

How OLS Can Help You!

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE ON HOW THE OLS PROGRAM AT BELLEVUE COLLEGE CHANGED MY LIFE, HOW IT CAN CHANGE YOURS, AND WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN JOINING THE PROGRAM.



OLS[®] An Associate Degree
in Occupational & Life Skills
BELLEVUE COLLEGE

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Chapter 1

Entering the Trenches of College!

Ahhhhh! The feeling of just completing high school. You walk down the aisle in your cap and gown, and you receive the much needed and much deserved diploma! You have just

completed another chapter of your life and you have two whole months ahead of you to do whatever you want. I knew that feeling. I feel like there was a weight lifted off my chest and that I just completed a certain stage of adulting. I felt very accomplished.

But there was one thing that I had major anxiety about. It's the dreaded C word, "College." I had observed college students all throughout my younger years and had preconceived notions that college was way too intellectual and complex for my liking. The idea of preparing for a major part of my life that would determine my future, I didn't know how I was going to handle being more independent and all the classwork that came with all the freedom I was going to experience.

When I opened my OLS acceptance letter it was posted all over social media and people who I didn't even know saw the video of me reading it. I looked excited, like I was looking forward to the experience, but the nervous emotions took over. I recalled having interviews with the principal and being asked lots of questions that I found hard to answer.

To my surprise, when I entered the program, I felt they took things very slow and easy. We were all introduced to the classes we were going to be taking and what kind of topics we were going to be studying.

My very first class was Learning Strategies. We practiced organization and time management. To be honest, I still need to work on my time management skills, but I felt more confident about how I would bring that out. We went into detail about setting our alarms, waking up strategies, when to go to bed and more.

It's really a good class for your first year because part of the work life and the college experience is punctuality. This class instilled the facts and knowledge on how to do that. When you take this class, you are being introduced to a basic life skill that many people struggle with.

The biggest plus about this class is that it's not as academic, but it teaches a good life skill, preparing students for the workforce.

The biggest lesson I learned is that it's ok to mess up and learn from your mistakes. That's why Learning" is the first word of the class. One of my biggest challenges in life is Executive Function Disorder. A large part of it for me is planning and time management issues. I used to get really frustrated and I'd go super-duper hard on myself because I didn't feel like I was meeting society's expectations on how to be a good worker and employee. When most people go to college, they have preconceived notions that they have to have all their disciplinary actions put together but it's just the start of living the life as an adult. I learned this new term called adulting. I didn't start feeling like I went through that process until I started college.

In high school, I had people who would physically come to my front door from the school to make sure that I was sitting in my seat at 7:50 AM every morning. I felt like that was way too easy of a task and I wasn't learning about the consequences of my actions. Learning Strategies really goes in depth about your specific needs in planning and time management skills and it pinpoints the specific accommodations you need to get you to be punctual independently. So, you'll go into the experience worried about your performance but the people there will gladly help you.

I also remember a little kerfuffle I was in when I was being distracting in class. The teacher kicked me out and I felt like I was wasting time that I could be getting a good grade. When I sat outside, I thought about my actions and consequences. Then I went back to the classroom about 15 minutes later after some hardcore pondering and I walked straight up to her, gave her an apology and kindly asked if I could rejoin the group I was working with. I remember getting a full grade and feeling so accomplished when I checked my canvas. I used a certain

learning strategy of communicating and asking for a second chance. We all have our off days. Nobody is perfect in this world, but we learn something new every day. When I saw that grade, I just realized I learned something else powerful from the class and it's how to communicate effectively. I was facing an issue and I strategized a solution for the problem.

My favorite class is Introduction into Computers! I'd say I was the most in tune with that class because I be obsessed with highly advanced technology. (Bellevue is the perfect city for that HINT HINT!!!) In this class you will learn how to brush up on your typing skills, how to use certain programs like Excel and Microsoft Word and detailed information on assistive technology. You will also learn how to properly format emails for the professional workplace. I noticed we all practiced spelling and grammar. Now after taking that class, I feel that I know how to use my own technology well. Last quarter, I was able to write a long-detailed paper about how to end housing insecurity in our area by using the computer skills I learned during my first year. I used the autocorrect and the right punctuation. If you feel like technology is too complex for you this class will give you good tips and pointers to navigate not just your computer but your phone, iPad, and other gadgets as well.

The next class I would like to talk about is Introduction into Communications. This class teaches you all about how to effectively talk and communicate with one another. From what I remember, we went over ways to discuss matters in both a professional and interpersonal environment. One thing that you'll probably find helpful is that you'll also learn how to listen carefully to one another.

The biggest thing I learned in this class is that part of being a good communicator, I also had to listen to what the other person is saying. Before this class, I always liked to run my mouth

off in conversations and debates with people. I never gave the other person a chance to state their opinion.

In conversations, some people subconsciously think that just talking all the time is a good way to get their thoughts across. After this course, I learned to take in and absorb other perspectives and ideas. My friendship group got bigger, and I can do my work at my job with ease and comfort. It took me a while for me to realize that being quiet and listening for a bit helped my life out in the long run.

Your relationships with your parents and family members will also get stronger as well. I consider my mom a bundle of wisdom and I got access to it a little more when I put my differences aside and took her advice. It made me realize how my family's trying to help me and I hope many of you will get that after taking this class.

My whole point of this chapter is that there are many classes, teachers and experts who are there to help you along the way. All the anxiety that you have about having to do things completely alone is a farce. That's why I want to go to my next subject which is Learning Lab.

During your time at OLS, you will have every Wednesday off. There is an event called Learning Lab. It happens Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 12:00 to 1:00 PM. On Wednesdays it's from 9:30 to 11:30 AM. It's because of Learning Lab that I could do my work in detail, and it gave me the motivation to strive harder. There will be people there to always help you. If you feel stuck, you can ask them for help. If you feel like your work is overwhelming or you just don't know how to do it, don't give up. By attending Learning Lab, you can achieve being the best student you can be! Overall, I can say I have no regrets going to college. It's a warm, welcoming environment for all to enjoy.

Another aspect that will help you move forward with your experience and that I really appreciate is Performance Reviews. Those are personal 10-minute meetings you have with your instructors to see how your grades; Performance Indicators and your overall performance is doing in class. You'll fill out a form about how you think you did, then your instructor will write out what they think of how you did. You'll both talk about it over the meeting. Sometimes I hated to hear the hard truth of what I needed to work on, but I took it as a learning experience instead of an insult. Most of the skills you put into your internship during your 4th year will mostly be due to the one-on-one help. I feel like I'm more trustworthy and accountable due to the personal work I did with them. Hopefully you'll find that helpful as well!

Chapter 2

The Covid-19 Pandemic

I thought entering the first stages of college was hard but preparing for what was to come, my first couple of months in person was a piece of cake. During the end of February of 2020, the governor ordered a lockdown for all of us. I remember exactly what happened. I was walking around Seattle with my friend and we both received an email on our phones telling us that we were going to start having online classes. Everything shut down and all of us were made to stay at home for a long time.

The pandemic made attending school so unpredictable. There were many times I felt like giving up and dropping out of school. The beginning of the pandemic was the hardest time for all students and workers. Yet, I learned the most during that challenging time. It really tested my executive functioning abilities. All classes were moved to MS Teams, and we had to sit through

classes for more than an hour in our rooms. I must admit I got distracted a lot because I felt like I wasn't being held accountable as much.

Students who stayed in the program got a much more valuable experience, because it really prepares you for the future. I got used to a new routine. In the workplace there will be things that happen that you won't like but must deal with. I'm working an internship at the Academic Success Center on campus. There are tasks that I complete, but a big portion of the job requires me to sit at the front desk doing nothing for periods of time. If I didn't have two years of the pandemic that required me to sit in my room for long hours, then I wouldn't be prepared for the job. So, I even take the pandemic as a positive way to help my development.

In addition, all the downtime provided me the opportunity to practice my morning routine. Before quarantine, I wouldn't know the first thing to do. Now after all that practicing, I wake up consistently at 5:15 am and leave Shoreline to Bellevue around 6:40. I make my lunch the night before and make breakfast.

During your college career you'll go through some hardships and will want to give up, but keep pushing through and you'll eventually grow, mature and adult from it. Another valuable lesson I learned from sitting through class in my room is the virtue of instant gratification vs delayed gratification.

My dad and I discuss this topic every week. If I had dropped out because of the hard times, it would have felt good in the short run, but I wouldn't have gotten to where I am today if it wasn't due to the quarantine. Now I'm at the point where I'm preparing to move out of my mom's house.

Living on your own requires lots of time, skills, and patience. When you experience obstacles in college you won't notice it immediately, but you become a little bit closer to freedom and independence.

One of my favorite classes I took was called Critical Thinking through Science. In this course we learned how to solve problems in the most practical and scientific ways. We got to work with our hands a lot while trying out different experiments. There were also some classes about politics that really perked my mind as well. One of the courses I really tuned into was called News and Daily Living. My favorite part of the class was when we all observed the 2020 presidential election. Each student was given a certain topic to report on. I thought the debates were the most engaging and exciting part of the class. I really put my public speaking and media skills to use. The discussions we had in class were also to my liking. The fact that we spoke about topics that I feel passionate about also kept me in school during the pandemic. After a while I started to like online classes and I got used to staying at home. I have a feeling that school was the only thing during the two years that kept me entertained and I eventually looked forward to it.

It wasn't until the summertime during the pandemic that I noticed how much I valued school at the time. The long days of just sitting at home during quarantine while everything was closed except the essentials got to my head. I didn't think I'd be that excited when I heard that the new school year was going to start.

When the new year started, I pinpointed my professional flaws that I needed to work on. One of them was punctuality. I knew how much I got distracted even when I woke up early. So, I used the pandemic as a steppingstone to practice my time management skills by setting my alarm

10 to 30 minutes before class to remind me to log on MS Teams in an orderly fashion. It was easy enough for me because there was no commute in the process so I could stay at home.

For the remainder of the pandemic, I practiced my weaknesses so when I went back to campus, I could put my new skills to use! If I could give new students a new piece of advice even though we won't experience another viral pandemic till the next 100 years, there will be times that you want to give up. Sometimes the work might be hard, or you'll have to work with some people that you don't get along with or you might think a teacher's style is too hardcore or doesn't match with how you do things, but my tip to you would be to just stay in the program and stick through it. You would learn so much and become stronger and see the light at the end of the tunnel. I'm just starting to see that as well. Once I graduate, I feel like I have a whole new perspective on life as I keep working and living to the fullest!

Chapter 3

The Return to Campus

My favorite year is 2021, because that's the year we all could return to campus. It felt like my college career was starting all over again. I felt reborn! The look on my friends faces when we could see each other face to face again was like coming out of a two-year hibernation. I had prepared all the skills and new habits from quarantine to put it to use in person! The courses were very stimulating. I'd say my favorite course upon returning was Nutritional Health and Fitness.

During this course you'll learn a lot more than just hardcore academic ridged facts and workplace preparation. It will teach your personal life skills regarding how you interact with

people and how to work on your physical and mental health. One of those is making healthy food choices. The nutritional class that I took we learned all about how the food we eat affects our body. I like how this course doesn't directly judge you for the number of empty calories, but it makes you think about perhaps reviewing your choices of places to eat or the groceries you buy.

There was an assignment about us reviewing the total calories of McDonald's meals. I remember the amount in each meal was considerably higher than meals that you can cook at home for example. You can make the same type of thing in your own kitchen and already have it be healthier and less greasy and salty. One of my favorite assignments was called choose my plate. That's where we had a plate, and we can add what foods to eat daily to assess how healthy it is and the nutritional value. It really made me think about making healthier food choices. The biggest thing I learned from the class is that just because something tastes good and it's convenient it might not be the best choice for your body in the long run. After the class I evaluated my eating choices with more scrutiny, and I make sure to only put ingredients in my body that I can read on the list.

Another class that kept me entertained amid the pandemic was called Music Appreciation. In that course we talked about the different genres we like to listen to and what music inspires us the most. Even though we were getting credit and it was still a class structured environment it didn't feel like school. In my opinion it felt more transformative. We got to learn about many types of music from around the world.

There was an assignment where we got to share what type of instruments, we liked the most. I talked about how I started playing the piano at 4 years old and have been taking lessons ever since. Even after I stopped, I still played and learned new content. I eventually got to writing my own songs by hand (no notes or sheet music required) and got to show it to the whole

class. Just that gave me a good enough connection to the students and teacher. I used it as an expression of frustration during quarantine.

Another class I was very fond of is called Walking and Jogging. This course taught us the importance of having movement in our lives and why exercise is important despite all of us being indoors most of the time. Not only did I receive credit for the class, but it instilled a healthy daily exercise ritual in me. Before I would just lay in bed and be on my computer and phone all day but now, I wake up early in the morning to workout. The course was just enough to push me over the edge to make that decision.

There was also a yoga class that I took during quarantine. I felt that class gave us balance and regulation on life. It helped me focus on more schoolwork and gave me a clearer mind as I'm sure it did others. It helped me integrate back to campus life! So, I'd say my return was successful. Without the pandemic though, I have a feeling the year will go by fast for most of you. It still feels like I'm still in my freshman year and everything's passing by so quickly. Even if it feels long, the experience is still worth it, and you'll meet lots of good friends and people there who can help.

Chapter 4

Internship Time

I learned a lot during the past 3 years in the OLS program, but I'd say the most educational time for me was the 4th year. We all had pretty much acclimated back to campus life

and seeing people face to face again. The first quarter we still took 4 classes, so it was still like regular school. All the learning skills I practiced during quarantine came in handy for the classes.

One course I'd like to home in on is called Social Change in America. In this class we focused on homelessness and food insecurity in the greater Seattle area and what policies and social movements we can initiate to help the poor and downtrodden. Politics is one of my strong interests, so I took advantage of everything I knew and wrote a huge article on different issues that affect homelessness. It also gave me some insights on what type of career occupations or a side volunteer position I could apply for.

Another class is called the Environment in our Community, where we learned and talked all about climate change and how humans affect it, and what we can do to change it. All the PowerPoints were very interesting and mind stimulating. I recall making a really detailed PowerPoint about greenhouse gasses and how to cut carbon emissions. There are a lot to take advantage of when it comes to this program.

In the 3rd quarter you'll be starting your internship! Mine is at the Academic Success Center on campus. I know that sounds very nerve racking, but don't worry. There'll be a highly trained professional that'll set it up and help you out throughout the way. They will supervise you on the first day to make sure you know all the tasks to do and that everything is running smoothly.

In the beginning of the year, you'll meet with them once every other week to explore what occupations interest you and what companies OLS works with. You'll do some exploring and eventually start. I feel most companies are non-judgmental because it'll be a learning experience for you. You'll still attend a class once a week on Mondays called Field Experience.

In that course you'd be learning about professionalism in the workplace and accommodations you can get at your job. I personally find it very helpful.

Even when you're about to graduate there will be calls you can attend, to learn all about the different services offered when you get your degree. I joined a call and learned about a couple organizations. There's one called Mainstay at Seattle Central College. Their main objective is to answer difficult questions about employment after graduation. They help you explore jobs, how to master interviews, how to advocate for yourself and how to prepare for the workforce and independent living services.

Another one is called LSA which stands for Learning Skills Advocate. This one was my favorite and I think I'm going to take advantage of this one because they specialize in executive functioning skills. They provide in-person and online training to support your needs. They will have trained professionals to help you with vocational service, life skills and much more daily living help related topics.

The last one I'd like to mention is called DVR. This stands for Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. Their main objective is to fight for certain policies to have people with developmental disabilities to be valued members of society. They'll also help you with employment services and independent living situations and stick up and fight for your rights if you are ever taken advantage of. They will be by your side!

The OLS program has permanently changed and shifted my life for the better. I now feel I can almost reach and see the light at the end of the tunnel. There were some very tough hardships I went through but it's well worth it at the end of the day. I do recommend you go to a resource fair. You will have lots of fun, learn new things and meet all kinds of nice people. They

also started an Alumni program so even when you graduate, you'll still feel like you have a family to rely on. It's not just hardcore academic schooling but more personal than that.

The End