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### Confidence for graduation

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Office of Communications & Marketing

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For immediate release

**Confidence for graduation**

By Tiffany Pickett

November 24, 2023

For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at [comm-mark@obu.edu](mailto:comm-mark@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5206.

*Editor's Note: We're honoring Ouachita's first-generation students, alumni, faculty and staff throughout November with special events and emphases, including a series of weekly posts authored by first gens on the Stories blog. Read about our campus celebrations and find more stories at [obu.edu/firstgen](https://obu.edu/firstgen).*

"Fake it until you make it." While a common phrase in the leadership/business management advice genre, it's genuinely how I survived my freshman year as a first-generation college student.

I smiled. I nodded. I tried to exude the confidence that I knew exactly what I was doing, but in reality, to quote Michael Scott from "The Office": "I knew exactly what to do. But in a much more real sense, I had no idea what to do."

I would quietly ask questions to friends I could trust or pray that another classmate asked the question I wanted to ask in class. Or I would just flounder and pray my professors and the staff at my college would show grace towards me. Floundering rarely worked out.

Don't be like me. Don't use floundering as a strategy.

What, exactly, didn't I know? How to speak the college language. What "hours" meant. How many hours I needed per semester in order to graduate. (Yes, we had advisors, but you have to have a basic knowledge of the terms before advising is helpful.) How to sign up for tutoring. How to know what careers

options matched my interests. I'm from a town of 70 people; I couldn't really comprehend the vast career opportunities that exist in the world. There might be more out there than being a doctor or lawyer, but you don't know what you don't know. Freshman Tiffany wouldn't begin to believe that adult Tiffany's career is full of all the things that give her life and fulfillment.

Beyond the language of college I wasn't sure about were cultural differences and changes I wasn't prepared for. I'm from a very rural part of Arkansas and had a thick Southern accent upon entering college. I said words maybe incorrectly or words that are not universally used. I didn't come from a suburban middle-class background, so there were things that just didn't translate between myself and others.

Looking back, I wish I hadn't been so self-conscious and hadn't let those differences make me feel inferior. Now I'm really proud of where I came from and how those people in that place made me who I am.

I'm proud of being a first-generation college graduate. The drive to work in higher education comes largely from wanting students to understand and be equipped to navigate how universities operate. How to speak the language and interpret it in ways they can understand. To have an easier time than I did. For students from all backgrounds to know exactly what to do, so hopefully no one has to ever "fake it until they make it."



*by Tiffany Pickett, acting director of Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing*