

Facing fear: Expert tips from a professor on confronting college fright

October 14, 2015



College can seem costly and intimidating. Many first generation college students feel especially lost and afraid — mostly because they have no one with prior experience to tell them what to expect in college.

With that in mind, I asked my peers some about their common fears and worries. These are the results:

- “Not graduating in time and my parents having to pay more money because of it.”
- “Getting lazy with just doing the bare minimum instead of working to my full potential!”
- “Studying this major and finding out that it’s not what I want to do for the rest of my life.”
- “Failing.”
- “Having all this college debt with no job.”
- “Not being able to find a job once I graduate.”
- “Not living up to my parents’ expectations.”

Now, none of these fears seem far-fetched. I decided to go to Dr. William Altman, a psychology professor here at SUNY Broome, for a more professional opinion on how to deal with these common fears.

I ended up getting a lot more than I bargained for! Not only did he answer my questions on how to deal with these fears, he also imparted some very valuable life lessons. He began by saying, “The best way to deal with your

fears is face them.” As obvious as that seems, most people don’t do this. Dr. Altman, however, gave some practical advice in facing college fears.

Do your research

The best way to succeed in college is doing your research and gathering beneficial resources, he advised. One great resource he mentioned was ONETonline.org, a website where you can find a career based on your interests and the most current data relating to that career such as the employment rate, how to find jobs in that field, the average pay, the years of college or experience needed and where you can get both. Another great website is Grants.gov, which shows all different types of grants available. Worried about paying off those loans? There’s a public service and teacher fellowship loan forgiveness programs, which pay off your student loans after a certain number of years on the job. Not many people know about these things, but there are hundreds of resources out there to help us prosper on our road to success.

‘Do what you love – in a way that makes sense’

When talking about pleasing others versus choosing a career path or major you truly want, Dr. Altman shared several important statements.

First, “Do what you love in ways that make sense.” He followed this with a story of an old acquaintance, a painter who also worked in a pizza shop. He’d save and save and save until he had enough money to stop working for a few years, devote that time to his paintings and then go back to work once the money was gone. While unconventional, he made everything work for him. Having a financial security blanket so you can truly do what you love is always an option. People should never think that they can’t do what they love and make money from it, because it’s entirely possible.

Second, “Failure is not an option; failure is a requirement. Fear is useful. Fear alerts us and makes us consider things. Too much fear can paralyze you.” For a different perspective on fear and rejection, Dr. Altman discussed cognitive therapy. He explained the process as taking something you believe to be true – such as a particular fear – and testing it like a hypothesis. Once it is proven wrong, you no longer need to accept your doubt or fear as truth. Amazing right? It’s that simple. So is channeling your fear as motivation rather than a hindrance. To avoid being paralyzed, ask yourself, “What am I going to do with this fear?”

These types of fears don’t change overnight; they take time and determination to work through. These words of wisdom from Dr. Altman definitely helped me and will hopefully help you on your college journey. One last tip: writing out your goals and having them on your wall somewhere visible gives you a greater chance at achieving them. They’re in your face every day, a constant reminder of what you want to do and can easily achieve if you truly want it.

Writer Samantha Figueroa is a SUNY Broome student.

Filed Under: [Uncategorized](#)

© 2022 · SUNY Broome

The Focus: SUNY Broome's Faculty & Staff Newsletter