

Understanding Yourself

Four Strategies For Conquering The Fear, Returning To The Classroom

(NAPSA)—Once you have determined that completing your degree is the best way to achieve your life goals, you've probably done your research. You've figured out how to make the time, how to pay for school and what degree to pursue. One thing, however, may still be holding you back—fear.

It can be scary walking into a classroom full of strangers. What if things are completely different from when you last set foot on a campus? What if everyone in the class is in their teens and you can't relate?

"Being nervous about returning to college is not necessarily a bad thing," said Dr. Mary Hawkins, president of Bellevue University. "Your apprehension shows your desire to do well. More than 2.5 million people over the age of 30 currently attend college in the U.S. Don't let fear take away the chance to accomplish the new goals you've set for yourself."

Research the Learning Environment

"Familiarizing yourself with the situation will help alleviate some of the tension," Dr. Hawkins suggests. A good place to start is the National Center for Education Statistics at nces.ed.gov. The site's College Navigator tool allows you to search more than 7,000 schools and view enrollment statistics, including age breakdown, on each. This will give you a good picture of whether the school you are considering attracts more adult learners or more traditional students.

Speak With Current Students and Alumni

Next, call the schools at the top of your list and ask for referrals to students who have taken or are currently enrolled in the program you might enter.

"This is the best way to get a firsthand account of the experience you will have," Dr. Hawkins continued. "Students and alumni have nothing to gain or lose by being honest about their experiences. Make sure to speak to more than one individual to get a more balanced view of the student experience."

If you feel more comfortable with an indirect route, you can



More than one-third of undergraduate students are over age 25.

pose your questions to any alumni groups the school may have on social networks such as Facebook or LinkedIn.

Consider Online Learning

If the classroom is too intimidating still, look into online learning, which you can complete from the comfort of your own home.

"Due to responsibilities, including family, work and community commitments, many working adults find this way of learning is the right fit," Dr. Hawkins said. "If you are considering this option, include both students who have studied online and in class in your research so you can compare how the experiences vary."

Give Yourself a Deadline

Simply putting your plan in writing or talking about it out loud can give you the momentum and accountability to get moving. Give yourself as much time as you need but set a firm deadline. Determine a specific date by which you plan to begin your coursework. Tell family and friends who, you feel, will be supportive. You can also put your plan into writing at www.makeithappennow.org, which offers expert advice on staying motivated.

"Remember, most of your classmates will be as nervous as you are," Hawkins said. "Much like going to the gym after years away or going to the doctor for your yearly checkup, the anticipation is often worse than the actual experience."

Don't let fear hold you back; once you overcome it, you are on your way to a more promising future.