

One Student's Story

It was the day before New Years that I found out that I was getting dropped from UW-Madison for one academic year. All the stress, anxiety and lack of confidence that I felt the previous semester all culminated into one email. I was a failure.

Looking back, I realize that my predicament resulted from a few, major bad decisions in the semester, which prioritized other commitments over my academics. I was on academic probation, but I didn't take the right steps to address it. By the time I realized I needed to re-center my focus on class, it was too late. Each round of midterms, I told myself "you'll improve on the next one."

However this wasn't the case, and with each round of bad grades, I saw my confidence drop lower and lower making my eventual failure a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Going into faculty appeals, I had told only a few people—it was too embarrassing to share. Unfortunately for me, I worked for a program crawling with deans and advisors so when I appeared on the day of faculty appeals to plead my case, it was a shock to everyone. It was an even bigger shock for me to find out that I would not be readmitted after my appeals hearing. Everything I worked for and planned for that year – getting on the Dean's List, locking down a job – was all thrown out of the equation all at once. As soon as I found out that I was truly dropped from UW-Madison, it seemed like my dreams were snatched from my hands, and I felt nothing.

"Who do I talk to about this?" "Do I focus on getting a job or getting back into school?" "Do I even want to get back into school?" The next couple of months would become a vital period in my life – I dare say one of the most important ones I've ever experienced. I found a support structure around the same people I tried to hide my problems from; the Center for Academic Excellence, the program that I worked for.

With the support of academic deans and advisors, I built an academic plan that would allow me to graduate after my eventual readmission. I wasn't a student of UW-Madison anymore, but I was definitely ready to return

and excel as one. Most importantly, this support helped me realize that I was still cared for, and all hope was not lost for my college career. Not long after a period of

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reflection, confusion and questioning my self-ability, I started to find my bearings.

Planning for a return to school was only half the battle – I was still lost as to what to do with my life while I was dropped. Looking back, I realize that the time away from school was good for me mentally. I had the space and time away from the rigours of class to deal with my damaged confidence and solidify my life goals. My confidence started to come back to me after I narrowed down on a career path that I loved and was convinced would play to my strengths. I also took transfer credits at Madison Area Technical College and attained good grades. This strengthened my belief that I still had the ability to excel in an academic setting.

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During those months, I took any and all steps that I believed would take me as close as possible to the future I wanted. I gathered great work experience volunteering at a research lab related to my occupation of interest, and completed a website redesign for my student job. This played a major role in me achieving my goal of landing a job.

When I applied for readmission, it was a far cry from the "you'll improve on the next one" mantra I had earlier because I knew my confidence was back. Fortunately for me, I was readmitted to UW-Madison and immediately

cleared strict academic probation. The plan had worked.

Looking back, I will always say that this experience was a major defining period in my life. The semester in which I got dropped was a struggle that can never be truly communicated with words, something that one can never truly understand without experiencing. However, the turnaround brought meaning to all the suffering, and transformed me in a way that also escapes words. I wasn't a failure, I persevered.

Kevin B., UW-Madison Class of 2017