

Filling in the right form

“Now I have my own Arts office horror story”

Commonsense says beginning a degree mid-year is bound to be a nuisance. The university official even told me so.

“It can be done. It just complicates your studies.”

But in 2006, Europe seemed a sensible break after studying an incomplete degree for two years. When I returned to study again, I was determined that I would succeed in my second effort. I was enrolled for mid-year commencement, enthusiastic and ready.

Surely it couldn't be all bad. Perhaps a little confusion in the second semester units that build on knowledge acquired from first semester units. On the other hand breezy first semester units.

The easiest solution, I figured, was to turn up at the Arts office before the beginning of each semester and use

the assistance of the office staff to full advantage.

Truthfully, I was just grateful to be studying something I actually liked, and was more than happy to be told which subjects to study. This ignorant and simplistic knowledge in the structure of tertiary education would come back to bite me later.

To complicate the process a little further, I thought it important to claim some credit for the otherwise useless two years spent at another tertiary institution.

This was really the birth of my intimate relationship with the Arts office. An endless amount of forms, permission with signatures of people I would never meet, organising subject sequences in reverse, deciphering which level subjects would be studied at and most importantly, credit points for unrelated

subjects from an unrelated degree. I developed a complex and dependent relationship with the seemingly lovely ladies on the fourth floor.

My encounters with the ladies were always quite pleasant as far as tertiary bureaucracy goes. Occasionally, I felt indebted to them. My knowledge of degree structure went no further than the desire to get high grades and then finally graduate. At the beginning of each semester, they provided me exactly with what I needed: specific guidance in what I was doing and when.

On the visit to organise my second last semester, the staff member who wasn't my usual assistant became rather confused when viewing my file. “Did you know you could have done a double major?” she enquired.

Double major? Naivety bites.

Perhaps I should have made an effort to understand the difference between a science degree and an arts degree. Double major has a much better ring to it. But I was now confused as to why I was informed of this now, when it now required revoking credit and doing an overload for one of the two

remaining semesters.

She explained to me that it must have simply been “missed”, lost in translation because I started midyear.


“Sorry about that,” she said genuinely but without regret, “So what do you want do now?”

Complacency bites as well.

In the end, as impressive as double majors are, it wasn't worth the mental pain and expensive backpedaling required due to its late discovery.

Heading for the finish line, I'm more than content with my single major degree.

Besides, now I too, have my own Arts office horror story like so many students.

If it weren't for my naivety in combination with complacency of staff in tertiary bureaucracy, I would have found myself with a double major in Journalism and English in my Bachelor of Arts. Caveat emptor! What is Latin for “Let the student beware”? 

Larisa Tait



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