

STUDENT STORIES OF NAVIGATING THE MAZE

ARTHUR



“It starts with how you look at it, how you position yourself, how you attack the point.”

—ARTHUR

Arthur is a college student who is studying IT and cybersecurity with the hopes of opening his own business in the future. Arthur believes in the importance of giving students post-secondary opportunities beyond attending college and acknowledges that success looks different for everyone. Arthur describes himself as independent and hardworking, and he finds his internal drive to be the key to his accomplishments.

CHOOSING A COLLEGE DURING HIGH SCHOOL

Arthur graduated from a public high school in Chicago in 2017. He is a rising fourth-year student majoring in cybersecurity and information technology through an online degree program at a private for-profit university.

During Arthur’s senior year of high school, he applied to a variety of public and private four-year colleges, but thought his options were limited by his high school, which he explained “really promoted going for a four-year college [rather than a two-year college] ... and didn’t really talk about trades... I just feel like they could give you more options.”

When he was deciding between colleges, “it was strictly about whether I could afford it financially, and whether they would help me out in that area,” said Arthur, rather than whether or not they were a good fit for him and his career aspirations. Ultimately, Arthur decided to attend a private four-year university because he received a full-ride scholarship to attend that institution. In his first year, he majored in civil engineering.

CHALLENGES AT HIS FIRST COLLEGE

Arthur later discovered that his tuition was going to increase each year, and that his financial aid would stay flat, forcing him to take out loans.

This was not the only challenge Arthur faced during his time at this college. “I couldn’t really focus on my classes because I was trying to move around, I was trying to move dorm halls so much because we kept getting threats of getting fines, and it [would] be over ridiculous stuff.”

Arthur also felt as though his four-year college, which was a predominantly White institution, had students from a number of different backgrounds but did not create opportunities for different groups of students to bond. “I feel like they could have [done] more to mix [us] together,” Arthur explained, “so that way we would feel comfortable talking to each other.”

Arthur also described his college's style of teaching as vastly different than what he had been used to during high school. This meant that along with pressure from his financial aid and living situations, Arthur was also expected to learn an entirely new teaching style.

"They had been taught that way their entire lives, and I was used to just a different way [of teaching] and to jump from something I had been doing since first grade through all the way through high school," he said. "It was a real switch for me. And... I would say it was a struggle."

TRANSFERRING TO A TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

After facing these academic, social, and financial challenges at his four-year college, Arthur transferred to a local two-year college in Chicago for the fall semester of his second year. He decided to change his major to criminal justice, started playing baseball, and worked in the library.

Arthur attributed these new forms of campus involvement to his relatively smooth transition to campus. Not only did he feel like he was an integral part of his new college, but these activities helped him afford it, too. He explained that baseball was not just an extracurricular, but also a way for him to get scholarships and eventually transfer to a four-year university to play baseball.

In addition, Arthur felt that the counselors at his two-year college were more connected to the student body than at his last college. "[My two-year college] was smaller so they actually focused on their student body a little bit more than [my last college]," he said. "They were more integrated with you and what you were doing."

Arthur also recalled receiving resumé building help from one of his instructors. He explained that seeking out one-on-one support from instructors and counselors was very helpful.

In the spring, Arthur transferred to another two-year college in Chicago where he received an even larger scholarship to play baseball.

TRANSFERRING BACK TO A DIFFERENT FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE

The COVID-19 pandemic began shortly thereafter, and Arthur decided to transfer again, this time to an online degree program with a private for-profit four-year university. Arthur described his transfer processes as relatively simple, with his credits transferring successfully from college to college.

At his current university, Arthur has thrived academically with support from his professors and counselors. He noted that attending college virtually has strengthened his capacity to manage his own schedule, workload, and time. Arthur is optimistic going into this upcoming school year and hopes to create his own cybersecurity business after graduation.

WHAT WORKED FOR ARTHUR

1. Receiving consistent financial aid. At his first college, Arthur was concerned about

unexpected tuition hikes and the resultant burden of student loans. Arthur described feeling worried and unmotivated because of these factors. After transferring to a two-year college, he was able to find scholarships and extracurricular activities to avoid getting loans.

When you receive a financial aid decision, it is important to understand not only how your financial aid might change from year to year and the factors that influence your financial aid decision, but also whether the college or university raises tuition or fees on any regular basis.

2. ***Seeking out one-on-one support.*** Arthur explained that meeting one-on-one with the instructor for one of his classes led to him receiving help with issues that extended beyond the course, like his resumé. Reaching out to professors and counselors regularly with questions or for advice can help you develop a stronger relationship with people at your college who are there to support you.