

How to overcome first-year fear of failure

After their first semester and first major university exams, many first years are sitting with an unenviable conundrum: the realisation that they may not have made the best choice about what to study for the next three years of their life.



© Ferli Achirulli – 123RF.com

And now they have a major decision facing them, the decision about whether they should continue on their current path and see things through, or whether they should cut their losses and try again in a different field next year.

“Many of these students may, for the past five months, have increasingly been feeling that the qualification for which they enrolled doesn’t match what they expected. Others may feel that less-than-great first semester results should be taken as a warning signal that they may not be cut out for the career they envisioned. Whatever the case may be, this is the time for cool heads, and hasty decisions should be avoided,” says Dr Gillian Mooney, Dean: Academic Development and Support at The Independent Institute of Education.

Don't be discouraged

She says on top of the doubt, the prospect of first year failure can cause a serious knock to the confidence of young students, and it is therefore essential that they seek assistance from student support services to help guide them on the road ahead.

“But in terms of facing up to the decisions that lie ahead, the single most important thing for students finding themselves in this predicament, is to remember that a false start does not equate to failure. Instead, do the work to figure out what contributed to a less than optimal performance, or why there is a mismatch between your previous vision and reality. And whatever you do, don’t just give up and jump into something else, because you may find yourself simply repeating the experience,” Mooney says.

She adds that for many first years, this will be their first encounter with having to develop their resilience and making a potentially tough, adult decision.

“In today’s world of work, being multi-skilled is not only beneficial but more often than not, essential. So chances are that even if you do decide down the line that you want to pursue a different field, career or qualification, your first qualification will stand you in good stead when you start job hunting and when you enter the workplace.

“So our advice will always be to try and find a way to make things work, even if they seem not to be working so well at the moment. Do your best to turn the ship around, by determining how you can improve your performance, and also by figuring out and setting your mind at ease about how you will be able to use your first qualification to complement a potential future, additional qualification. Re-aligning your vision of your future can make all the difference to your motivation and determination,” she says.

Mooney says that while first-year dropout statistics are significant in South Africa, those doubting themselves after the first semester still have a lot they can do to remedy the situation, and becoming part of the statistics need not be a given.

If at first you don't succeed...

“Your performance to date should definitely not be taken as an indicator of your likely future performance,” she says.

However, students should honestly assess where they are, and how they are going to proceed.

“There are many factors contributing to first-year failure, including difficulty adapting to a new environment and massively increased workload, personal or socio-economic factors, not to mention the freedom of being considered an adult coupled with the temptations of round-the-clock party opportunities.

Evaluate, course correct...

“So determine which factor or combination of factors contributed to your current situation, rectify and adjust where possible, and give the next semester your absolute best shot. It is also useful to try and get even more involved with your studies, by trying to get real-world job-shadowing or internship experience so that you can get a better feeling for how your academic work will translate into the real world of work.”

Mooney says that students should only consider changing direction once they have given it their absolute best, and have sought out the assistance of their institution’s support structures to help them navigate their current challenges.

Keep calm and carry on

“So finish your second semester and give it your best. In the meantime, you can start looking at your options by doing online research and speaking to student advisors at other institutions which may have different, more work-focused and future-facing qualifications that may be more aligned to your vision and personality.

“But never lose sight of the fact that no knowledge will ever be wasted. A false start does not mean it’s the end of the road, and keeping calm and getting some perspective on your situation before making rash decisions can turn negatives into

positive – not only academically, but also on your personal development on the road to adulthood.”

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>