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The journey to graduation

Addie Woods

Office of Communications & Marketing

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The journey to graduation

By Addie Woods

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For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at 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.

This year marks my fourth and final year of college. It seems just like yesterday I was walking up the stairs of Frances Crawford Hall, too many bags in hand, to embark on my educational journey.

I grew up knowing I wanted to pursue a higher education to finish what my parents started. I didn't know where and how to start my journey, but I leaned into my advisor, Dr. Deborah Root, who answered every question, met every need and solved every problem because she wanted to see me succeed.



Addie Woods settles into her dorm room in Frances Crawford Hall.
PHOTO BY ANNA ROUSSEL

I came into college not knowing what I wanted to do with my life and picked a major based on the subject I had earned the highest grade in when I was in high school. College granted me the permission to explore other areas, hinting at the idea that I could lay down educational bricks that created a skill set for myself. Brick by brick, I gained the knowledge that wasn't first available to me. Being a first generation college student, I tried out (almost) every single major Ouachita offered because I didn't have any prior direction. I finally settled on a media/strategic communications major seeing that there was so much value and opportunity in the department.

During my time at Ouachita, I have experienced an outpouring of love and support from my professors who made time to equip me with the knowledge I needed to excel – in and outside the classroom. It was very important to me that I picked a college where I would be more than just an ID number, grade or seat in a classroom. Ouachita never faltered in its ever-increasing list of ways to get involved, number of mentors and feeling of belonging to an organization that is bigger than yourself.

As I reflect on the last three and half years at Ouachita, I think about the advice that freshman year Addie would appreciate. I would remind myself—especially as a first generation student—that college looks different for every person. I found myself comparing my experience to those around me and almost always felt less-than, as if my college experience wasn't the way it should be. By slowing down and acknowledging that my story wasn't the same as others, I was able to enjoy the journey and not just rush to the destination: graduation day.

Being a first generation student pushed me to visualize my goals and set myself apart from the story that had been given to me. I've had so many people around me who believed in me and knew that I could graduate from college, and those people are there for you too – you just have to ask.



by Addie Woods, a senior communications & media/strategic communications major from Searcy, Ark.