

Student returns to UW Oshkosh after 17 years

by Jennifer Monroe - Thursday, December 30, 2010

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/7930/student-returns-to-uw-oshkosh-after-17-years/>

Colleen Monroe, 37, has had a long time to think about the positive impact of higher education. After leaving the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh in 1993, she always considered returning to college to finish her degree. One semester and two courses later, Monroe will achieve her goal, thanks to her hard work and the Graduation Project, which helps “stopped-out” students return to the University.

Monroe was awarded an associate degree from UW Oshkosh at the December 2010 commencement ceremony and will return for the spring semester to accomplish her ultimate aim of attaining a bachelor’s degree.

Though she said it wasn’t easy, Monroe feels her return to school will be worth it.

“I had a lack of confidence in the beginning,” Monroe said. “I really wondered if I could be successful because I had been out of school for so long. But I did well, and this experience was all I needed to motivate me to complete my bachelor’s degree.”

“Of course it’s stressful. It’s one more consideration I have to make when planning my week. But this was the right time for me to come back.”

Monroe credits her success to her hard work and assistance from UW Oshkosh service offices. She has worked with staff from the Graduation Project, Career Services, Admissions and Advising.

“The University has a lot to offer in terms of student services. The best part of working with offices like the Graduation Project is that I already have someone on my side. I have an ally,” Monroe said.

Prior to her return to school, all Monroe could see were the obstacles. Working with service offices, she said, helped her jump hurdles and get back in the classroom.

“I didn’t know if I would have to retake my classes. I didn’t know if it would fit in my schedule, and I still didn’t know what I wanted to major in,” Monroe said.

When Monroe connected with the Graduation Project, she found answers to her questions.

“I met with the Graduation Project staff, and they laid out a plan for me, step-by-step. They were the driving force to get me back in school,” Monroe said. “When they pulled up my STAR (student academic report) and told me I needed only two courses to compete my associate degree, I thought, ‘I can do that.’”

Monroe’s big concern in returning to school was that she hadn’t decided on a major.

Currently working as a massage therapist, she didn't see a clear major that would help her in her current career. She worked with the Career Services office to help determine possible areas of study.

"I still didn't know what I wanted to major in. Because it was the reason I dropped out the first time, I knew I needed help weighing my options," Monroe said.

"The Career Services staff asked me a lot of questions and laid out some potential career paths that match my interests. I'm the kind of person who needs to have a path before I can get going. They helped me determine some goals, and now I have something to work for."

Monroe said she's had to make some changes in her lifestyle to make room for her classes and course work, but that the sacrifices will be worth achieving her goal of finishing her degree.

"My daughter is 4-years-old, and I was concerned that school responsibilities would overtake my free time," Monroe said.

However, Monroe has used her experience to grow closer to her daughter.

"She sees that I'm learning, and we both talk about our days at school. I try to take what I'm learning in my classes and relate it to things she knows, like numbers. We talk about school all the time."

Monroe believes that it is never too late to return to school, and she said this time around she's making changes that have helped her be successful.

"School means more to me now. I'm more concerned with grades, and I'm more focused on finding the right path. I'm 37-years-old, and I get to ask myself what I want to be when I grow up," Monroe said. "I still haven't chosen a major, but I've narrowed it down and am working towards the goal of completing my bachelor's degree."

- [Read more about the graduation project.](#)