

ONE MOMENT IN TIME – THE BEAUTY OF BEING RIT TIGER

RIT Croatia from a student's perspective

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It was the winter of 2014 when I started my RIT adventure. At first, college experience seemed intimidating since I enrolled as a relatively older freshman at the age of twenty-six. However, it marked a beginning of a journey where I discovered a whole new dimension of myself and others.

My English skills, which were not that great when I started the college, were one of the reasons I was hesitant in the beginning. I was afraid if I would be able to keep up with all of the lectures and assignments. Hardly anyone at that time believed I would graduate. Yet, here I am - a class of 2019 graduate with diploma in my hands proudly walking across the stage as they call my name. But it was not so gloomy in my freshmen year.

The challenge of adapting to a completely different education system where deadlines are taken very seriously and attendance mandatory was a rather challenging thing for a twenty-six year old with a gap of more than nine years in formal education. Besides my regular work at that time, I had to accommodate lectures, assignments, and all those hours of preparation before the exams. It seemed a mission impossible since many lectures would overlap with my schedule thus greatly harming my performance. During the lectures, I was ashamed to speak because I was afraid that my English was never good enough. Sometimes I would be faced with my colleagues' laughs due to my improper pronunciation of certain words or phrases. A catastrophe in the making – this is exactly how I felt at the very beginning of my first semester in academia. I needed to shift my priorities and dedicate myself wholeheartedly to education. In the meantime, I decided to make college my major preoccupation. This meant stepping back from my own business and taking more time to practice my English, attend more office hours, and come prepared to exams and lectures.

And once you think that everything was going in the right direction, out of a sudden you are faced with another challenge. Let me tell you a story that stuck with me until this day for which I will remember my toughest period at the college. In the first semester of my sophomore year, I took the course named Writing Seminar. The goal of

the course was to prepare students to write academic research papers and everyone was supposed to produce one until the end of the semester. After going through many office hours and draft revisions, in week 12 (nearly the end of the semester), my professor decided that my paper was not good enough and recommended me to drop the course. I was shocked, angry, and at the same time felt such weakness that I could not do anything else but cry. This was the first time in my life that I did not make it even though I have committed significant time and effort. Eventually, I dropped the course and took it in the first semester of my junior year. By then, I was completely fine with the fact that sometimes you really have to fail in order to make a big come back. The second time I took the course, I aced it and received so many accolades from my professor that I could not resist the temptation but brag about my achievement. And yes, I can proudly say that I became comfortable with failure as much as I was comfortable with the success.

As soon as I made RIT my top priority, suddenly a whole different world opened to me – the world of amazing people including my colleagues and my professors who accompanied me in this extraordinary trip. With them, I learnt to be more patient, tolerant, confident, hard-working, and resilient. It did not take long to realize that all those lectures, presentations, team projects, and office hours were made with one particular goal - to make me a strong, educated, and competent college graduate. And this was all I needed to keep going regardless of how hard it seemed.

The beauty of studying at RIT is that you are immediately becoming part of one community which is able to accept you in your entirety. It gives you a chance to think and act differently without being judged for it. For me, this proved as one of the greatest motivators to successfully obtain my degree. It is amazing how many new things I have discovered about myself and others along the way. I learnt that I was stronger, more persistent, and more courageous person than I have ever thought. Never before have I had the opportunity to achieve something greater than becoming a part of only seven percent of the world population with the college degree. And for me, this is a blessing and privilege which should never be taken for granted.

Looking back, I understand how RIT experience made it possible for me to become self-confident individual by turning my weaknesses into strengths and becoming fully aware of what I want to achieve. As I set for the future, I see myself as a strong-willed, ambitious, and patient individual whose drive to make the most out of life shall always remain fierce.