

Some time ago, I stood at the door of the academic advising office at UBC Vancouver, feeling intimidated and insecure, and hoping to talk to someone about becoming a student.

I was 31 years old and had finally found the nerve to quit what had long been an unsatisfying career. I didn't know it at the time, but I was considered a "non-traditional" student, a "mature" student, without the grades or the courses or the prerequisites typically required for entrance to university. Frankly, I didn't even know what a prerequisite was. I didn't know what grades I'd received in high school and I didn't know where to get a copy of my transcript. I didn't really know what a transcript was either.

I got lucky. UBC turned me away.

I was accepted into a local college and I spent the next two years experimenting with courses that sounded interesting. I studied English, Philosophy, History, Spanish, and Psychology. It was a life-changing time for me as I discovered interests and passions I didn't know I had. After two years, I transferred the credits I'd accumulated to Simon Fraser University and finished a Bachelor of Arts degree in English.

I surprised myself by turning out to be a pretty good student—as many mature students are—and I ultimately completed a Masters degree in English, specialising in Rhetoric and Writing. I'm now a faculty member in the Department of Communications at Okanagan College and I love my job. In particular, I love watching students surprise themselves as they learn what they're really good at, especially when they didn't think they were very good at anything at all.

I got lucky again last year when UBC-O turned me away for a second time and let me stay on at Okanagan College. The college lets me work with students in an environment that supports their success, regardless of their age or academic background. I get to know my students and they get to know me. No one is made to feel intimidated or insecure and, above all, no one gets left standing at my door.

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