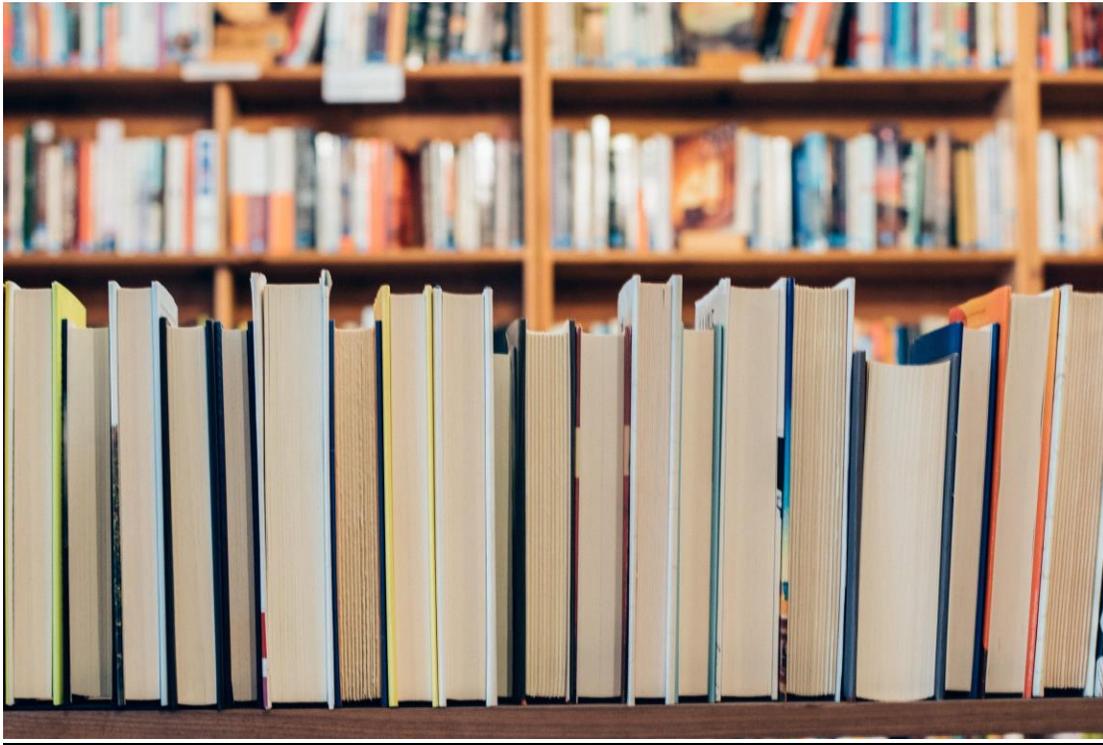


A Conversation With Mature Students



Article by Dilraj Virk / Photo by Jessica Ruscello via Unsplash.

At York University, mature students are often overlooked amidst the sea of first-year students, who come to university straight out of high-school.

However, mature students represent a vast portion of York University's student population and come from unique and varying backgrounds, with interesting stories and experiences to share. Some of these students include Kate, a fourth-year student in the Children, Childhood and Youth program who previously worked in animation for the past two decades, and Alan, a fourth-year psychology student that always has everyone laughing.

To better understand the mature student experience at York, I conducted an interview with Kate and Alan, featuring 9 questions, and gathered insights on their views as mature students.

1. What advice do you have for incoming mature students?

Kate mentioned taking it slow during your first year, by taking fewer than 5 courses. You can balance your needs this way, by taking a lighter course load and managing work and being a parent. Be sure to take advantage of all the resources York has to offer as well, such as Learning Skills Services. Last but not least, Kate suggests speaking to other mature students, as many of them may be facing similar challenges, and you'll feel less alone. In addition, don't worry about the length of time you've been out of school. Alan went to York straight out of high school but got intimidated and returned 40 years later. If, as a mature student, you feel intimidated, reach out to other mature students, take advantage of professors' office hours, and ask questions during lectures!

2. How has ACMAPS helped during your time at York University?

“By attending ACMAPS workshops and events, I formed genuine connections and friendships with other mature students, many of whom had interesting stories and backgrounds.” - Kate

ACMAPS also has support adapted to each mature student's individual needs and Kate felt a sense of community whenever she visited the ACMAPS office or participated in ACMAPS workshops. Alan always visits ACMAPS when he doesn't have an answer to something. He knows he can come by and ask a question and receive an answer.

3. What challenges did you face when you first started at York University?

Academia was not foreign to Kate, as her father was a Professor, but she came from an arts background, and had last attended an Art College in the 90s. Therefore, Kate initially found it difficult to learn with technology and read academic articles and books. The deep thinking and critical writing that some courses required made her reach out to members of her family, many of whom are fast readers and writers. It was also difficult for Kate's children to adapt to her being a student, but they were supportive, and saw the journey as an adventure. Alan didn't face many challenges because he took a lighter course load of 2-3 courses per year. Time management also came easy to him and he ensured not to leave work to the last minute.

4. How can mature students get involved on campus?

Try to take at least one hour out of the week to get involved with ACMAPS and/or YUMSO (York University Mature Students' Organization). Try to put some time aside to attend workshops or YUMSO events, because before you know it, a year or two goes by, and you're already close to graduating! Getting involved with ACMAPS and/or YUMSO also helps you connect with other like-minded mature students. In addition, York has over 100 clubs for students to get involved in. Alan would also recommend joining clubs, taking advantage of the Tait McKenzie Gym, and making friends!



5. What are some ways mature students can juggle work, school, and parenting responsibilities?

Many assignment deadlines at university are rigid, but you must accept that your priorities will change daily, and sometimes you'll have to change course. Through speaking to other mature students from ACMAPS and YUMSO, Kate learned how they juggle multiple responsibilities, and built a toolkit from the advice they gave.

6. What other resources on campus can help mature students navigate their first year and beyond?

Besides ACMAPS and YUMSO, Learning Skills Services, The Career Centre, and the Writing Centre are all useful resources students should take advantage of. Learning Skills Services and The Writing Centre especially helped Kate write academic papers throughout her time at university. Alan also recommends to periodically check in with your academic advisor to ensure you are meeting your degree requirements.



“I usually go to the movies to de-stress and relax. Visiting coffee shops and sparking up conversations with people also helps and having a sense of humour about myself!” - Alan

7. How do you cultivate positive mental health when stressed?

Self-care is a necessary part of taking care of your mental health. When Kate is stressed, she tries to put aside one hour a week to do something on campus. Otherwise, she does yoga and exercises, even if it's just for a bit every week. Self-care activities also energize Kate and help her study better.

8. What has been the best part of your university experience so far?

Some of Kate's favourite parts of her university experience were unexpected, including receiving a few awards; as these made her sacrifices and hard work worthwhile. She also became closer with her husband and children, who supported and enriched her learning experience; even helping

her study! When Kate first returned to school, she saw it as a selfish journey, but since then, she's formed stronger bonds with the people she loves. For Alan, achieving a high GPA and volunteering at ACMAPS has been the best part of his university experience, as he's been able to help other students and guide them in the right direction.

9. What's your one wish to improve the world?

Kate's one wish to improve the world would be for everyone to start having uncomfortable conversations about systemic racism and other social justice issues. While these conversations may be uncomfortable for some, they are necessary if we are to move forward and address anti-blackness within our communities. Alan's one wish to improve the world would be for people to be nice to one another, accommodating and friendly.

Kate and Alan are two great representatives of the mature student community at York, which is composed of vibrant students with a lot to share! Be sure to check out some of our other blog posts for mature students!