

Student Spotlight

Transfer student success stories.

Matt Lynch, pursuing a BS in Social Science at Portland State University. Previously, he attended Pitzer College in California, where he was pursuing a BA in Psychology.

Q: *Tell us about your transfer pathway. What was challenging, and what was helpful?*

I have been a musician my whole life. I grew up in Iowa but moved to California to go to college. Initially, I enrolled because it was an option for me and it was expected, but my heart was really in being a performer and as a result, I left college before finishing.

A friend invited me to visit Portland, and I fell in love with the city and decided to move. After that, I worked in music stores and vocational sites for adults and kids with developmental disabilities, while continuing to perform as a musician. Eventually, I got married and started a family. During that time, I quit my job to be a stay-at-home dad, which I did for about 10 years. While taking care of my daughter, I became familiar with the burgeoning kids' music scene in Portland. This is when I stumbled into the most successful chapter of my music career. I've performed around town, mostly playing guitar, bass, and percussion, singing at public shows and private events at schools and libraries.

Then, in the past few years, between the pandemic and a divorce, it became obvious that being a musician was not viable anymore. That's when I realized that my skills and experience are well suited for teaching, so I decided to explore finishing my undergraduate degree so I could pursue a Masters in teaching. Back in California, I attended Pitzer College. When I contacted them about completing my degree, they were not very responsive. I mean, I tried everything I could to get in touch and get some answers about returning to school. I knew it was a long shot because I was now living in Oregon, but I figured going back to Pitzer would be the best way to finish my degree. When I finally heard back from someone at the college, they weren't very helpful. They told me that to finish my degree, I would have to move back to California. I was only a few terms from completing my degree, but that wasn't an option.

At that time, I started looking into Portland State University (PSU). Dealing with PSU was like night and day compared to working with Pitzer. No matter how I inquired or asked for information from PSU, I got a response. If the person I was working with didn't have an answer for me, they helped guide me to someone who could help. At that time, I also learned about their [Transfer and Returning Student Resource Center](#), which has been the greatest part of the whole transfer experience. They have this department that is specifically for transfer and returning students. Their resources are really incredible.

After applying and being accepted at PSU, I started going to events before I was even enrolled in any classes. PSU had outside lunches and get togethers for transfer students, which made me feel like part of the community before I started classes. I also was lucky to get into [their Summer Bridge Scholars Program](#), which has a course called "Transfer Bridge" for transfer students who have been away from college for a while. I got to take a class at the end of summer before starting classes, which meant I was familiar with the campus before I took my first class, fall term. I also was able to become familiar with Canvas and technical requirements for coursework. Randi Harris, the Director of the Transfer and Returning Student Resource Center, was also the teacher for the class, which was great. The course focused on introspection and figuring out my personal challenges so I could leverage that in a way that would help me be successful. It was stressful at first. There were required meetings, a quiz, and registration, but after that, it was wonderful! I was even able to bring my daughter to campus with me.

I think I would have had culture shock if it hadn't been for that class. It also prepared me for orientation by showing me who to talk to and how to find the classes I needed to take. Because of the Summer Bridge program, I became part of a small community of transfer and returning students, which was really helpful.

My advisor, Elizabeth Benner, helped me map out a plan so that I could finish my degree in one year. She explained prerequisites and the coursework I needed to take. It's been remarkably smooth on my end. Currently, I'm in the middle of applying for the Graduate Teacher Education Program (GTEP) at PSU's College of Education. I will finish my undergrad this spring, then the graduate program starts in the summer.

Another benefit of attending PSU has been the [*Transfers Finish Free*](#) program. This has been a game changer because as a musician, my hourly pay is great, but I struggle to get enough hours to make ends meet. Because of the Transfers Finish Free program, I'm still able to do my public shows and attend school full time. I'm not forced to have a full-time job outside of school. Being a student has become an important part of my identity and being able to focus on my education has made a difference. To qualify for the program, you must apply for every grant and scholarship that you qualify for. As it turned out, this was daunting because I qualified for hundreds of different grants/scholarships. The people in the program helped me narrow things down, so I only had to apply for the ones I was most likely to get. They encourage everyone to do their due diligence and get as much outside funding as they can, then PSU made up the difference. Transfers Finish Free covers base tuition and mandatory fees for eligible transfer students enrolled full time. If it wasn't for that program, I would have had to spend a fortune or would graduate with debt. The program is awesome!

Last term I got an email telling me I made the President's List because of my grades (all A's). That was really rewarding. One of my teachers told me that you get out of a class what you're willing to put into it, which has been true for me. I know there are a lot of people facing barriers, which doesn't always make things that simple. But I really have gotten so much out of my time at PSU.

Now I'm in the middle of my application for graduate school at PSU. Applications are due February 1. My references are in, and I've written replies to the essay prompts. I'm finishing up my resume and need to take some placements tests, but I'm close to finishing up my application. I'm really looking forward to finishing and beginning my graduate program.
