



Image: painted Alpine Mountains Clip Art, GoGraph.com

Lyrics quoted: "Climb Every Mountain" from *The Sound of Music*, Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1959

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"Climb Every Mountain..."

Mother Abbess reflectively sings to Maria Von Trapp in *The Sound of Music* before encouraging her to go spread her wings into the unknown. As a mature international student, the backing of my family to finally do my degree (and move my family abroad) certainly made me feel a little Julie Andrew-esque, albeit minus the mesmerising voice!

As a mature student, you have most probably climbed a mountain or two of your own to be at university, be it financial, physical or psychological. We all have different reasons why we ended up at university at this stage in our lives. We all have unique commitments and backgrounds that require our attention besides those essays, readings and mid-terms - whether you are a parent or carer juggling looking after dependents, working a demanding job (or both) or if you are a senior struggling with the digital maze that we have all been dropped into back in March. What does unite us is that we are at university to learn something we are passionate about and get qualified so we can better provide for our family.

"Ford every stream..."

A huge part of the university experience is the personal connection you make with your peers. Online delivery just does not provide the social interaction we feel by physically being on campus. Hence, the overwhelming feeling of isolation

and loneliness expressed by so many I have spoken to. So, when we think those streams are too deep or fast flowing and it is safer to stay on the riverbank, this is when we must at least try to find a safe crossing.

Luckily there are a number of virtual social resources that can support you to connect with other mature students. For example Atkinson Centre for Mature And Part-Time Students (ACMAPS) has a regular [Café Hour](#) where you can meet with peer mentors. [York University Mature Students Organization \(YUMSO\)](#), has a monthly virtual evening meet-up as well as a [WhatsApp Group](#) for mature students.

“Follow every rainbow...”

Whether you have an undergraduate degree, masters, PhD or a diploma waiting for you at the end of that rainbow, you need to look after yourself to get there. Your wellbeing is just, if not more, important than the academic achievements. Looking after yourself could be joining a local walking group or going for a stroll in the park to enjoy the fresh air.

Fall is an over-looked season where a lot of people start to prepare for winter, holidays and forget to enjoy the beautiful colours of the leaves (my kids reminded me how much fun it is to crunch them!). Personally, I have been busy planting flower bulbs for springtime in my garden. Did you know a 2011 studyⁱ from the Netherlands showed gardening can reduce stress more than other relaxing leisure activities? Even if you only have a balcony or indoor plants you can still plant some beautiful flowers in pots and give yourself something to look forward to!

At university, you can check the website of your faculty for a full list of wellbeing resources and services. A full array of university-wide services can be found on Student Community & Leadership Development’s [COVID-19 Wellbeing Resources](#) page. ACPAPS facilitates regular virtual Mindful Meditation and other wellbeing sessions which can be found on their [events](#) page.

Getting to grips with academic ins and outs is scary – especially if you are in your first year and you can’t just walk up to the TA or Professor at the end of lecture to ask! Luckily, there are tools provided by the various departments to help you during this time. If, like me, you miss the good old browse through the library stacks, there are guides and contacts to help you through online research at the

[YU Library website](#). And my go-to page when I am can't remember by APA from MLA from Chicago, is the [Spark Kit](#). And of course, the [Writing Centre](#) can help you with writing notes or essay planning. And of course, don't be afraid to ask your TA or Prof. – they want you to succeed after all!

“... 'Till you find your dream”

Time at university flies, especially when you are busy. Make the most of the connections you build and try going out of your comfort zone every once in a while - join that online Yoga session, a coffee meet-up, volunteer for a club as you never know where a conversation or a connection might take you on the way to pursuing your dream. Most importantly enjoy your journey!

ⁱ Van Den Berg, A., & Custers, M. (2010). Gardening Promotes Neuroendocrine and Affective Restoration from Stress. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 16(1), 3–11.
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