

## LIFE AT 22: HOW TO DEAL WITH NOT GETTING INTO GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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Dr. Zarah Moeggenberg, now an English faculty member who focuses on feminist and queer rhetoric, always knew she was going to be a professional clarinetist. In a Zoom interview, Dr. Moeggenberg shared that though she applied to a couple of four year universities, she actually started her academic career at a community college, where she was focused on clarinet performance.

In her first year at community college, Dr. Moeggenberg took a freshman course in writing and fell in love with the idea of being a professor.

"My professor was a young woman, and when she taught you could just tell she was on a high, and I knew I wanted to be like that," she said.

She then reapplied to four year universities with the intention of going into English secondary education, which she thought would be a path towards higher education.

"I didn't know how any of it worked because I'm a first gen student. I didn't have any idea how people become who they become."

Dr. Moeggenberg graduated from St. Thomas Aquinas with a degree in English and a concentration in creative writing and went on to apply for graduate programs in an effort to get a Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) in poetry.

The decision to switch her focus from clarinet performance to poetry was not an easy one, and Dr. Moeggenberg shared that it felt odd to realize that she could be successful in more than one area.

Dr. Moeggenberg followed the typical advice and applied to between eight and ten programs, an expensive decision and one that did not pay off. She was accepted to only one of the programs, and it did not offer her any funding.

A habitual perfectionist, Dr. Moeggenberg said, "I felt like a failure. I just thought, 'you are either a terrible poet or you're dumb...We just have these normalized conceptions about what's supposed to be next and what your life is supposed to look like, and I felt like that was upset."



Dr. Moeggenberg and her dog, Teddy.

She spent the next year moving between her mother's house in Grand Rapids, Mich. and housing with her friends while she sporadically worked as a bartender and nanny.

Her re-entry into the world of academia came from a culmination of random experiences. Dr. Moeggenberg's friend was applying to an undergraduate program in the Upper Peninsula (UP) and encouraged her to apply to their MFA program. At the same time, a couple of young adults were in Grand Rapids, Mich. for an event and invited Dr. Moeggenberg and her friend to stay with them in the UP so the two friends could tour the university.

While she was in the UP touring the campus, she got a phone call from the MFA program informing her of her acceptance with funding. Dr. Moeggenberg spent her next several years studying poetry and teaching basic writing courses for freshmen. While she was teaching, she experienced the same high that she had noticed in her freshman writing professor at community college.

Knowing she could not teach these courses at a university level without a doctoral degree, Dr. Moeggenberg then completed a doctorate in rhetoric with the intention of becoming a professor; however, upon completion of her doctorate, there was a lack of teaching positions at universities, so Dr. Moeggenberg completed postdoctoral studies in queer and feminist rhetoric.

Dr. Moeggenberg said, "In life, I feel like one thing leads to another, and you don't know what an opportunity or experience is going to push you to do or realize what you're interested in."

Though she was originally denied from graduate programs, Dr. Moeggenberg went on to finish postdoctoral studies and is a reminder for all students that the world of postgraduate studies is not a linear path.