Simona Miulescu
Data Analyst

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How did you get interested in Data Analytics and what has your journey been like so far? What is your background?

I was born and raised in Romania under a communist regime. At 22, I fled to the U.S. in pursuit of freedom and a better life. I worked two jobs and took English classes at night. Eventually I became a Human Resources Specialist, working for the same company for 12 years. At mid-career, I found that my job skills had become obsolete due to outsourcing and virtualization. Since my HR positions included a great deal of Data Analysis I applied for and was hired as a Data Analyst with Hewlett Packard Enterprises—under a division which is now with Perspecta, after a couple of spin-mergers.

I believe a pivotal moment in my life was the fact that I went back to school and started the new job at the same time that my daughter was a senior in high school and was preparing for her future. She was and continues to be a tremendous inspiration for me. My daughter Bela, my only child, is a Materials Engineering major at the University of Florida and turned 20 last week. So, having a daughter so passionate about science influenced my own career.

Why did you decide to attend Broward College?

I felt limited with my technical skills, so I decided to go back to school. I learned via Career Source Broward that I qualified for retraining under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and I could receive a scholarship since Information Technology (IT) was one of the industries needing more professionals. I participated in an orientation, took a certification exam, was accepted into the program and then tested for placement. I was motivated by testing into college math and English, despite not having taken an academic test for many years.

I was still uncertain of which program within IT to pursue when I took a database course with Professor Felicidad Archila—loved it—and ultimately was able to specialize in Data Analytics.

What do you love about your field?

Being able to learn new skills and train my brain plasticity to embrace all these new things that I am constantly learning; there is a lot of power and confidence that comes from finding that I can actually master something new.

What advice do you have for other women considering this career?

Basically, my message is: If I can do it, anybody can. When I went to high school, we didn't have computers. So, you can imagine how starting college classes felt, as most classes are blended with online learning. Just navigating the college's online platform was scary to me, as I was trying to understand which part was blended and what to do next. Since I was working during the day and going to class at night, I had to be very disciplined. With every course I started taking I thought I was going to fail.

Simona and Her Daughter

I remember taking a Linux class with Professor Farris, which involved virtual machines in the cloud. I didn't even know what the "cloud" was. It was very scary, but Professor Farris said, "We are going to take it one step at a time and we're going to record what we do in class," and I have to tell you I watched those videos until I could basically recite each step.

Practice and repetition gave me the confidence to stay the course. So, my advice is take a few courses, don't take one and give up! Take two, three, four, or five. Even if you pass with a B or a C, the most important thing is that you passed the course. When you take two, three, four, five classes you are going to find out what you like because your brain by that point is plastic, elastic and happy—it's going to tell you what to do next. It is going to point you in the right direction.
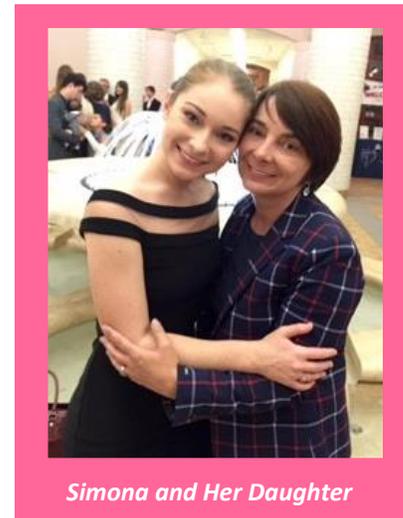
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What is the pay like for a Data Analyst? What is the career ladder like?

Let me put it in perspective for you: it took me 10 plus years in human resources to get to the salary that I started with as a freshman Data Analyst.

I am now part of a team of Data Analysts receiving work assignments that increase in difficulty with experience. As you acquire skills, you become a core person on your team. You become a subject matter expert in certain aspects of your work, and that gives you great satisfaction as a professional. Of course, as you progress through your career, you receive performance appraisals every year. If they are favorable and exceptional, compensation follows suit.

Tell us what you do as a Data Analyst: What is a typical workday like? What is the work environment like?

The Data Analysis that our team conducts involves mining a huge data repository based on clients' specifications. It is basic Data Analytics with the aid of predictive modelling using a variety of software tools. This is a piece I was able to really master—the ability to embrace new software and multiple software programs to analyze the data. The more you learn to be flexible and adapt to changes, the easier it gets.

What makes you successful in your work? What is your greatest professional accomplishment?

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I am proud to have contributed to the client contract renewal for our division. It's a very intricate and comprehensive process to rebid on a contract of this magnitude. Our client was very happy with our performance. I would consider that my most significant accomplishment.

What challenges have you overcome?

Before Broward College, when my husband bought a new TV and there were three remotes on the coffee table downstairs in my living room, it scared me to think that I would have to operate three remotes to figure out how to watch TV. Every time he bought me a new phone, I felt I didn't want the new phone because I would have to figure it out from scratch.

Now, I am dying to get the new phone and play with it. If I find out about new software, like Excel coming out with Power BI, I ask Broward College: "Do you have a course in Power BI because it sounds so interesting? I want to take it." Not only did I take Power BI-1, but I also took Power BI-2 and when I found out that Power BI is called the "dumbed-down Tableau" I said to myself, "Well, if this is dumb then I want to see Tableau," so I am taking a Tableau course right now.

When I was the new kid on the block in my job, I had to ask my team for help every day. Now I get to be of help to others on my data team, which is absolutely amazing!

How has Broward College helped you in your Data Analyst job?

I started classes at Broward College the same time that I started this job with Hewlett Packard—entry-level in my job and freshman in college. The best thing that happened was that I started both at the same time. It was a perfect synergy between taking classes that enhance my skillset and the opportunity to be able to apply these skills at work. I was in a very fortunate position, and I still am, because what I learn I have a chance to at least try or practice or apply at work. This is an ideal scenario for someone to be able to do that, and I realize not many people have this luxury.

Do you have female Tech professionals in your company?

As a matter of fact, I am very proud and happy to say that my direct supervisor—my team lead—is a woman. Hewlett Packard Enterprises—and now Perspecta—attracted many women to technology, and it was very important for me to see that.

In my IT classes at Broward College, it is predominantly male enrollees. However, during the past four years I have seen more women joining these classes, which is very encouraging. I believe that the Data Analytics field is very
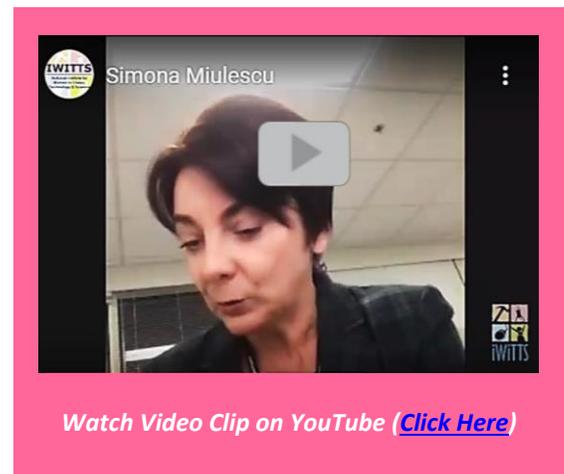
appealing to women in IT. Sometimes IT terminology and narratives revolving around technical names and program and degree descriptions sound very manly. We have to make these degrees more approachable to women by how we market them and how we express them and how we portray them.

Do you have a mentor or role model?

I met Professor Felicidad Archila at Broward College and she was the catalyst; she was instrumental in my being able to find my path. There are hundreds of advisors at Broward College, but she is beyond an advisor. She is a role model and mentor to me and many others. I took a database course with Professor Archila and I was really impressed. She brought real-life scenarios and case studies into her class and I realized that her class was just going by so fast. Working full-time and starting a new job, with a daughter a senior in high school—drop off and pick up and after school activities and SAT's and everything you can think of—you can imagine that I needed motivation to be able to be engaged and to stay awake in class most late nights. In life, work, and school, I make it a point to be engaged because that is what keeps me interested.

With Professor Archila, to be engaged was effortless—it was organic and natural. It was obvious to me that she understood the real world and the need to sync academics with the workplace. Otherwise, we graduate, but we are not marketable. Professor Archila wanted to know what I found useful from my classes that was applicable to my Data Analysis position at Hewlett Packard. She invited me to sit on the Broward College advisory committee as an employee of a Fortune 100 company. Professor Archila also advised me on course selection and that led to the development of a new program with Broward College--the *Bachelor of Applied Science in Computer Science and Technology Management with a Data Analytics Track*. This is my dream come true as far as a degree goes. This is my dream degree.

I understand you won an award from Broward College in 2018.

On April 30, 2018, Broward College recognized a group of faculty and students as "Extraordinary Women of Distinction in TECH". I am honored to be part of the group receiving this award.

Do you have any Certifications?

Only a few so far, including CIW Database Design Specialist, CIW Web Foundation Associate. I am also a SAP Business Objects Web Intelligence 4.2. and SAS Enterprise 8.1 user.

Tell us about your current studies.

I am two semesters away from completing the Bachelor of Applied Science in Computer Science and Technology Management in the Data Analytics track with Broward College.

Simona's Women in Tech Award from Broward College

How do you like to spend your time off?

I love to travel with my family. We visit our family in Transylvania (Romania) and also try to add a new country to the itinerary, whenever possible. I love to sing, as my mom did when I was growing up, and I'm part of the church choir. My daughter loves musical theater. Music has always been an important part of our family life. I also love to read and work in the garden.