

GGC School of Liberal Arts Graduates Focus

Nontraditional Students Succeed and Make Unique Contributions in the SLA

Nontraditional students are a visible campus presence. Many felt a drive, an internal motivation, to complete a degree. They are not afraid to speak up and reflect on assignments.



(L-R): Janet Lively, Alethea Webb, and Denise Norton

They almost always complete their homework. Still, nontraditional students defy easy description. Nearly everyone agrees that they may face unique challenges but also that they distinctly contribute to the classroom environment. We decided to interview three SLA graduates, Alethea Webb ('15), Janet Lively ('20), and Denise Norton ('21), so that they might speak in their own words.

1. What motivated you to start or finish college?

Norton: I made a deal with my son that I would earn a degree at the same time he earned his. The other factor was that I started a history degree long ago, and I wanted to finish it.

Lively: I started college at age 68. I just always wanted to go, because I enjoy learning. Five of my six children are college graduates. I wanted the shared experience.

Webb: I was suddenly presented with the opportunity to leave my day job, and I was motivated by having a strong desire to finish the undergraduate degree that had eluded me for so many years.

2. Were there contributions you made as a nontraditional student or that nontraditional students make?

Lively: I didn't mind being the only one who raised their hand or asked weird questions. I loved the fact that sometimes I was the only one who caught the joke or had rapport with the professor's sense of humor.

Norton: Most have a lot to offer in discussion about history because we have lived through so much.

Webb: Because of our life experiences we may have a different perspective on the subject matter at hand.

3. What are the challenges?

Norton: Some students might have health issues

and others might have family issues.

Lively: Challenges exist through being 'a lone wolf' without a friendship base (We needed a 'Silver Seniors' club!). But I was pleased that students accepted me when I put forth the effort to be sociable.

4. What do you wish that students and faculty understood about nontraditional students?

Webb: We [enjoy] the certainty and confidence that this is something we definitely want to do at this point in our lives. In addition, something that I wished some of my professors understood is that when giving out assignments or projects, assign something that might not always produce your usual text book answers but something where a non-traditionally aged student might be able to integrate their life experiences into their response.

5. What was the best part of your experience?

Norton: All the faculty and staff members have been in my corner.

Lively: I loved going to GGC! I loved 98% of my professors (100% of the history profs!). I know the mental exercise has been great for the brain!

Webb: Being a part of such a diverse student body that represented different ethnicities, cultures, generations, and backgrounds. At GGC I met one of my best friends, who is Brazilian.

By Richard Rawls