In August, Utah State University announced additional available funds for students being invited back to finish their degrees after putting their academic goals on hold. Thanks to funding from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), as well as existing USU scholarships such as the Ivory campaign, USU students are returning and achieving their goal of graduation after years-long hiatuses.

Beginning in the fall 2021 semester, a multitude of students have returned, entering USU’s Integrated Studies program. These students from all across the state have been given the opportunity to pick up their education right where they left off, with some set to graduate in only one semester. With scholarships available and advisors ready and willing to help students at every stage, there may never be a better time to get back into school and finish that long-put-off degree.

“To have this Integrated Studies degree that has allowed me to come back and finish and get a degree and not have to start all over with something else, it’s been great,” said Shari Marble, who is in the Arts & Humanities emphasis out of USU Brigham City. “I will have a degree that suits my career needs moving forward. I can’t even put a price on the things that I’m learning.”

USU Provides Opportunities

Deciding to come back to school is a decision not to be taken lightly. Many students who have left school without a degree and are looking to come back may feel like it cannot be done, or they cannot afford it. With help from the Returning Aggie Campaign, students are finding it can be done.

“I had been out of college for eight years,” Marble said. “I started a family in that time. I’ve always thought, ‘I really should go back and finish,’ but every time I looked into it and researched it with my husband, we thought there was no way we could afford it. To have the potential of some help, it really opened that door of possibility.”

Amanda Snow, who is in the Social Sciences and Human Services emphasis at USU Kaysville, felt the same way, saying the scholarship has meant everything to her and her family.

“It’s allowed me to finish my education,” Snow said. “I’ve been out of school for at least 10 years, so without this scholarship, I wouldn’t have this opportunity right now.”

It all started with an email and a phone call. USU sent out emails to former students who were close to graduation. Mallorie Norman, who is in the Business & Communications emphasis at USU Salt Lake Center, had been getting the emails for several months before she investigated the opportunity.

“They reached out to me and said ‘we want to finish your degree. You can finish it sooner than you think. You can finish it online and we have this awesome opportunity where someone has offered to pay for it,’” said Mallorie Norman, Business & Communications emphasis out of the USU Salt Lake Center. “For us to get this opportunity, it has just been honestly life changing.”

USU Will Be There Every Step of the Way

Getting back into school can be daunting. After years of not being in academia, there can be an adjustment period for students as they get back in the swing of things. However intimidating it may seem, students have seen it is not as hard as they thought it would be.

“We thought it was going to be an ordeal,” Norman said. “We thought it was going to be more complicated than it actually was. I’ve had a great advisor and we’ve had people helping us every step of the way—financially and academically— as we’ve made the transition back. I’ve been pleasantly surprised how well it’s worked and how easy it’s been to jump back into it.”

The Integrated Studies program offers flexible degree requirements, allowing students who have previously
attended USU to apply their credits toward this new degree. USU understands that priorities change, and so can career paths and options. Integrated Studies allows students to apply previous credits towards one of its six emphases, which allows them to design their own career path, customized to meet their needs.

Students in the Integrated Studies program have found that their advisors are always ready to step in and give them the support they need to stay on track and to figure things out. With advisors such as Rebecca Berrett for Statewide Campuses and USU Eastern, as well as Camille Cardon for the Logan campus as well as out of state students, there is always a resource at USU to answer questions and provide help.

“The counselors have been awesome,” Snow said. “Rebecca has been phenomenal. She has answered every question and has been so positive about everything.”

For students who have come back, just knowing someone is there and cheering for them to succeed, it has made the difference.

“There are people there to lend a hand as you get started and to be a support and help walk you through when you have questions,” Norman said. “There are people there that want you to succeed, and that believe in you. If you’ve gotten sidetracked, you can get back on track because there are people there to support you.”

Come Back, It’s Possible

Merely months ago, students like Marble, Snow and Norman didn’t think it was possible to earn their degrees. Now, Marble is set to finish her degree in December after only one semester, with Snow on track to graduate in spring 2022 and Norman to follow in summer 2022. Each one had similar sentiments for others contemplating a return to school.

“It’s doable, even though it doesn’t seem like it will be. Just go for it!” Snow said.

Norman had gone through all the stumbling blocks before. She had since moved from Logan, was unsure how to afford college and had family obligations as a mother. Receiving those messages from USU and seeing she could finish her degree online through USU Statewide Campuses, she finally knew it was time and it was possible.

“I had been getting emails for months and I kept brushing it aside, saying it wasn’t for me, it was for someone else,” Norman said. “That’s going to be too complicated and not something I can handle right now. But I’m so glad I reached out. This has really given me a lot of confidence and really empowered me, because it was something I thought I would never get to achieve. I still have a lot to give.”

Marble is also glad she took the plunge and reached out after being contacted for weeks about opportunities. She is loving being a part of the Aggie family once again.

“USU totally made this possible by reaching out to me,” she said. “The second I reached back and decided to look into this, they were right there to answer my questions and be helpful. It has been really fun to feel like an Aggie again. I feel like an Aggie again and I feel supported. It’s been a really, really good experience.”

To learn more about options and resources available to finish college, visit finish.usu.edu.

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if($('.embed-feed .card').length == 4){ $('.embed-feed .card').last().closest(.col-md-4).remove(); } //
$(':content > .row.justify-content-end').remove(); });