

OpenLearn animation

We did it!' The role of study support in student success

Student A, B, C, D:

Student A: Come on squeeze in... graduation day; never thought I'd make it!

Student B: Yeah, I know what you mean. Well, studying, why it's being like running a marathon or... you could actually say doing a Tough Mudder because at times it was like really struggling through mud, you know, real mud. Uh, but I've done it. I really can't believe it; I think I spent the first year really not knowing what I was supposed to be doing.

Student A: I had a lot of help from my tutors.

Student C: Yeah, me too, especially when studying seemed so hard going. I was working full time and every obstacle was in my way.

Student A: I had this amazing tutor. When I was feeling overwhelmed, they helped me know what to focus on to complete the module.

Student C: I always tried to attend the tutorials. I valued the focus on the TMAs and the sessions broke down the isolation of studying on my own, but [laughing] I was so nervous at the start when everything was new.

Student A: I nearly gave up before I started. I didn't want to ask for help filling in the forms. They are hard to fill in!

Student B: I don't like asking for help either. I suppose I was expecting to be judged or worse patronized. I thought because I am, you know, black that the staff would think me stupid. I didn't want to take that risk.

Student A: What makes you think that? The systems are complex.

Student B: Well, I thought you should know where to find the answers but wow the information's, it's not easy to find and I had such a bad experience at school. I really assumed that my experience at the OU was going to be the same, but I was reassured and that what I shared about when I wasn't feeling well was confidential that really helped and an advisor explained that and answered my questions.

Student D: I know what you mean.

Student C: I had one tutor who showed me where to find the study skills website. It was like they handed me the key to the secret library.

Student B: Yeah, I benefited from asking for help when I was unwell, I had thought I would need to provide a doctor's letter and that's not cheap, not cheap at all and I was worried that if I mentioned my health condition, I would be labelled a mad crazy black man. You know well you don't want to be labelled like that do you, you know I'm fed been stereotyped and the impact that would have on my family and the relationship I had with my tutors, that they would treat me differently to other students actually in fact when I confided in my tutor, they were

very understanding. They sent me links to the website and some videos and they arranged for student services to phone me!

Student D: They support a lot of OU students with mental health conditions, did you know that?

Student A: Yeah, I had support too. I've noticed that there's much more understanding about mental health than there was when I was at school'. I didn't want to be labelled as lazy because I needed extensions, but it was such a relief to get that help as a single parent. With the support, my marks increased, I gained confidence and my motivation was definitely stronger. In fact, I really started enjoying studying.

Student C: I'd procrastinate, when things got too much I'd hide from my studies. I was advised to study little and often. Yeah, I learned a better way of working

Student B: Yes, sometimes I was intimidated by my studies. I panicked when I was out of my comfort zone... but advisers helped me manage my anxiety.

Student D: They listened to me too, and they helped me believe that a degree was doable. I was so glad I told the OU I was struggling with my housing situation. The disability support made such a difference for me. I had my own advisor to contact.

Student C: I joined the BAME student association. I valued the community: it was good to know I wasn't alone... you see, I came to the UK without family.'

Student A: Why'?

Student C: I left Syria; it wasn't safe because of the war and on top of that I had such difficulties with the Home Office in the early days in the UK.

Student A: That must have been so tough, you've done so well!

Student C: thanks, my studies were really important, I wanted to be a good role model for my daughter'.

Student B: It sounds like we've all had challenges, and it sounds like we've all benefitted from the help from the OU. We did it!!!

All students: Yes!!!