

**A Bumpy Road to NCCU**  
**ATL Chapter Holiday Scholarship Recipient's Story**  
By Saria M. Canady

Sometimes, you gotta do what you gotta do.

That's the mantra by which NCCU student Tiffany Ross lives. Ross, 27, is the 2009 recipient of the NCCU Greater Atlanta Alumni Chapter's Holiday Scholarship.

"I'm so grateful for it," Ross said of \$250 the scholarship, given to her based on need and her academic standing.

Ross boasts a 3.5 GPA, but she isn't just making the grade. She is also making waves and a name for herself at the university. Last year, she was awarded for her community service efforts, and recently was invited to speak at the alumni reunion banquet.

"I got to rub elbows with important people," she said. But it hasn't always been smooth sailing for Ross.

On a recent Tuesday evening, while making a food run with a friend, the Atlanta native spoke of her long journey to North Carolina Central University. A journey that has been plagued with trials, setbacks, and sacrifices.

"You might hear my car rattling," she said to excuse the background noise emitting from her old car as she told her story. "We call it the snake." She laughed.

It's a testament to her ability to make the most of life's inconveniences, including one that derailed her first attempt at a college degree.

Although not her first major setback, it came when Ross was a sophomore at Morris Brown College. She had enrolled in the HBCU after graduating from the magnet program at North Atlanta High School. But when Morris Brown lost its accreditation in December 2002, Ross had to leave school along with more than 2,000 other students who were left without federal aid.

"My transcript was in limbo Morris Brown's loss of accreditation also put Ross' transcript in limbo, leaving her unable to transfer to another college.

On top of her academic woes, Ross was already facing struggles at home. Before long, those struggles marred her second college attempt, this time at Atlanta Metropolitan College. With too many distractions and declining grades, Ross put down the books again to focus solely on the most important thing in her life — family.

She was living in Atlanta's troubled English Avenue neighborhood, otherwise known as "The Bluff," in a two-bedroom apartment she shared with her disabled mother, younger sister, brother, sister-in-law and five nieces and nephews. Ross said a string of personal hardships, including a

house fire, forced them into that uncomfortable position and they were all depending on her to hold it together.

And hold it together she did, working full time as the household breadwinner — with school on the far back burner.

That is, until a friend told her about NCCU and encouraged her “to take a leap.”

But she didn’t get the acceptance letter she had hoped for. Instead, she said, university officials told her that her GPA wasn’t high enough, but that she could reapply after taking a list of classes elsewhere.

So, Ross set her determination in motion. She re-enrolled in Atlanta Metropolitan College, taking night classes while continuing to work full time during the day to support her family.

Her hard work paid off, too. She raised her GPA and reapplied to NCCU. This time the answer was yes. And despite not having any family or friends in the area, Ross loaded up her car and headed to the Bull City.

“It was kind of like the break I needed,” Ross said. “My family has always been my first priority, so going back to school was the one thing I could do for myself.”

Although she recalls bouts of homesickness, feelings of guilt for leaving her family behind, and the challenges of being a nontraditional, she said she constantly reminds herself that she is just doing what she has to do. She believes sacrificing now to serve a greater good in the future.

She hopes to graduate with her bachelor’s degree in public administration by the spring of 2011, secure a job with a government agency as a contract specialist and work her way up the ranks to director or coordinator. She hasn’t yet decided whether she will attend NCCU to get her master’s or head back south.

In the meantime, she is still trying to conquer the everyday stress and financial challenges. She juggles an 18-hour class load with a part-time job at T-Mobile and a work study in the campus Alumni House. And she still keeps heart and mind on home. Using most of her financial aid refund to cover her housing at Campus Crossing, Ross sends any extra money home to her family.

No easy feat my any stretch of the imagination, but Ross is confident NCCU is where she should be.

“I know I made the right decision,” she said.