



THE STRUGGLES WITH SELF-CONFIDENCE AND SELF-BELIEF WHILST IN EDUCATION

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Introduction

Over the course of the last three years, I have been studying for an LLM Law degree at the University of Plymouth. When I agreed to write this article for the Plymouth Law Review, the focus was to be on my path into law. However, whilst writing this article, one message has come to my attention that I believe is more important to share with readers. Every student will face obstacles that they have to overcome. These obstacles will challenge their self-belief and self-confidence.

This article aims to highlight to readers why there is a need for self-belief and self-confidence when transitioning to further education and beyond. At only 20 years old, I cannot say that I have all the wisdom in the world. But as a current student and soon to be graduate, I hope to share a story that many can relate to, and some will find valuable.

A desire to succeed

I have always had a passion for learning. From an early age I understood that I would need to work incredibly hard to achieve success in education. Neither of my parents were particularly academic. My family focused predominantly on practical subjects rather than academia. From the beginning I found this challenging, as if I was already set up for failure.

Overcoming challenges is a large aspect of achieving goals. Before I completed my primary school education, my parents made the difficult decision to separate. A decision I did not handle well. Suddenly, I had adopted a responsibility to make sure my mother was happy and look after my younger brother, who no longer had his father around. As a ten-year old, my parents' separation was incredibly heart-breaking. I felt isolated as many of my friends

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had both parents supporting them. The lack of support and the upset I endured at such a young age, coupled with the knowledge that no one in my immediate family had been particularly successful in academia, is what I believe drove my desire to succeed in education. It became my one goal: to do the best I could at school, to prove to myself that my troubled childhood and 'set up for failure' would not be my downfall.

I have a trouble with the phrase 'grades are not the end of the world'. Whilst I appreciate that humankind is not going to be destroyed if I do not achieve my goal, for me it is not about the actual grade itself, but what it represents. To me, it represents hard work, strength, and my determination to overcome obstacles that still affect me to this day. There are few greater feelings than knowing that someone else appreciates your work and finds value in what you have to say. Whilst I agree that grades are not the end of the world, for some individuals like me there is a desire to succeed that goes beyond simply wishing to show off to future employers. It is this desire that has driven me throughout my education. However, achieving this has not been without its challenges.

I want to study law, so I am going to study law

Everyone's journey through education is unique due to the obstacles they must overcome. For me, choosing to study law at degree level was not as simple as 'I want to study law, so I am going to study law', nor was it a case of 'once I achieve the grades, I am going to study law'.

After obtaining my GCSE's I continued my education, studying Geography, Psychology and Law at A-Level. It was clear to everyone around me that of the three subjects, I had a passion for law and a fascination with how it developed, particularly case law.

It had always been my dream to attend university. It did not matter what subject I studied, provided I got there. Selecting a university was not a complex decision-making process for me, but in retrospect it should have been. I knew there were many universities but had no idea what they each had to offer and the differences between them. From my perspective, a psychology course was a psychology course, and a law course was a law course. The only difference I really appreciated was the separation of the 'elite' Russell Group Universities compared to the others. To be honest, I did shamefully little research into what the different universities had to offer. I attended a few open days and chose those universities to apply to. To me each university was practically the same.

Once I had chosen my universities, I could apply to study law. It was my passion and the one subject I had ever truly enjoyed. However, there was one thing that stopped me from applying to study law: self-confidence and self-belief.

Anyone who is studying law will be familiar with the 'ooh' sound and the phrase 'you must be so clever', when you tell someone that you are studying law. In fact, I heard these exact words from my flatmate and her mother when I met them for the first time on arrivals weekend. There is a complete misconception in society, largely perpetuated by Hollywood, that law students are some of the smartest individuals in the world. We must study twenty-four hours, seven days a week to achieve any form of success. It was this perspective that I held when applying to university. I had no faith in myself that I could ever succeed in law because in my mind, I was not smart enough. Yes, I enjoyed learning about law, but passion alone was not going to be enough to pass three years of exams and coursework testing my legal knowledge. Because of this lack of confidence, I chose to apply for criminology instead. It seemed like the perfect substitute for me. It engaged with elements of the law, was intellectually stimulating, and yet did not require me to stay up till midnight learning cases to support the application of the law.

During the application process, my confidence was at an all-time low. However, this changed on 15 August 2019. Like every student on results day, I was attached to my phone when I got an email from Bath Spa University confirming that I had been accepted to study criminology. I was both delighted and proud of myself that another goal of mine had been achieved. Later, however, when I collected my results from my Sixth Form, I was stunned. The grade I had received for Law was the best I had achieved across all my GCSE's and A-Levels. The moment I read my results I was devastated that I had lacked the confidence to apply to study law. I had always thrived in the subject and enjoyed it, yet I had let my lack of belief in myself overshadow my passion.

When I told my mother that I wanted to change courses to study law at university, she panicked. She had no idea what to do and did not understand that I could change courses at this late stage. Her main concern was accommodation and that I would have nowhere to live. This was the biggest pitfall of not knowing anyone who had attended university. I had no one to turn to for advice. Thankfully, my partner's mother encouraged me to phone the University of Plymouth. With my mother's reluctant support, I made the phone call and secured my place.

Doubting myself

After being accepted onto the University of Plymouth's Law course, my self-confidence was at an all-time high. However, as I am sure many students know, this can fluctuate like the weather. It is difficult when your self-confidence and belief dwindles, due to the negative thoughts in the back of your mind that cast doubt over your own abilities. Personally, I question whether I would have rebuilt my self-confidence had it not been for the University of Plymouth Law Society (UPLS), who have been a cheerleader in my corner since the day I arrived at the University.

In my first year I competed in the UPLS Mooting Competition but was eliminated in the first knock-out round. My Mooting partner Chloe Collard encouraged me to apply to be one of the UPLS Events and Activities Officers for 2020/2021. I was absolutely petrified to apply. Other than Mooting, I had little involvement with the society, due to the fear of judgement from my peers. To my surprise I was elected to this position. This served as a much-needed boost of confidence, that I had not experienced since receiving my A-Level results. The following year my self-confidence grew further when I competed in and won the UPLS Negotiations Competition and came second in the Debating Competition.

At the end of the second semester of my second year, I ran for President of UPLS. Over the two years of my involvement, the support it had given me was a major driving force behind my newfound confidence. Unfortunately, I lost by two votes to a very worthy candidate. To my delight, however, I was elected UPLS Secretary and Careers Officer for 2021/2022 and could continue to be a part of the society that I have come to love. Throughout my time engaging with UPLS the confidence and belief I had in myself grew tremendously, and I am now in a position where those thoughts in the back of my mind doubting myself are rarely there.

You can achieve

It is easy for me to sit behind this screen and tell readers that you need to believe in yourself to succeed in both education and in your future career. This is not to say you will not encounter challenges. It is not always easy to believe in yourself, especially when life events have caused you such pain and heart ache that you do not know your self-worth. I was fortunate enough to be surrounded by great friends who have supported me in getting me where I am today. The best advice I can give anyone reading this report is to set your goals and always believe that you can achieve them, no matter what hurdles you may need to overcome.