



Tales

Of Academic Survival

A collection of narratives by the students and faculty
of the University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu

Editor's Note

The idea for *Tales of Academic Survival* came to me in September as I read the fall 2008 Student Equity Excellence and Diversity (SEED) proposal announcement. As a newcomer to the state of Hawai'i and specifically to the UH West O'ahu campus, I noticed the large number of first-generation college students in our service area (Pearl City, Aiea, and northward to Wai'anae). I also observed and admired the hardworking students who came into our tutoring center for help—students who juggle several jobs and family responsibilities as they make their way through papers, tests and projects. I wanted to find a way to honor and encourage students new to academic culture, to offer words of experience and inspiration. What better way than to publish a book of our essays?

We sent out a call for stories from the university community. We invited students, faculty, and staff to tell a story about some phase of their university experience that helped them to be better students and better understand the university experience.

We thank the Diversity and Equity Initiative at the University of Hawai'i for this grant to produce *Tales of Academic Survival*. We will distribute this booklet to current members of our university, as well as to potential students pondering a college path as they transition from high school, or a career or military change. My hope is that *Tales of Academic Survival* provides practical advice and inspiration (through well-written essays) that can be focused on this “battle cry” from Dr. Ideta's essay: “See you at commencement!”

Emily Nye

Director, University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu Writing and Learning Center

Thank you: Stacy Naipo for editing help, Valentino Valdez and Julie Funasaki Yuen in the Public Relations and Marketing Department.

Foreword

The stories in this collection of essays reflect the struggles, accomplishments and overall wisdom of the members of our university community. Read just a few pages and you'll get a sense of the rich diversity of our UH West O'ahu 'ohana. Although these authors are at different levels or stages of life and have varied education goals, they are united in their message: getting a college degree is not easy, but we're doing it, and you can too!

My own path began at Leeward Community College and led me to UH Mānoa and then to graduate school on the mainland. When I first started my college journey I had no idea how daunting the challenges would be for someone like me coming from a working-class background with no role models to follow. I was fortunate that some wonderful teachers and mentors helped me along the way and motivated me with their stories of survival and achievement. I hope the words of these authors will inspire and motivate you, as well.

Enjoy!

Gene I. Awakuni

Chancellor, University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu

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The Reluctant Academic - A Slacker's Guide to Succeeding in College and Life

Kelly Ching

“DON'T YOU HAVE A TEST TODAY?” The shrill of my mother's voice pierced the silence. I awoke with a start and jerked upright, to find her standing over me with her arms crossed. “Huh?” I mumbled groggily, as my eyes drifted to the red digital numbers on the alarm clock by my bed and tried to focus. The clock read 8:55 am. I jumped out of bed and rubbed my eyes, then realized it was Saturday! “NO, we don't have school today,” I told my mom, very agitated since she had awakened me from my peaceful slumber for NOTHING.

After she left the room, I stood up slowly and as my head cleared I realized ... “F%#@#&^! I am late for that SAT thing!!” I cursed to myself, still in the haze of a hangover from the party that lasted until the early morning. I threw on a T-shirt, ran out of the house and jumped in the family car. On the way to the school I rustled through the car's glove compartment and found a pencil. Hey, hey my lucky day -- it was a No. 2, just what I needed!

I arrived at my high school cafeteria, where the test was being held, and swung open the double doors, panting like a dog. One of the teachers proctoring the test told me I had just made it (it was about 9:10 a.m. and the test started at 9) as they were locking the doors. I slipped inside and looked around. The room was silent with all (one hundred or so) students deep in test taking mode, with their heads staring intently down at the SAT question booklet or hastily filling in those little bubbles.

Thus began my half-hearted journey into the strange and mysterious world of higher education. Somehow I was admitted to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa after a mediocre high school effort. Must have done some good guessing on that SAT test! My college career continued on much like high school, with mostly C grades and a sprinkling of B's, with the

oddball “A” mixed in. After 5 ½ years (yes, you read correctly, 5 ½ years) I became a proud graduate of UH with a bachelor’s degree in Zoology.

After a meandering professional career, which included stints as a high school science teacher, zookeeper and an English instructor in Japan, I decided to go back to school for a graduate degree. By this time, I had been out of school for 10+ years and gotten married, so I knew it would be a challenge. I decided that I wanted to work in higher education, because I loved working in the field of education and helping people realize their goals. Some in-depth research (actually just some googling) showed me that I would need at least a master’s degree. This would allow me to work at a college, avoiding the bureaucracy of the public school system -- the dreaded DOE. Hopefully, this would also minimize my interactions with students/parents who did not want to be educated and, importantly, allow me and my family to stay in Hawai’i and earn an (almost) decent living.

In the meantime, my wife was doing her best to allow us to live in Hawai’i, so she enrolled at Leeward Community College’s English Second Language (ESL) program. She earned straight “A’s” and always studied so diligently, that I was inspired (perhaps envious is more accurate). In any case, seeing her excel in the college-level courses in her second language impressed me and stirred my competitive juices as well. Making a long story short, in graduate school I became a straight-A student. During that time, I was able to secure a graduate assistant position which gave me a tuition waiver and a little bit of cash to pay the bills.

So, here are my tips to succeeding in college: one; you can always become a better student, no matter how you did in the past; two, study hard--or at least hang around with someone who does; it tends to rub off; and three, even if you are not sure that what you are learning will be useful (I always questioned this), keep an open mind and don’t give up on higher education. College will open doors that you cannot foresee -- if I had not earned my bachelor’s, I would not have been allowed to get a VISA to work in Japan, and therefore never would have met my wife.

The next step for me academically will likely be a doctorate degree (ugh). Hopefully, that will lead to a position of leadership in higher education. Who would’ve thought of such a pre-posterous thing ...it’s a lucky thing I found that No. 2 pencil in the car.

Kelly Ching is an Academic Advisor in Student Services at UHWO.

Got Focus?

Sofia Zarsadias

I have come to realize that the most difficult part of being a college student is keeping focused. Distractions such as television, friends, and Myspace often win the battle for my time without much effort. I often start out on the web googling things like scholarships and FAFSA deadlines, but somehow I always end up on YouTube watching two Chinese boys lip sync to pop songs or some other kind of nonsense. The same goes for when I decide it's time to study or complete a homework assignment early. I start out with a book in my hand, only to have it replaced with the remote control. Not many students realize that ignoring school or procrastinating on one assignment, or even one class, will affect your grades and maybe even the rest of your life. You must constantly keep focused and stay motivated in order to be a successful college student.

It is difficult for me to focus on just receiving an assignment, let alone completing it. When I hear a teacher start to assign homework my mind seems to go blank and all I hear is, "Okay, class, for homework I want you to blah blah blah blah blah... oh and don't forget that we don't have class next Wednesday, but we do have a test on blah blah blah blah blah." Selective hearing is definitely not a method for becoming a successful college student.

Always pay attention in class, even if you think you already know what the teacher is talking about. This semester in my Math 103 class I was not paying attention when my teacher was discussing the homework that would be due the following week. I figured that she had already posted all our homework problems online anyway so I lost focus and seemed to press the "off" button to my brain. Little did I know that she was discussing how she had added some problems to our assignment. To this day, I am not sure what I missed. All I know is that when I turned in what I thought was a complete assignment the following week, I could not help but notice that everyone else's papers seemed to be thicker than mine. Needless to say, my grade suffered.

I have a couple of strategies that help me keep focus when I study. I am not one to gain

clarity with little breaks here and there. I have to really buckle down and keep working until the assignment is completed. I have to lock myself in my room and tell myself that I won't do anything else and just focus on my work until it is finished. I try not to let anything break my focus, knowing that as soon as I finish a homework assignment that is one less thing to stress about in my life. That is enough motivation for me.

For some, thinking about the future and seeing the *big picture* is what motivates them. Knowing that going through years and years of school may one day lead to prestige and a high-paying job is enough to jumpstart some people. My parents often remind me, "Sofia, even though medical school takes a while, you'll be able to call yourself 'doctor', and you'll be able to live such a comfortable life! Yes, you should definitely major in medicine." Not to rain on anyone's medical parade, but any occupation that requires more than eight years of schooling is just not worth it to me. Just imagining myself wearing a lab coat and having lots of money just is not enough to motivate me to complete medical school, let alone its prerequisites.

The best way for me to stay motivated and focused is to look at the *smaller picture*. Taking one step at a time and breaking down big goals into smaller, attainable steps can greatly improve self-motivation by allowing you to see those goals more clearly. I do not know what I am going to be majoring in yet, but I do know that all of the classes I am taking are getting me one step closer to being able to graduate. Right now, I do not even have a *big picture* to look at since I am unsure of what I want for my future, but I can picture a few steps that lead somewhere higher than I am right now. I see no point in creating some master plan if it is not enough to motivate me. However, focusing on one thing at a time can definitely make it easier to put things into action.

So, whether you're the kind of person who can stay focused by looking at the *big picture*, or you like to take one small step at a time, do whatever it takes to stay focused in school. Self-motivation is one of the best qualities a student can have, so attain it however possible. Stay motivated and avoid distractions by either reminding yourself that one day you could attain a rich and happy life if you just get past this one assignment in front of you, or by knowing that once you finish it you can go to sleep. So, next time you reach for the remote control, pick up a school book instead and know that, in the end, it will all be worth it.

Sophia Zarsadias is freshman at UH West O'ahu.

Attitude Archibald Gets Wise and Goes Back to College

Andy Archibald

My college experience has been a bifurcated career that has spanned over 40 years. In my entire life, I never got anything right the first time, and, in far too many cases, either the second or third time. My birth mother apparently recognized how much trouble I was going to become and she promptly left me in the charity ward for adoption on the first day. My adoptive parents discussed putting me back into “Child Protective Services” on several occasions because I was impossibly head strong, and steadfastly ignored everybody’s attempts to teach, guide, or provide me with a sense of discipline. Since I knew everything there was to know, I left home at age 17 to make my way in the world. With a good-sized chip firmly planted on my shoulder and safe in the delusion that I had total control over my life, I strutted into the “real world.”

My decision to enroll in college the first time had absolutely nothing to do with furthering my education because I did not need any of that fru-fra. Everybody knew that if you had any talent you got a job and if you had no talent you became a college professor. The major employer in 1964 was the U.S. military, and they were offering jobs in Vietnam which included room and board, and all the ammunition a person could carry. Since I was not really in the mood for foreign travel I enrolled at the local community college for some rest and relaxation. What I really needed was the rest, since 17-year-olds can only get part-time work, which only pays minimum wage and is not enough to live on. Economics forced me to get three part-time jobs to pay the rent for the closet I lived in and the larger beer and entertainment budget. The only place I could get any quality sleep was in the back row of the lecture halls, so I always signed up for large classes because they were quieter than the apartment I shared with three other great pretenders.

After two years of “higher” education I had a blazing 1.67 grade point average, which would have been much lower if I had not gotten a few charity “C’s”. I compiled this academic record by studiously avoiding any pretense of study or effort, and my college experience was further enhanced by being in San Francisco during the 1960s. The community college informed me that I was academically ineligible to attend any longer, and no four-year college would accept me. At the ancient age of 19, I made the first intelligent move in my entire life and enlisted in the Marine Corps. In 1966 most draft age males with high I.Q.s were in college or Canada, so the military had wisely begun to offer college-level education to recruits. In short order, I found myself in places other than San Francisco surrounded by no alcohol or drugs, and attending an electronics school that offered two years of lower-division math and science. The school had a great incentive program also; for six-month sessions of eight-hour, six-day school weeks with a test every Friday, every Marine who fell below 85% was removed from school and sent to Vietnam. All of a sudden I found a renewed interest in college-level classes.

When I returned from the service with marketable skills, I was able to get a great job and spent the next three decades working as an electronics technician for a major communications company. When I retired, my intention was to catch up with all the beer and comic books I had missed, but two overwhelming forces combined to drive me to reconsider every decision I ever made. First, my wife informed me in no uncertain terms that on her watch, I was not going to sit on the lanai all day and drink beer or enjoy any of the other activities I left in the ‘60s in San Francisco. Then my doctor informed me that I had an incurable and progressive disease that could be treated only if I stayed healthy and kept my mind active with intellectual pursuits. This is kinda like being told that if you don’t straighten up and go to school you are going to die. Somehow this reminded me of the Marine Corps, and I took the doctor’s advice very seriously.

I returned to college in the spring of 2007 and some amazing stuff happened. Since my life depended on it (again), I made an effort to work and actually educate myself. The embarrassingly young professors and even younger students proved that I didn’t know everything, and if I paid attention I could learn from all of them. As my interest and grade point average have increased, two miraculous things are occurring: This May I will graduate from college, having completed two years of upper-division classes in two years, and my incurable and progressive disease has been slowed with a combination of therapy and medication. The timing of these

events could not have been more serendipitous since my retirement 401K has become a 101K, and I am going to have to find a job when I graduate. College has saved my life. I would encourage everybody to enroll and give it a chance to do the same for them, especially since I will be looking for a job and I don't need the competition.

Andy Archibald is a spring 2009 graduating senior, majoring in political science at UH West O'ahu.

A Positive Attitude

Melody Simpliciano

A strategy that helped me survive in college is having a positive attitude. I've learned that the attitude you present tells others who and what you are, and what they can expect from you. When people view you as having a great attitude, many will eventually be fond of you and will help you in some way. Having a great attitude is important because people will see your personality and know that you're a strong and confident person. Incoming freshmen should have positive attitudes because it will help them do well in their classes and make new friends easily.

To become a good college student and do well in class, one should think positive thoughts. For instance, when I attend my speech class, I ask questions if I don't understand something. I feel confident enough to speak up and be proactive. When my questions get answered, I know what I have to work on or study for in class. If I'm on the right track and am aware of what is happening in class, having a positive attitude is very useful. In some classes, though, I had no idea what I was doing and began to think negatively. I became confused and stressed out. That didn't help me at all, so I knew I had to do something about it. The only thing that helped me do well in my math class was a positive mentality. It took me some time to finally ask my math professor questions, but I did. The more I participated in class, the more fun it was to talk to the professor, read the assignments, and turn in good quality work. I learned that having a positive attitude not only helps you do well in your classes, but also helps with communicating to others.

People who are shy or just anti-social have a hard time meeting new people and communicating with others. The only way shy people can change is to have the right state of mind. If you have low self-esteem and find it hard to meet new people, your attitude towards the situation will many times determine whether you overcome your shyness. The more positive your outlook is towards meeting people, the more you will try to overcome your fear and work

on your self-esteem. However, if you have a negative attitude towards meeting people, you will never take the chance to step out of your comfort zone and will find it very difficult to meet anyone new. Looking back on my experiences, I don't think I was ever too shy to meet new friends. It was always easy for me to meet new people for some reason. I guess it's because I have always had a positive attitude.

I've learned that it is always better to be positive rather than negative. When you start down a negative path, it becomes hard to get back. Many students develop an attitude where they give up easily. Then, they try to defend it long after everyone else has seen that it no longer makes sense. The best advice I would give to newcomers is to keep your comments positive so they will build up to a positive attitude.

Not only can I do well in my classes and meet new friends, but I have learned how to stay positive all the time, even when I'm angry or sad.

Melody Simpliciano is a freshman at UH West O'ahu.

Kids + Physics = Learning

Akira M. LeBlanc

Why do I have to take this course again? This is an all too familiar question for English Education majors in a math or science class, or in the case of Physics, a math and science class — talk about a “crucial conjunction.” So, facing the fact of this physical reality, I decide that the gravity of the situation is far too complex for me to handle as a single unit. Studying alone for this critical exam has thus far proved that *the force* is NOT with me. It’s like I’ve been struck by a dropped bowling ball at 10 meters per second, squared. And needless to say, my once conserved momentum is fleeting. My thinking is rapidly decelerating and, even worse, my concentration is waxing and waning between tossing the unfrozen salmon directly into the oven for tonight’s think-tank meal (and wishing for the best) or calculating practice question number 3a (and wishing for the best). The juggle is perplexing. Not only do I have to decode Newton’s principles of such and such and this and that, but somehow I also have to figure in the very pressing pressures of parenthood. The kids have practice, the dinner needs to be cooked, and this irrational, unfathomable assignment is doing an incalculable number on me. For every action there is an equal and opposite blah, blah, blah. Newton and Kepler with their first, second, and third laws — I wonder how they handled first, second, and third person? Well, the fact still remains that I have to figure out how to resist the tension of this assignment and find my solutions. Thus, it’s right at this moment when I whip out a few forces of my own — I call the kids! No kidding.

Years of being a nontraditional student, one with a job and a family, has taught me a few laws of my own. First, when it comes to family gatherings, I’ll either be absent or doing homework. Second, unless study groups are scheduled for my house, I probably won’t be there. And third, when there are no classmates around to study with, fetch the children. Recalling that children’s minds are like “little sponges”---well, let’s stop there, actually their minds are more like great big boulder-sized sponges that can accommodate more information than your overeager physics

professor can toss at you. This being the case, we nontraditional students often overlook the study buddies that we have within a hug's reach. In fact, by rehearsing our own study materials with our children—be it from world geography, college algebra or frustrating physics—we grab a hold of an immeasurable opportunity for family quality time, family learning and family fun. And here's one of the coolest parts—kids ask the best questions, that is, the ones that all of those college-level study buddies would be too ashamed to admit they don't know.

As for me and my physics, I start by teaching the kids what I know. Naturally, I have to break this down into 8- and 10-year-old terms. I draw multi-colored, multi-directional arrows; I drop books and crumpled papers from the table; I dilute my university level vocab down to the elementary; I teach physics to my kids and through their responses they teach physics to me. And when I've done my mini-session presentation of the facts, they gladly and impartially hit me with a barrage of questions that, one way or the other, I have to figure out. 'Cause even though I'm no Newton, I'm Mommy... and Mommy knows everything.

Akira LeBlanc is a senior majoring in English ...by the way...wife of one, mother of two, friend to all!

A Professor Who Inspired Me

Gail Barta

Memories of a professor so great can linger on long after we have left their classroom. My professor's name is not important for the story, but please note, I will never forget this woman as long as I live, and out of much respect, I will call her Nancy. Nancy taught English. An old subject (English) that came hard for me long ago, was again staring me down. Entering college in my forties opened up some old wounds, scars left behind because of past failures.

One day I was confronted about my handicap by a music professor. The confronting music professor announced to the class, "We have a student among us in great need of a refresher course in basic English." His announcement came in an indirect way, not addressing me by name, but I knew who he was talking about. He was right. So the story goes, after so many years of hiding (so I thought) my inability to write, I entered Nancy's classroom unruly (at heart) and unlearned. "How am I going to make it through her English 100 class in one piece?" I thought to myself. This was a class I could not drop or let slide by. I decided to take the humiliation squarely, and not skirt around it like I always did in the past.

So I jumped in and belly flopped. If you've ever experienced a belly flop you know what I'm talking about. Your landing is unsightly and for the rest of the day you feel like throwing up. Professor Nancy was a patient, kind, long suffering professor, who stood strong against my awkward, often vacant stares through each of her classes. She didn't give up on me or grow impatient, even with all my shortcomings. She stuck to her strict English rules and wouldn't let me get away with even a period out of place. I had a love-hate feeling for her at times. I hated the strict structure that the demands of English placed on me; it was like wearing a straight jacket. Professor Nancy watched as I struggled, never letting me lose focus or give up. Today I am grateful for her strength. I know now that the suffering I felt was a tool I needed to conquer those fears that hung over my head for many years.

I am reminded of "To Sir with Love," a movie about a patient and kind, long suffering

professor who stood strong in a class of students determined to make his life miserable. “How do you thank someone who has taken you from crayons to perfume? It isn’t easy but I’ll try,” says the theme song. At the end of the movie when this song is performed, the class of students who had been so unruly and unlearned in the beginning, were changed. They were transformed into well-rounded, secure adults, completely different from when they first stepped into his classroom.

I was very much like one of those students in the movie, when I walked in to my English classroom long ago. One glorious day, at the close of our semester, Nancy asked us to submit a free-write. The assignment was left open to our discretion, leaning towards our creative side. I asked Nancy if I could submit a story I had been writing. I physically felt a rush of excitement that day leaving her class as she gave me the go ahead to submit the story. Here was my chance to present a piece of myself to someone I had grown to trust and respect. I rushed home, picked out the two pages for the assignment and worked tirelessly until I was satisfied. Despite all the corrections, grammar checks, and instructions spattered in bright red ink, a more beautiful sight could not be found than the words she wrote in black ink! It’s obvious today that I did not master the skill of English by any means. Professor Nancy did, however, leave me wanting more, and that in itself is what I call an A+ professor.

Gail Barta is a third-year student at Pacific Rim Bible college, majoring in worship and the arts. She attends UH West O’ahu as a freshman student majoring in Literature.

College Through Responsibility

Zayla Toledo

Once you enter college life, responsibility is essential in order to become a successful student. My responsibility is attending all of my classes on time, making a good effort in all of my schoolwork, and learning from my mistakes. With this knowledge, I now have a greater understanding of how to be successful in college. It's ironic that the class I dread the most, math, has been inspiration to help me understand that attendance, effort and learning from my mistakes will help me achieve success in college.

My math class taught me that attending classes should be thought of as an obligation and is mandatory for understanding the material. Not only does attendance affect me, but it also affects the person who is helping me pay for my college tuition. Whether it's a family member or kind person that started a scholarship fund, I should always attend the class with a sense of obligation. Without those people I would not be here today so I should remain grateful for the education I have because of them.

Another thing I learned in my math class is if I miss even a day of class, I'll fall behind. Math and college are like a staircase; you can't continue upward without taking each step. Attending class is part of that staircase of knowledge and achievement in higher education. Skipping a class creates a domino-effect that affects future understanding of the class. The first effect is confusion throughout class discussion. The second effect leads to confusion about the new problems in class, and then in homework assignments. Third would be falling behind in class and a lack of understanding the material overall. Lastly, the domino-effect of missing a class leads to failing the course and the pushing back of your final graduation date because you have to re-take the course. Thankfully, because of my strong financial support and because I attend class regularly, I understand the new and old material and with much effort I'm continuing my

long journey up that staircase of higher knowledge and success.

Making a good effort also helps me achieve success in my math class and in college, overall. This includes participating in class, completing all assignments and studying for tests. Near the last 20 minutes of class my math teacher wrote problems on the board and our responsibility was to participate and complete that problem in our notes. When participating in class it's another chance to understand the material and/or ask questions if you are confused. Effort in participation also shows awareness in the class, an eagerness to learn and can help me focus and stay on task. Keeping up with all assignments, small or large, is also important. When finished with a math assignment on time, I'm prepared, have better understanding of the material and feel a bit more confident in class. Falling behind results in a backup of homework assignments as well as an incomplete understanding of the course.

The effort of studying for all tests, quizzes and finals is also a good habit of a responsible college student. Taking the time to sit down and study is very important when preparing for upcoming tests, exams and/or quizzes, not only in math class but in all other college courses as well. Studying is hard because it requires a lot of self control to remain focused and requires a great sense of prioritization. It's very hard to remain focused in these times when there are so many opportunities for distraction, such as the telephone, television, computer, games, and more. It takes self-control to ignore all distractions and focus on studying. Prioritizing also falls into the effort category. Demonstrating the act of choosing education over games, studying over hanging out with friends and studying over chatting online also illustrates your commitment to your education. Without class participation, completing all tasks and studying, I wouldn't make progress in college.

Learning from your mistakes is the final kind of personal responsibility I learned from my math class. "When doing math assignments, always use a pen because it is pointless to get an answer without knowing your mistakes. When using a pen you can always go back to the problem and learn what you did wrong, rather than using a pencil, erasing it, and forgetting how you got to the answer in the first place," said my teacher. Surprisingly, that was the most inspirational quote I've heard this year. It taught me to learn from all of my mistakes instead of just forgetting about them and repeating them later. When completing notes, class work, homework and quizzes, I always use a pen. If I do make a mistake I can always go back, analyze it and learn what I did wrong so I can do it correctly the next time. When applying this quote

to every college course, I will be able to learn from all of my mistakes, and understand the material better.

Math was never my forte, but because of it I learned useful information for both inside and outside of the class. My math class taught me about college responsibility and inspired me to keep good attendance, make a strong effort, and learn from my mistakes. This knowledge will stay with me for years to come, and hopefully aid me to achieve college success.

Zayla Toledo is an optimistic and creative student majoring in Liberal Arts at UH West O'ahu; she is crossing her fingers for a new UHWO nursing program.

A Learning Experience

Christen Schirmer

When I first started college at Chaminade University, I thought everything would be like high school. After four years at Mililani High School, I felt confident and well-prepared for my first semester in college. My first day at Chaminade University was exciting and all my classes, I thought, were going to be pretty easy. After a couple of months had passed I never missed a day. Yet slowly, as days went by, I realized it was just as easy not to attend class. One class, in particular, was History 151 with Dr. Thompson. As a student in his class I learned to be responsible and to put my priorities first. Responsibility and prioritizing helped me become a better student. I gained a great learning experience from this class and it would help me throughout my college years.

When school started I was doing very well; I never missed a class or any assignments. Dr. Thompson required us to purchase his binder, consisting of all our assignments. As the days went by, class seemed simple enough by doing your assignments and the readings in the binder. There would be days Dr. Thompson would let us out early; maybe 30 minutes after class had started. This made me realize that as easy as it was to attend class, it was also easy not to. After a couple months into the class we had our first exam coming up. To prepare for the exam the teacher mentioned that by studying all the assignments, reading, and crossword puzzles we would be fine. I felt good going in and taking the exam because I felt I studied well and understood the section. During the exam, I had no hesitation choosing my answer because I already knew them. When we got the exam back, I did well and received an A.

Shortly after receiving our first exam, I started to feel as if I didn't need to go to class. I thought to myself: Why go to class if he lets us out early? Our binder contained all of our assignments and readings needed for the next section, so why is attending class so important? I found myself unmotivated and I started to miss class. One time, then two, and it started to become a bad habit. When I missed class, I would just ask my fellow classmates about the

homework, or what they did in class. I was wrong to think that I could pass exams without attending class.

With this in mind, the next class I attended I found out we were having an exam the following week. Since I hadn't been to class I wasn't sure what to expect on the exam. Some of my classmates told me that they read in class and he explained each section that would be on the exam. Dr. Thompson also held a review session for this section, and I failed to attend that. Many of my classmates also failed to attend the review session. I was overwhelmed when I started to study. I had no idea where to start and where to finish. I joined some of my classmates to study, we went through assignments and readings, but I still was not confident about taking the exam.

The following week came along and it was exam day. I was feeling scared and nervous while I waited for the exam to be passed out. I read the first question and I was already guessing the answer. Throughout the whole exam period I was literally grasping for answers. I realized that I couldn't possibly pass without coming to class or the review session. When I was done with my exam and was leaving class Dr. Thompson said to everyone, "I hope all of you did well." He said it in a sarcastic way because he held a study session that many students failed to attend.

The next class came along and he passed back our exam papers. I was nervous and terrified to see my grade. Once I got mine, I flipped it over and saw I received my first F in all my school years. I felt so bad and I realized that I needed to change. Not attending class led me to this grade and I had to face major consequences. My professor was very angry because I wasn't the only one; at least half my class also did poorly. Later that day, Dr. Thompson saw me in the café, pulled me aside and said, "See when you don't come to class? You went from having an "A" on the first exam to an "F". You should come to class more often."

After failing to attend class and failing my exam, I knew that I had to change my ways. I gained motivation from this experience and I found myself in the classroom again. I never missed another class or study session after receiving that grade. I stayed focused and took the initiative to do my assignments and attend classes. I would focus on Dr. Thompson's lectures and did what was assigned. Before I knew it my grades were back on track and I passed the course with an "A". I became more responsible by attending all classes, and putting my priorities first, helped me receive an "A".

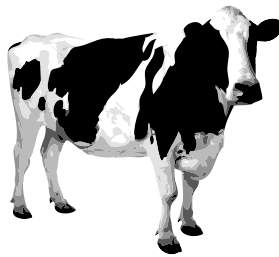
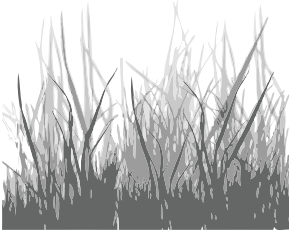
This experience also helped me realize that high school is nothing compared to college. In high school I was basically forced by my parents and teachers to attend class or I'd fail. It felt like an obligation to attend classes, but in college you make your own choices. I became more responsible and learned to put my priorities first, because if I didn't I wouldn't become a successful student. I had to ask myself why I attend school, and the answer is for a better education. I intend to accomplish that. This experience also helped me realize that I do not know everything, and attending class is very important. As easy as it is to attend class, it's also simple not to go. As a college student you need to overcome that and push yourself to attend class. This experience has helped me become a better student.

Christen Schirmer is a freshman majoring in Psychology at UH West O'ahu.

Different Views of the World

Dr. Jonathan Schwartz

Which two pictures go together?



As a new faculty member, I feel I am satisfied, confident and productive. I attribute my positive feelings to supportive relationships I've developed over the last year and a half in Hawai'i. Getting to know and forming relationships with faculty, staff, and students at University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu has been rewarding, and provided me with encouragement, guidance, and satisfaction. During personal time, I often reflect: Why is it that I place such a strong personal emphasis on my relationships?

In class, my students and I discuss the importance of relationships as a part of teaching and learning. Discussions inevitably turn to why individuals from the continental United States come to the islands, become dissatisfied, and choose to leave.

Though there are a number of different ways to examine this issue, my students and I often settle on the different ways in which people view the world. We discuss how some people look at the world according to an individualist perspective while others view the world

according to a collectivist perspective.

Individualist and collectivist perspectives differ in the personal orientation to the self and to others. Individualist societies, such as those found in most parts of the continental United States, focus on the self; people focus on personal goals in order to measure success. People are more self-reliant. In trying to accomplish goals, these people often resist assistance and input from others.

Others societies, such as those found in Hawai'i, view the world very differently. Collectivist societies view the group as primary, as opposed to the individual. The individual is a social being bound to others through emotional ties. Collectivist societies focus on the goals of the group. Collaboration is expected. Working with others is not seen as a burden. Instead, the input from others strengthens a project. Success is measured by fulfilling responsibilities to a group. There is complete regard for the viewpoints of others.

Are you more individualistic or collectivistic? Your grouping of the pictures on the top of this page might tell a little bit about how you view the world. As part of a research study, Nisbett (2003) presented American and Chinese children with pictures illustrating the three objects at the top of this page: grass, a cow, and a chicken. Children were asked to place together two of the three pictures. Nisbett found that American children tended to group the cow and the chicken because both are animals. These children viewed the objects according to categories. Chinese children grouped the cow and the grass together because a cow eats grass. These children viewed the objects according to relationships. The results of this, and other studies by Nisbett, show that there are different ways of looking at the world. Chinese children tend to view the world according to collectivistic values, whereas American children tend to view the world according to individualist values.

I believe the implications of how I view the world relate to my own happiness. To me, positive relationships with others bring happiness. I think it is important to become a part of a community and build healthy, strong relationships - a tenant of collectivist values. I truly have enjoyed the time I've spent getting to know the faculty, staff, and students during the short time I've been at UH West O'ahu. I look forward to the years to come where I hope to continue to be a contributing member to our growing university.

Nisbett, R.E. (2003). The geography of thought: How Asians and Westerners think

differently and why. New York: Free Press

Jonathan Schwartz is a second-year faculty member at the University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu. He is an assistant professor in the Division of Elementary Education and teaches courses in literacy, special education, and philosophy.

To Ryan (Age Four)

Aimee Ilac

Dear Ryan,

I imagine you are opening this letter after spending the afternoon of your 18th birthday getting an early start in your studies for your first round of finals as a college student. When I think back to my first semester in college I remember being alone. As the eldest in the family, I didn't have any siblings or cousins to turn to for advice. None of my friends were attending college, leaving me to face this daunting experience alone. I did not fare too well in my first stint at a university (UH Mānoa). It was better at UH West O'ahu, where you might remember visiting my classes and meeting some of my professors. While I hope you, your cousins and friends can embark on this journey together, I wanted to leave you a few tidbits of advice. I also wanted to remind you to call your mommy mother since I don't know if you will be here or on the mainland.

Part of receiving a quality university education means taking classes that will make you want to go to sleep. A good skill to learn and apply with these classes is the ability to draw connections between everything. What might initially bore you in one class might help you in another. In one of your introductory-level Social Science classes you might yawn at learning about Karl Mannheim. Then in your English class you discover you can apply his theory of the Sociology of Knowledge to a reading of one of your texts. In fact, you discover that a paper you wrote in high school on *The Outsiders* is almost completely in line with Mannheim's theory. I urge you to look for these types of moments in college. These mini-epiphanies will do wonders to encourage you to get to class on time and pay attention.

Once you get your 'vegetable' courses (you hate them, but you have to take them because they are good for you) out of the way, find a subject you absolutely love and stick with it. Above all, I want you to pursue your passion. Having said that, I am hoping you don't come home telling me your passion is mountain climbing or skydiving. However, since you already

love books and being read to, I am going to try to nurture that as much as possible. I would love to have you join the elite of scholarly society by becoming an English major. All joking aside, pursuing your passion will help you meet success. Studying a subject you enjoy will help encourage you to invest the time and energy required to be successful. Life as an adult is full of bills, responsibility, and aging (yikes). Having one part of your life that you truly enjoy makes being a grown-up much easier.

I am guessing I still lecture you, as I do now, about what it means to be a good person, so this next piece of advice should sound similar. You will probably roll your eyes right about now, but here it is: Get involved. Find a club or organization and join early. I am hoping that all the community service projects I have gotten you involved in have instilled in you a yearning to help others. Many school clubs participate in community service projects. If you happen to stumble across one that doesn't, try to introduce them to the value of taking on a service project. Clubs also help you make friends with other students that might share your interests. It also looks very good on graduate school applications. School is always much more enjoyable when you have friends on campus and in some, if not all, of your classes. During crunch time you might all get together to have a study session to compare or trade notes.

Forming relationships should also include your professors. Just as all of them might not like you, I do not expect you to like each and every professor. However, please treat them all with the respect they deserve. I cringe when I hear my classmates argue and complain to our professors, and I will be mortified if you ever do the same with your professors. You can ask Uncle Curtis: sometimes being a professor can suck the fun out of a subject when you have a bad batch of students. The main thing to remember is to keep an open mind. You might come across a professor or two that will turn out to be your mentor. While at the moment I don't know where you will end up in the next 14 years, I do know you will be at a good school. Your professors will be there because they enjoy teaching. I am sure they will not object to giving you additional advice and encouragement.

I realize I could not possibly cover everything I want to in such a short letter. You know how I love "corny." I am thinking about printing this letter on stationery with phrases like: "Be True to Yourself," "Believe in You," and "Study Hard." But I will spare you the embarrassment of being seen with those phrases in big bold letters. I have the traditional "say no to drugs" and "choose the right friends" speeches on hand but have put them away for now. Plus, I am

planning on giving you the friends lecture when you start kindergarten this fall (and every fall there after). I hope I have not bored you to death with this letter. I tried to keep this letter much more structured than my normal speech. But, as you have seen, I snuck in some digressions. Know that I love you and want the best for you. You will always have your family to come home to if need be. No matter what happens, we will always be proud of you. Now, before you forget, call me. I miss you!

Love,

Mom

Aimee is a senior majoring in English at UH West O'ahu.

Tenacity and Persistence

Dr. Lori M. Ideta

I am what they would call “a first-generation college attendee.” My brother and I are the first in our family to go to college. I spent ten consecutive years of my life earning three degrees. Then, I started working on a university campus. So, I basically stepped foot on a college campus when I was 17 and have not left since. Based on my years of immersion in higher education, I can honestly testify that such attainments of college degrees have less to do with super intelligence and academic gifts. Rather, I truly believe that the ability to survive and thrive in higher education is rooted in two core characteristics: tenacity and persistence.

If you are like me, a first-generation college attendee, you fully understand that making your family comprehend the stresses of university life can be tough. As much as they try, our families don’t have much sympathy when you are up for three straight days trying to write a 20-page paper. They don’t give much slack when you tell them you must “meet” with your group to work on your project that is due the next day versus washing the dishes. And as much as they love you, they really don’t understand why you can’t sleep the week before finals, why life literally needs to stand still during the week of finals, and why you sleep the entire week after finals.

During these times, it becomes difficult to keep going. It’s rough enough trying to fulfill all the expectations of your courses and individual faculty members. When you need to explain what that all means to folks who don’t have the same contextual base as you, it gets doubly hard.

Even if you come from a household where there are others who preceded you to college, surviving the university experience is not easy: there are hundreds of pages to read, reports to write, topics to research, and projects to complete. Add to that figuring out your course schedule, registering for classes before they fill up, staying awake in a class you have no interest in but is required by your major, and completing all that financial aid paperwork! Top all that

off with trying to make new friends, attempting to fit in, and balancing school and work and family and a social life. Whew! Sound tough? You know it is!

It is during these times that we feel like quitting. On those days that you are down, never doubt that higher education was designed to be exclusive and challenging. Access to, and success in, higher education was originally only for society's elite. If you weren't good enough, smart enough, or talented enough to survive, oh well! Sadly, honestly, remnants of that mentality and approach remain. This is where there is a blessing in being labeled "hard head" by your mother. If you're like me, you do things that people tell you that you cannot do. I become driven when people doubt me. I work harder to prove them wrong. I not only survive, I thrive. I know you have that in you as well. Let it emerge. Whenever you feel like quitting, remember that "the system" wants you to give up. So, do not. Be tenacious. The ancient Chinese proverb states, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." You've taken the first steps. Keep putting one foot in front of the other. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, "When you can't fly, run. When you can't run, walk. When you can't walk, crawl. But for God's sake, keep moving forward." Eleanor Roosevelt said, "You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

If the words of our Asian ancestors, Dr. King, and Mrs. Roosevelt are falling on deaf ears, you may be asking yourself, "Why? Why should I keep trying?" Because when you think you, cannot, you must trudge ahead. Be persistent. Why? Because only approximately 25 percent of the United State's population has a bachelor's degree and you have an inherent right to be a part of that 25 percent. Because a college education is never wasted. Because doors will open for you once you are a college graduate, that you cannot even envision at this moment. Because you will be better due to the experience. Because once you earn your degree no one can take it away from you. Because once you become a college graduate, you will lift as you climb and you will make the college experience better for those who follow you as you will understand, you will support, and you will assist us in creating a new culture where everyone knows that they are welcomed and that they belong. Because you can.

So, when you feel like quitting and giving up, go ahead, have a melt down. You are entitled to a tantrum. Cry. Scream. Feel sorry for yourself. Call a friend. Lean on someone's shoulder. Drown your sorrows in a tub of ice cream. Tell the world that you are quitting. Rant. Rave. Then, the next day, come back to class and be persistent; be tenacious.

See you at commencement.

Dr. Lori M. Ideta feels honored to serve as the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at UH West O'ahu.



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