I remember the first moment I made my way to the Bemidji State University campus. I got here on a Friday afternoon on a winter day in December of 2008. I came early so I would be able to complete all of my paperwork and be prepared for classes the following month. While on campus that day, I met a few staff members who were so organized. I observed that each one of them was performing different tasks and, at the same time, working toward the same goal. I admired the organizational structure. It looked like the internal organs in our body where each one is performing separate duties, but obliged to work together for successful function of that body.

After meeting a few staff members, the admissions officer, the financial aid officer and my academic advisor, I went to the bookstore. The books were orderly arranged as in a library, and I kept looking at various books as if I were in the library! I bought a few texts and then left. I was set to commence school in the second week of January of 2009.

On the first day of school in January, I felt very excited and at the same time was very nervous because it was my first day in the university, and I did not know anyone. I was like a strange bird that just fell from the sky. Since I had been in Minnesota, I hadn’t spent time in this part of the state.

That first day, I also didn’t know how to get to my classroom. I was lost and had to ask someone about the academic buildings where I was going to take my classes. The person was
very nice and gave me good directions. I walked to the building. When I arrived, I saw a few
students and felt strange because they did not know me.

I approached one girl and asked where the classroom was. We discovered that we were in
the same class, so I felt less nervous. I introduced myself, and she did also. Her name was
Marilyn. We went into the class and in few minutes, the professor entered. When we were done
with that class, Marilyn took time to lead me to the other classrooms. She was very kind to me
that day and I praise her for that. I met another person, and introduced myself to him. His name
was Nambee. We got to know more about each other – where we were from and our majors.
After that, we spent the rest of the day together until we had to go home.

Nambee and I enrolled in a political science class, and we worked on a project together,
which was given to us by Dr. Donnay. We made a trip sponsored by the Minnesota
Environmental Partnership (MEP) to meet with state representatives and discuss a number of
issues concerning the state of Minnesota, like proper mining, environmentally “clean” cars for
the state, building sensible communities, and investing for Minnesota’s future. Minnesota
Environmental Partnership (MEP) is a coalition of organizations committed to the protection and
restoration of Minnesota’s lakes, rivers, streams, forests, natural areas, parks and trails.

The event was held on Monday, February 16 at the state capitol during the Minnesota
Environmental Partnership Lobby Day in St. Paul. I had the opportunity to be among many
students from Bemidji State University; we were at the capitol to lobby for the approval of the
bills. The meeting with the law makers was very appealing. They welcomed us and they
embraced our views as we enumerated our concerns. I was very excited about the session held at
the capitol. It enlightened me about how the way bills are passed in the United States. It allowed me to understand the relationship between the law makers and their constituents.

It was an inspiring moment for me, through Bemidji State University. I come from a country that has similar system of government, and while it has almost the same format for its constitution, most acts of democracy have not been practiced, especially in previous regimes where constituents did not have the opportunity to engage leaders and express their views on public matters.

I observed that the law makers were open minded; they responded positively to all of our questions and even promised to ensure that the bills were enacted. Moreover, one of them accepted an invitation to come to the university campus and talk more about issues of concern. This shows that democracy is truly being practiced in American society; the leaders are here for the people and are accountable to them.

I also observed that constituents are not just sitting around enjoying the benefits of government, but are involved with society through various organizations and interest groups, identifying ills and projecting solutions. I think this is something very good to do. I feel it maintains peaceful relations among the people and promotes development.

I will always remember those moments because it was an opportunity for me to meet new people and begin learning new things I had not known before. I think my experience during the first week on campus was something natural. Every student feels nervous, but things always get better as time goes by. Now I have many friends who have come from different areas of the United States and other parts of the world. So far, we have been working together, I do not feel the way I used to feel when I came to campus during the first week. Making friends on campus
can make a big difference. Also, the meeting held at the capitol with law makers was very important because it developed in me a sense of leadership. It erased the notion that people who lead us should be the only ones to discuss important matters and come up with a solution.