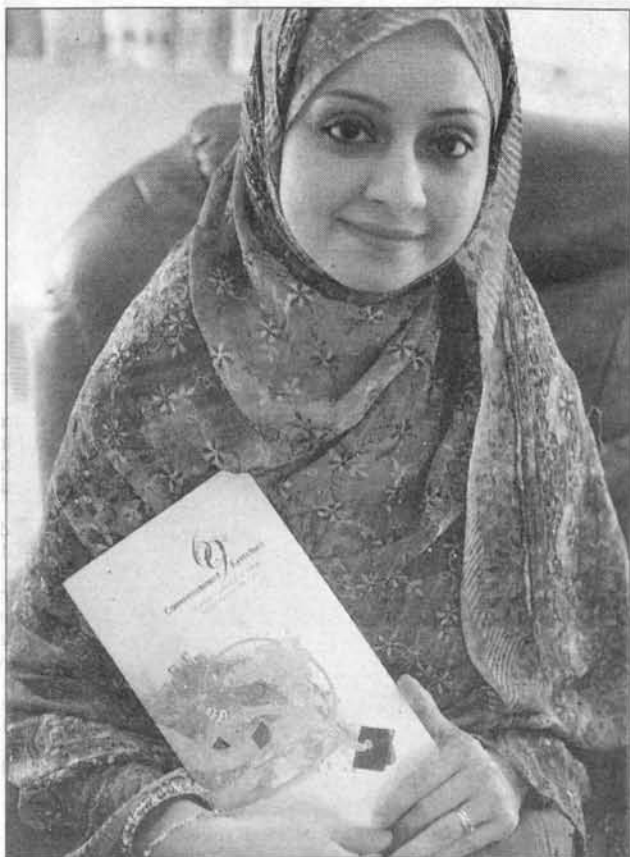


Top CUNY honors for 'hesitant' student



City University College of Technology valedictorian Ayesha Siddiqui proved to herself that she had the right stuff. Photo by Jeanne Noonan

BY MEREDITH KOLODNER
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

FOUR YEARS ago, Ayesha Siddiqui didn't know if she could go back to school.

With two small children, a husband who worked full time and family far away in Pakistan, she wasn't sure she could manage.

"After two kids, I was a little hesitant," said Siddiqui, 34. "I wasn't sure if I would be able to do well here in such a different environment."

In 2005, she took the plunge.

Her husband, Muhammed Anwar, took an evening shift at his job at Maimonides Medical Center's blood bank so she could go to school five days a week at Kingsborough Community College.

She finished her associate's degree in just one year. Today she is the 2009 valedictorian of City University's College of Technology.

"My professors were so good to me," said Siddiqui, who immigrated here in 2000. "They gave me so much confidence."

While attending Kingsborough, she would awake at 6 a.m., get the house in order and make the kids' lunches and the family's dinner. At 9 a.m., she would hand over her sons, 2 and 4 years old, to her husband so she could get to class by 10 a.m.

"I had a one-hour commute, which was very peaceful," she

CUNY Valedictorians	
FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES	
Baruch College	Alexander Kohen Queens College
Arthur Lotz Brooklyn College	Steven Appel York College
Nicole Lebonson City College	Gloria Velasco
Samreen Nayyer College of Staten Island	COMMUNITY COLLEGES
Dorothy Caldone John Jay College of Criminal Justice	Borough of Manhattan Community College
Heike Zelnhefer Lehman College	Opyami Akanje Bronx Community College
Yolanda Alvarez Medgar Evers College	Denise Comara LaGuardia Community College
Wayde Niles New York City College of Technology	Graduation is in September Queensborough Community College
Ayesha Siddiqui Hunter College	Not decided yet Hostos Community College
Jorge Baquero, Corinne Vidulich and	Dwayne Dacosta Kingsborough Community College
	Raluca Toscano

said. "I got a lot of studying done then. I am very thankful for the B1 bus."

Entering City Tech, she discovered most of the classes she needed were offered only in the afternoons and evenings, so her husband switched to the 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift.

"I wasn't sure if it would work, but my husband said, 'This is the time, you can do this,'" she said.

The Bensonhurst resident is one of a dazzling array of CUNY's best and brightest who excelled at city colleges and universities this year.

Hunter College has three top students:

■ A former dancer whose ballet career ended because of an injury six years ago and is on her way to becoming a biologist.

■ A Queens native who turned down offers at several elite colleges to go to Hunter and will enter NYU Law school in the fall.

■ A Colombian-born resident who entered a city high school without speaking a word of English.

At other schools, a Navy veteran and dad of three who worked full time at New York City Transit will earn the top slot at Medgar Evers College with a 3.9 GPA. A former Bronx Community College dropout returned there after a decade to take the valedictorian title.

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