

A dream realised

Dreaming of joining the legal profession after having matriculated may appear unrealistic, especially for people from previously disadvantaged groups. The challenges they face range from a lack of tuition fees to lack of support from the people who don't believe they could succeed. Another hard knock could be receiving no response from the bursars that one has solicited for financial aid.



As Alexander Pope once said, "Hope springs eternal". One needs to remain hopeful in spite of the odds. Keeping busy with something can alleviate the anxiety. It can either be by enrolling at a Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) or seeking employment as an unskilled worker. In my case I got a job as a trainee nurse at a government hospital. The idea of getting a job was to use it as a stepping stone and also to finance my legal studies. I was able to finance my studies whilst working full time as an auxiliary nurse (semi-skilled position).

The most important step towards getting a law degree is to take that courageous first step by applying and registering at your chosen university. The journey to the "promised land" can be long and difficult but it surely is an exciting one. You might have to juggle your time between family, work and study. This means very little time to sleep. Whatever you set your mind to, you can achieve. Keep the focus. Along the way you might lose a few friends who may feel neglected by you. Some people will try to dissuade you, by telling you that what you are attempting is "mission impossible". This is the case especially if one is studying through a distance institution such as UNISA. Know your strengths and abilities. With the requisite will power and determination you will achieve your dreams. Never entertain negativity, instead, associate yourself with people who believe in your dreams and support your cause. Be determined to prove to yourself, and those who support you.

The journey

It may take a while to reach the finish line. I had to work full time, mostly night shift and studied when I was off-duty. Naturally I did not have enough time for sleep, nor even for studying. I had to sacrifice. It can be quite daunting at times. But always remain equal to the task.

There will probably be serious obstacles along the way. Sometimes you might feel like giving up, especially if you are employed formally as a salaried worker. Other times one may consider taking a short cut or the easy way out. Sometimes you may hear a small voice whisper in your head saying "*you probably won't reach that goal, we might as well give up now*". But that is just fear and depressed confidence speaking. When you feel low and demotivated, it helps to go back to your support structure and renew the energy and get the motivation you need to carry on.

Run your own race and keep in your own lane. Never feel that other people who have obtained their degrees in record times are brighter than yourself; circumstances differ. You will cross many hurdles along the way but keep pushing harder and harder keeping the end in mind. If you are studying on your own, without any tangible contact with the lecturers at the university as is normally the case with UNISA students, focus and discipline must be the order of the day.

It will mean less time for friends and less time to go out and have fun.

Be consistent and try to obtain good marks for the modules; this will give you the edge over others when you apply for your articles later.

The light at the end of the tunnel

The tunnel might seem long and dark. But always remember that the fruits will certainly be worth the effort. Stop at nothing to get your degree in law. Your proudest moment is in sight when you have laboured tirelessly through university and are doing your few final modules. You can almost taste it. This is a critical time during which some students drop out of studies because they no longer afford to pay the study fees, especially if you had to finance your studies yourself.

Without dealing much with what is currently happening at our universities such as #FeesMustFall movement, this is a suggestion to our government and funding institutions that they need to go back to the drawing board and review the current funding model to address the harsh realities faced by the students.

To conclude, I would like to say to all students still pursuing their first degree that despite all the hardships they face in their student life, perseverance is key. And especially to UNISA students who are often made to believe they are second or third rate students or graduates, study hard and just know that there are good law firms and companies out there that believe in you and recognise how hard you have had to work to obtain you degree. These firms and companies are waiting to give you a chance to do your articles or internship with them. I know this on a very personal level.

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