

The Last Word

By Claudia Ricci, Ph.D.'96

UAlbany opened “a whole new world up to me.”



Claudia Ricci, a faculty member with UAlbany's journalism program and the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), was formerly a staff writer for *The Wall Street Journal* and an award-winning reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Her first novel, *Dreaming Maples*, was published in 2002. She is pictured here with her daughter – and fellow UAlbany alumna – Lindsay Kirsch, B.A.'08.

The students couldn't be any nicer, or more polite. Bright and engaged, the undergraduates come to my English class ready to speak their minds. A few of them are just brilliant.

Oh, and the campus here at Georgetown, where I am on leave from the University at Albany, is picture perfect: a genteel mix of new and old brick. A grassy quad sits in front of an elegant old building with towers and spires and charcoal grey stone.

But as I stroll past that building returning to my office after my noon-hour seminar, I picture some of the earnest faces of the students who have passed through my UAlbany classrooms. That's when it hits me: I miss UAlbany. I miss the students I love so much. I miss the very public-ness of the university where I carved my identity as a teacher.

For so many UAlbany students I've had the privilege of teaching – many of whom are in the Educational Opportunities Program – the state university was their only affordable option. Without SUNY, their educational loss would be immense.

The students here at Georgetown, by contrast, have the great luxury of choice. If they hadn't gone to Georgetown, they would probably be at some other private university where the brick and grass and stone mix with plenty of academic opportunity.

It's not that Georgetown isn't incredible, because it is. But so is UAlbany. It is a fine school that has made an extraordinary difference in so many thousands of lives – including my own. A whole new world opened up to me after I earned my Ph.D. in 1996. My daughter, a transfer who studied Latin and Caribbean Studies – which she adored – proudly earned her diploma in May 2008.

When I did my doctoral work at UAlbany, I already had a B.A. from Brown University and a master's from the University of California at Berkeley. I was well acquainted with public and private education. What I found at UAlbany were some of the most inspirational teachers I'd ever had, wonderful role models as I began my own teaching career in 1998.

I am very grateful to have this sabbatical experience here in Washington, D.C., especially at this pivotal time in our nation's history. But something has become very clear to me since moving here in January: I am incredibly proud to be a teacher at a public university. My heart and soul are deeply embedded in the vitally important enterprise that is public education.