

Jamira's Story



A bit about me

Hi everyone,

My name is Jamira and I study online through Open Universities Australia. I'm studying psychology because I've always been interested in how people think and what makes them behave the way they do. I'm 37 years old, so I think I'm pretty old to be a student, but the nice thing about studying online is that so many of the other students are around my age as well. We can't meet up face to face, but we talk online through the student forums in our classes, and there are lots of people my age who are studying the same units as me.

I've got three kids, I'm a single parent, and I go to work, so I don't have a lot of time. I decided to study through Open Universities because there was no way that I could get to lectures and stuff like that, what with work and the kids and so on, but one day I saw something on the internet about how you could study online and do your studies anytime of the day or night, and work at your own pace, and I just thought, well, that's for me!

My kids

My kids are 16, 14 and 8, and they are all pretty excited about having a mum at uni! Not that they like it all the time... sometimes they get a bit fed up when I have an essay to finish or something like that, because I don't have the time to give them like I normally do. But they are proud of me too, which is really nice for me, and I hear them tell their friends that their mum goes to university. They've also become a bit more independent and helpful at home, now that I don't have the time to do as much as I could before. My 16 year old, he's not a bad cook now, and I only iron my 8 year old's clothes – the others are old enough to do their own.

Why I decided to do this

No-one in my family has ever been to university before, so I never really considered it when I was younger. I only went to Year 11 and then I got married and had children, and just did part time jobs and took what I could get. It's been more of a struggle financially since my husband and I divorced, but I have been managing ok with this job I've had for a few years now, working shifts in a manufacturing company. But things came to a head for me when I applied for a promotion and was knocked back. I've been doing this job for a long time and I've got more experience than most, but when I applied for a manager's position, they told me I didn't meet the criteria because I didn't have a degree. The money would have been a lot better and it would have made life easier all round, so that really got me thinking. I didn't see how I could go to uni, with the kids and everything, and not living anywhere near a uni. Also, I didn't know the first thing about how to even begin to apply for uni, or what I'd need to study or anything like that. So when I saw something on the internet about doing your degree at home, online, I sent off an email for someone to call me back and give me

some information about how it works for a person like me. So the way they described it, you study in your own time and you have a lot of help online, and you can do it part time, so I thought that sounded good. The thing is, I couldn't not work. I couldn't afford not to work, so I had to be able to study and still work as well.

I didn't really know what I was getting into

When I first thought about going to uni, I thought it was just for all the clever kids, and with me not having studied for 20 years, I thought "Oh I don't know whether I've bitten off more than I can chew, but I'll have a go at it anyway"! I sort of just envisioned myself sitting at the kitchen table by myself surrounded by paper and books. But it's not like that really.... well, you do have to read books and papers, but you also watch tutorials and videos and read through slides, and listen to tutors online, so it's not just all paperwork. And you do a lot of contributing to online discussions with the other students. I really like doing that, reading what the others have said and deciding what I think about that, and what my ideas are. So it was quite different from what I thought it would be, and more interesting really, and I didn't think that I would enjoy it as much as I do. That's not to say that I enjoy it all the time! Some things are really hard – like learning how to reference. You see, back when I was at school, we never referenced anything, not when we did assignments and things like that, so I've never referenced in my life until now. I've never sat an exam since school – and I never studied much for exams at school either – and when I had to sit my first exam, well, that was pretty scary!

Fitting it all in

I try to do about three hours' work at my studies every day, between my shifts and the kids and so on. Depending on what shifts I'm working, that might be at all different hours, which is why the online is so good for me. So I might get up really early and study before the kids get up and then study after they go to school if my shift is starting later in the day; or if I'm on an early shift I'll get home before the kids and do a few hours before I have to start getting dinner and so on. My 16 and 14 year olds have been pretty good about being home with the 8 year old when I can't be there. I used to have to get babysitters for my shifts, but now it's much easier that the older two help out. Saturdays, I can do a bit more work, fitting it in around taking kids to sport and so on. I take my books and papers with me – it's amazing how much you can fit in hanging around sports' fields waiting for games to finish! I do get pretty tired though – I seem to be always tired – and sometimes the kids jack up a bit and say "Oh mum you're always tired", but when my marks come out they're really interested to find out what I get and things like that as well, and then they get very excited for me too. I think that I was very busy before anyway, so somehow, even though yes, I guess I am busier now, I was always used to fitting everything in, so now I just have to fit something else in too! I don't vacuum as often, and I make easier meals, and I do expect more of the older kids – they wash up and so on, whereas I used to do more of that too – but I think that's good for them anyway. Even the little one is doing more than she used to, like putting things away while big brother dries the dishes, and yes they complain, of course! What kids don't complain? But I think that I'm probably a bit more determined and I don't give in to their whinges like I used to, because I know I just don't have the time.

What my family thinks

My Mum and Dad are really proud of me. They say “Oh it’s like having a psychologist in the family” because of the subjects I’ve done. They like listening to me talk about what my next assessment is and they say “What’s on next term?” and things like that. And they like hearing about my exam results because they’re usually pretty good. They don’t live close enough to give me much practical help, although they will come and stay sometimes, which is a godsend, but they give me heaps of moral support. I have younger sister who was the only one in the family to go right through to the end of Year 12, and now that I’m at uni, she’s even thinking maybe she might like to study as well.

Things that help to keep me going

I am really, really determined, and I think that’s what gets me through the difficult times. The encouragement I get from Mum and Dad, and my sister and my friends really helps too. I think that once you’ve got the mindset to do something, the determination kicks in and you’ve just got to do it. And I’ve used the online tutorial support they have through OUA which really helped me with knowing how to write essays, and a couple of times I’ve rung up and spoken to student advisors and student coaches, to talk a few things over. But mainly, I think it has been my own determination to see this through. I’m more confident than I used to be too. I never thought I was very smart, but my first mark from the first piece of work in 20 years that I’ve handed in, was 36 out of 50, and I was pretty happy with that, and I’ve just been getting better at it ever since. So when I get good marks and pass my exams it makes it all worthwhile. There is such a sense of achievement from that.

What the future holds for me now

By the time I finish my studies, in about another 3 years, my little one will be getting close to starting high school, and I hope to have a day job as a manager, not work shifts any more, which will make things a lot easier for us, both in terms of having more time and more money - just making things a bit more comfortable for all of us. I think I might be able to move into a manager position fairly soon, because they were saying at work that if I was at least half way towards finishing my degree, then that would make me eligible to apply for a managers’ job, as long as I keep studying towards it. I’m nearly half way now, so I’ll be looking out for the next position that comes up. I am more ambitious now than I used to be. The good thing too is that my kids are saying that they want to go to uni when they leave school. They are very interested, and I talk with my older son about taking him along to open days and so on next year, and we talk about the differences between studying on campus and online and just talk through different options. So I think that what I’m doing now will open up a whole lot more opportunities for me, and for the kids too. I’ve noticed that it’s really started to build up my own self-esteem as well, and that I have more to contribute to conversations with other people. I say to the kids “There is nothing stopping me” – and I really believe that now.