I Believe in You

The year was 1997. The new graduate was 18 years old and decided not to go to college when he declared, “I’m taking a year off to find myself.” 365 stagnant days later his parents gave the ultimatum, enroll in school, enlist in the military, or move out. As eviction became a possibility, panic ensued. His mother recommended he attend cosmetology school, as she had many years before. “It’s always good to know a trade”, she said, “You’ll always have work.” He obliged. Seven years flashed by with the blink of an eye. Dissatisfied with his career, he told a coworker, “I wish I went to college.” “Go for it,” she said, “I believe in you.”

In 2004, he registered for the fall semester at Delaware County Community College. Confidence skyrocketed as faculty members congratulated him on his enrollment, but self-doubt shadowed his ambition as he walked into his empty apartment. “You can’t manage a salon while attending college. You’re not smart enough and have no time for school”, he told himself. He was the student who never emerged in class, the faceless designation, and the ghost of ambition. He withdrew from his classes.

In April of 2015, his mother asked him, “What happened to your plans of going back to school?” “I’ll go when my sons are in grade school”, he said. “That’s an excuse,” his mother said, “You can go now, part time, while your kids are still young. Set the example for them. You can do it. I believe in you.” He enrolled the next week.

Negative thoughts of yesteryears resurrected as he walked into the classroom, but dissipated quickly. In his English Composition class, students created blogs that allowed them to network by offering feedback on each others’ essays. As the online socialization carried into the classroom, he felt a sense of social belonging. He learned about the fixed mindset, the belief that an individual’s intelligence is a fixed trait and cannot be increased. He also learned about the [growth mindset](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ygx5nLtIFRI), which is backed by scientific research and concludes that we can [rewire and exercise our brains](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpfYCZa87g) to become stronger through our studies. He adopted the growth mindset, realizing that it had always been a part of him. He is excelling and enjoying his studies. He is learning and growing.

I have come along way since being that 18-year old graduate. I am finding myself.

To any incoming college freshmen: If you feel nervous, insecure, out of place, doubt your abilities, or believe that you are not smart enough for college, you are not alone. Whether age 18 or 80, most every college freshman feels that way in the beginning. You are in a new, unfamiliar place with new and unfamiliar people. Those feelings are normal but will pass. Don’t be afraid to question your professors. Don’t be afraid to question fellow classmates. If you want to go to college, go for it. You can do it. I believe in you.