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### 4 ways to break out of your comfort zone and have the college experience you want

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#### 4 ways to break out of your comfort zone and have the college experience you want

By Gabrielle Davis

April, 2021

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at [newsbureau@obu.edu](mailto:newsbureau@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – As a rising senior, it's incredibly easy for me to look back at my college experience and say, "College was a time for growth." I started my time at Ouachita as a shy freshman who just wanted to earn her degree, maybe go to a few events and get out. I was afraid to try anything outside of my comfort zone, lest I jeopardize my education.

Since then, I joined several on-campus organizations, earned multiple leadership positions, made amazing friends, held a job and somehow managed not to fail any of my classes. The girl that I entered Ouachita as is nothing like the woman I will be when I exit. But how did I get here?

1. Commit to change. The first step to leaving your comfort zone is to desire change. Fall semester my freshman year, I mostly bounced between classes, the cafeteria, the student center, the library and my dorm. These places were familiar and unchallenging. And I was beyond bored. By restricting myself to the places where I was comfortable, I fell into an unfulfilling routine. *Was this how I wanted to spend the next four years of my life?* Come November, I promised myself that the next semester would be different.

If you find yourself facing the same issue, I suggest that you take a step back. Recognize what your comfort zone is and ask if staying there will help you achieve your personal goals down the line. If the answer is no, open yourself up to change.

2. Stop saying, "No, that's not for me." So you've committed to change. Now what? One of the major stumbling blocks preventing me from exiting my comfort zone was the fear that I would try something new, and it wouldn't be "for me." I wasn't a good dancer, so Tiger Tunes "wasn't for me." I wasn't a fun person, so TWIRP "wasn't for me." I wasn't outgoing, so social clubs "weren't for me." These were lies I told myself to keep from feeling hurt or rejected as a consequence of trying something new. Once I recognized this, I started hyping myself up with this mantra: "I'm going to try new things, and it's going to be great. Even if I crash and burn, the attempt makes it worth it."

What are you saying isn't "for you?" Why *can't* it be? And is your answer to that question rooted in fact or fear? Deconstruct whatever personal lies are keeping you from trying the things you're interested in.

3. Seek out challenges. The next step is an active one: Put yourself in situations where you know you'll have to step out of your comfort zone. During the spring semester, I rushed for women's social clubs. I applied for membership to the Ouachita Student Foundation. I joined the *Ouachitonian* yearbook staff, where I would have to interview complete strangers on a biweekly basis. I knew each of these situations would make me uncomfortable, and I signed up anyway.

Whether you're a freshman or a senior, there will always be opportunities on campus for you to push yourself beyond what you know and are comfortable with. I encourage you to be deliberate in seizing those opportunities. Seek them out!

4. Keep going. Of course, this process won't be easy. Personally, I was constantly anxious. It was an incredibly difficult transition to go from spending hours and hours studying in my dorm to super involved on campus. When it seemed like things weren't going to work out the way I hoped, my immediate instinct was to run back to where I felt safe. And it was during moments like these that I realized I needed to stay. I was never going to grow if I kept protecting myself from situations that weren't even threats.

As you leave your comfort zone, expect difficulty. Expect that there will be times that you want to quit and return to the things you know. Tell yourself that's okay. And then keep going.

*Lead photo by Hannah Smith*