the winter conference. This was a brand new event, and I felt that my team and I could be serious contenders at the state conference. I wanted to go, compete, and finally share in the experience of a longer conference. There was one problem though. The state conference was on our spring break, and every spring break I have always helped my parents on the farm and at the market. My family grows and sells flowers at Pike Place Market, and they need our help at times to get things done. It was hard convincing them to let me go, but I am lucky enough to have parents that understand the importance of education and experience. I told Ms. Bielstein I was going to state, and soon after my cousin Nhuchia asked me to be her campaign manager. She ran for State Secretary, and I wanted to make sure she got it. We worked long and hard together to compile all of the materials she needed, wrote and rewrote my introduction for her and her speech, and tried to take care of every detail possible in preparation. I even pressed over 300 vote for Nhuchia buttons, some of which I still have. The preparation was a lot of work, but it was

fun with good company and plenty of jokes from Ms. Bielstein. Finally the conference came. We were so busy with the campaign and practicing that the conference has become somewhat of a blur, but a couple moments stand out. As her campaign manager I had to give a quick introduction before she delivered her candidate speech. It was under a minute, but when I walked up on stage and saw the entire bottom part of the opera house and three rows in the balcony filling, my heart sank. I had practiced the introduction to the point to memorization, but it was still the most nerve racking experience of my life. I was surprised to hear my voice projecting over my fellow members without any shaking. I thought I would be mumbling and fumbling with my words due to my nervousness, but it wasn't there. Nhuchia finished her speech, we sat down, and it hit me. I just spoke in front of 1,700 people. That experience and placing third at state in Banking and Financial Systems built my confidence more than anything previous to that. I came home changed. I was confident, bold, and I had a new level of determination. I was determined to do more than the status quo, I had seen what my hard work could accomplish, and planned to do more. I ran for the office of VP Community Service for my local chapter and won. I quickly planned a community service event before the school year ended, and it was a success. For the first time, my hard work had results in a different form than good grades.

Senior year rolled around, and I made it my year. I planned and coordinated multiple community service events including tree planting, a clothing drive for foster children, helping at Camp Korey, and adopting a road near our high school. My hard work paid off, and it was personally rewarding to see my efforts go beyond a letter grade. FBLA opened my eyes. It allowed me to see the importance of experience on top of education. In January the state VP for my region resigned and left a vacancy on the state officer team. Ms. Bielstein was not only my local chapter adviser, but the long-time regional adviser for the West Central Region. She asked our Cedarcrest officer team if any of us wanted to step up into that state position. I had joked a couple days before about taking the position when I learned it was open, and Ms. Bielstein said "you might." This made me panic a little bit. When she asked the officer team, I told her I wanted to step up; but another officer did, too. That was worked out, and I attended the January Executive meeting later that weekend and was appointed to be the State Vice President representing the West Central Region. But beforehand, I had to have a serious talk with my parents. I was growing up fast my senior year, and they worried that I was taking on too much responsibility, and I cannot say I was one hundred percent confident with myself either. Preparing and running conferences along with my other state officer duties proved to be a true test of my metal, but with the support of my fellow officers, advisers, and the WAFBLA staff, it was an unmatched experience. State Business Leadership Conference to me was the culmination

of all the hard work and experiences I have had with FBLA. All of the days were smashed and blended together with tears, running around to be in the right place at the right time, and practicing for the opening and closing sessions. After SBLC things winded down. New officers replaced the officers on both teams I was on, and the last thing was our Cedarcrest FBLA Banquet. My senior year was made by FBLA and friends.

FBLA, more than anything to me, was a brotherhood. I gained confidence, experience, time management skills, communication skills, organization, and friends. I will use everything I learned in FBLA for the rest of my life, and I know I will live my life with my friends, my FBLA family.

Executive Director note: Following Tuz' senior year, the state office received the following note from him.

*"Dawne and Judy, this year has been an adventure. It is almost unnerving how much I've grown and changed. I can never put into words what FBLA has done for me, but here is my best shot. FBLA has been my vessel. It has taken me places I could never imagine and has broadened my horizons. I stood on stage during closing ceremony and wondered where FBLA will take me next. Thank you times a million for all you have done for me and WAFBLA. This year has been the most influential and important to me, and you guys have been an important part of it." Signed "You son, Tuz Xiong"*