

## Student Spotlight

Transfer Student Success Stories.

***Mimi Sek, pursuing an AA in Education at Portland Community College and will transfer to Portland State University fall 2023, to pursue a Bachelor's degree in English.***

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

**A:** I am a first-generation college student and the youngest of three siblings. As a person of color, I've always felt like I need to do more than average. Excelling and doing above what is expected is the norm in my family. My parents' expectation was that I would go to a university right after high school. Then COVID hit. I had been accepted to University of Oregon and even paid for my housing, but it didn't seem worth paying thousands of dollars to get sent home to do school from my bedroom. When I told my parents I was going to community college, they were upset because I was turning down an offer from a university. I was fortunate, because I got so many grants and scholarships that I was able to pay for my own education. I'm so glad I made the decision to go to Portland Community College (PCC) because I had no idea what I was getting into and community college became a safe haven for me. I felt like I had the opportunity to slow things down and buy myself a bit more time to get used to college.

I've started to transfer to university several times. I feel like I've been waiting for this chance for so long. My original plan was to go to community college for one year, then transfer back to University of Oregon, where I had been accepted. But that changed when I got to PCC because I realized that they had a great teaching program, which is what I am interested in. I interviewed for their program and when I was admitted, they told me I needed to complete one more year before transferring to Pacific U. Going from PCC to Pacific U. also meant transitioning from the quarter system to semesters, which was overwhelming because the university told me I had to make up for that by taking even more classes. That was really hard to hear.

My mentor was really supportive, but I didn't always feel supported as a student. My struggles as a human being facing all these challenges made me feel disconnected from the program and teaching, which scared me. For ten years, I had dreamed of becoming a teacher—it was what I was passionate about. My support system wasn't great at the time, so I was trudging through, taking a lot of classes and hoping they would transfer. I was racking up lots of credits, but it seemed like it was never enough. I always needed to take more classes to be able to transfer. I struggled with that a lot and ended up going back to my academic advisor at PCC, Ayumi Giampietro, who has been wonderful. She has supported me through absolutely everything and encouraged me to take a step back to realize that I have lots of options.

There are other universities who were willing to take me, so I started applying and went through several interviews, trying to find a program which would take my credits. During my interview with Portland State University (PSU), I was told I needed to complete another year at PCC before I could transfer. I was really interested in PSU's program because it centers around multicultural education, which I'm passionate about. I also wanted to attend a school where I could see more people who look like me. Diversity is important. At the same time, I really didn't know if I wanted to switch from Pacific U. to PSU. My advisor was cautioning against making that switch because she wanted me to finish the program at PCC before transferring. I felt frustrated with Pacific U., because they wanted me to complete many of my lower division credits there, which would have meant re-doing courses I'd already taken. Ultimately, I decided to stay and finish the teaching program at PCC before transferring to PSU.

In Asian culture, I was raised to not ask questions, which is a mindset I brought with me to college. However, in college you can't really get anywhere without asking questions. The only person that I felt comfortable enough to be that vulnerable with has been Ayumi. I'm constantly meeting with her. It's so nice to have the opportunity to have an Asian advisor, because we come from a lot of the same cultural values. The statistics for educators of color are startling. Only 25% stay in the field through the first five years of teaching. Because of that, I've spent the past five years networking in the Hillsboro School District with BIPOC educators. We support each other and there are

mentors, which is reassuring and comforting. Although this is not going to be easy, that support helps. I know this will be a very rewarding career and I'm excited to start teaching.

While at PCC I also became a tutor in the reading and writing center. That experience reminded me why I love teaching. Being able to interact with students and teach them reminded me that the past three years are leading somewhere. Now I'm in my last term at PCC and about to start my practicum in student teaching. I was accepted at PSU, and I'll have a six-month break before I transfer this fall to pursue a BS in English. After that, I'll apply to the graduate program. When I transfer, I'll have over 110 credits. I've been working at this for quite a while but I know it is going to be worth it!