

Ann Marie 0:00

Hello, my name is Ann Marie and I'm just finishing up the second year my MA Innovation Management at Central Saint Martins. And I came to be here as part of a career transition. I had finished working full time for a global retail corporation. And I'd taken some time out to be a carer for my mom. And when my mom passed away, it felt like a great opportunity to pursue a dream that I'd had of doing an MA and I'd read a book by Daniel Pink called A Whole New Mind which really promotes the idea of a creative degree. So I did some research and found out about the MA at CSM, it was the only course that I applied for ...and it was very last minute. I got my application at five minutes to five on the last day. But was then delighted two weeks later when I got accepted onto the course.

Ann Marie 0:58

Before starting the course I really didn't know what to expect. I was quite anxious. I remember that it said in a communication that we would be getting a project for the summer and I hadn't received the project. So, there was a lot of apprehension and nervousness. I had not been in education for, gosh, a long time... like over 20 years. I had worked in innovation, but I haven't studied innovation. I didn't hold a role with an innovation title. I held roles with textile titles, but it was part of my job. So, I was apprehensive and nervous, I think, but also excited. I really wanted to learn more about innovation. I wanted to have innovation in my job title, if you will. So, it was two-sided, it was fear and excitement, I would sum it up as, before I started.

Ann Marie 1:55

I remember on the first day...actually we had before the course officially started, our course did something really nice, which was they had the second years at the time do an introductory course, an introductory day. And so we came in, and there were no tutors. It was just the second year students. And they introduced us to the course and to Central Saint Martins. And we got an opportunity to meet our new cohort, our new peers. So I met a lot of the people that are now my friends, and then that was really great. So then, when we came in on the first day, there were some familiar faces. And it wasn't quite so intimidating. I think that's a really great thing our course does. But I remember the first day we had to give a presentation and talk about ourselves and what our hopes and dreams were for the course, what our expectations were, kind of thing. And so it was really great to see everybody's different perspectives, and also the experience that people had. It's a very diverse cohort that I'm a part of, in terms of geography, and experience, professions and age, to some degree, although I am the oldest person.

Ann Marie 3:12

It was like kind of letting your breath out on the first day, once you've done your presentation and had everyone else's, it was kind of that pent-up tension. I would describe it as the inhale and then after it is like, okay, here we are, we can settle into this.

Academic Support 3:30

And how were the first few weeks?

Ann Marie 3:32

Yeah, I think the biggest surprise for me was reading. That there is a difference between reading and academic reading. And I don't think that dawned on me for the first six months, actually. So I really struggled with our first assignment that was about reading and writing an essay, which I think was the second project that we were given. I think that realisation was massive. And I think that happened for me, in an Academic Support session, which was outside of my course. It was interesting because I had not thought about what a massive change this was, for me, personally, coming from a working life professional career to an academic setting. I had not considered that at all. I had considered that I was going to learn something, but I didn't know how that was going to happen. I realised that there will be project work, there would be presentations, there would be reading, and there would be writing. But I didn't know what that meant. And I didn't really understand that there is a difference, different types of writing, there are different types of reading. And these are things that you have to learn and develop and make. And it was actually another Academic [Support] session much later in my first year that the Academic Support tutor helped me identify myself as maker. Because I am a weaver, I'm very interested in craft, but I hadn't identified myself as a maker before that point. And then, once I had that realisation, things really changed for me in how I approach my work. So now I approach everything that I do as a maker. Like I've just finished a very long essay, which I think of how I make, how do I make this? How do I make this essay? How do I take components and put them together? How do I gather my raw materials, my threads, and how do I weave them together? And by making that connection between who I am as a person, and how I can do this academic stuff, has been really massive and really helpful. And one of the biggest things I think I've got out of this experience.

Ann Marie 5:54

So these are little pocket study skills books that one of our tutors introduced us to, last year. So, for example, this is a small book called Getting Critical, written by Kate Williams, and it's part of the Pocket Study Skills series. They're just a really great resource. I think they're only five pounds. And they're great. They just really summarise things. And they're really easy to read. I read them on the tube. And they just state things really clearly. And they give you some ideas of how you can go about things like writing and reading. I had feedback that I wasn't being critical enough. And so I got this particular getting critical book, but since then, I've bought a bunch of the books in this series about writing essays and writing dissertations.

Ann Marie 6:43

So, I've tried various different things, I have experimented. Like I found out I like to read physical material. So I will print a journal article, I will get a book out of the library or I will buy a book, and if it's my own book, I will write in that book and I won't read it cover to cover, first of all I'll read about the author. And I will understand something about the author. This would never dawned on me before. Then I will read the introduction, if that's interesting, I'll read the conclusion. If that's interesting, I'll go to the contents page, I'll see what the contents are. I'll look in the index for keywords, for things that I'm researching, for example, craft or technology or innovation, see if keywords are listed, and then I'll go to that specific part of the text and I'll just read that text. If it's super interesting, I'll read the chapter. But now it's very rare that I will read a whole book and I'll just read parts of the book. And I will make notes in different ways. I will use little sticky markers I will underline in pencil,

and I will highlight if it is something I've printed out or make notes in my notebook. Or I'll make notes on a piece of paper. And then, um, what's a really good practice that I've developed, is writing a review of that piece immediately after I read it. So I might just write, I read this piece. It's really interesting. And they said, x, y, and z. I'm not sure how this relates to my work at this moment in time, but it's something I want to come back to. This part of the text really interests me and it reminded me this other thing that I saw. And it could be really short, and then it could include a few quotes and then I'll file that away. And then when I come to write an essay, I'll go back and look at that review. And sometimes what I've even done is just copy and pasted from that review, and then put it in my writing.

Ann Marie 8:33

I've also found that the physical environment and what you read is really important. So I've tried various different places. The library at college, reading at home, the British Library. I found a great space at the V&A. They have a National Art library. That I was researching craft that just felt like this is exactly the right place for me to be surrounded by all this amazing historical writing about craft and art and design. So for me, the actual physical space is important as well, I have to be really comfortable. I don't like a lot of noise, so the library college doesn't work for me. My favourite spot is the V&A National Art Library, or the British Library or at home. Also, you may find that you like writing in the museum or library one day, but you want to be at home another day or you want to be in a coffee shop another day. And it doesn't always have to be hours on end. It could be, it could be half an hour, it could be 10 minutes. I carry a notebook. I'll try and read a paper on the tube. Like cutting it into smaller segments that are more manageable is something that works for me, and that might work for you. My biggest suggestion is experiment, try different things, talk to people see what they've done. Talk to people in the Academic Support. It's just amazing the resources that we have.

Academic Support 9:54

Can you talk a little bit about the diversity, the diversity in your course, the diversity in the college and what that's given to you?

Ann Marie 10:03

So, in my course, we have a very diverse group of people from all over the world, all different cultures, people who've had very different professional backgrounds, people at different stages of their career. A lot of people are quite a bit younger than me, just starting out on their career. Whereas for me I've had a career. I'm kind of in my second career, if you will. And that's something really great because we all learn from each other. But that can be quite difficult because you're speaking different languages, not just ...and I don't mean like English to German... I mean you speak different languages in terms of your experience of what things mean to you. Something that I found quite challenging is when we have quite pressured timings to get work done. And we've had a lot of group work, for example, and not everybody in the group understanding but not being able to say they don't understand. So then you think that you're all on the same page, but you're absolutely not on the same page. So, just being really aware of that.

Ann Marie 11:04

But I think going back to UAL as a whole, and especially Central Saint Martins it's a fantastically creative space. It's just very different. It's not very mainstream. So you will be creatively inspired just being in the building. And there's always something happening right now the degree shows are being built. So there's the hive of activity. And it's great to walk through the main street and see a massive canvas with an artwork on it, or somebody making 3d very often you'll get performance where there's some performing artists doing something. So it's fantastically inspiring. It's a really amazing environment for anyone, and especially anyone who's at all creative.

Academic Support 11:48

So let's talk a little bit about multiple projects and dealing with time constraints.

Ann Marie 11:54

So, the average length of a project in the first year was four weeks, I think. Some were longer some much shorter. Me, I came from working in the fashion industry where everything moves at a really fast pace. I think being able to say that we don't want this to be perfect but we just want to explore something, we want to try something, we want to experiment, has been super helpful because it takes the pressure off. And I think that that's something that has been really freeing in a way. But it's not always easy, at all. I think also because my course is extended part time. So it's three days a week of university week, and then two days of your own work. Some people work as well as doing this degree. Some people are just doing this degree. We have to be respectful that not everybody is available five days a week. But something that we did in many of the teams that I was in is we said up front who was available when, to level set those expectations. So that you weren't asking someone to do something on a day when they were working and that everyone knew that that was not going to be an option.

Ann Marie 13:08

We have a studio meeting every week, one morning a week. And that's time really, especially in the beginning, just for chatting and seeing how everyone was doing. And if anyone had noticed anything interesting that week, and it was just quite an organic conversation, you really got to know people on the course and the tutors through those conversations. And then I think just organically through going to lunch with people we try and have lunch together. We were a lot more social I would say. In the first year, we organised a bowling night and had a Christmas party. We haven't done so much in the second year, which may be because this is a lot of work to do, which is a shame because I think it's a big part of the course for me especially is getting to know people and making new friends. And you know, I've met people on other courses and I had an opportunity to do like a workshop with somebody at the Tate Modern, that I met at an Academic Support workshop. And now I have a new friend in that and something that is an interest that's going to go beyond this course that I will continue to work with her and develop her ideas together, which is fabulous. There's so many interesting people at UAL from all different walks of life with so many different experiences. It's just it's just fantastic, really amazing.

Academic Support 14:37

Dealing with crises, failure, how do you cope?

Ann Marie 14:43

In my second year particularly we have a supervisor who you develop quite a close relationship with and I've developed friendships on my course. I have like a group of people that I can go to and say I'm terrible at this and this is not working, and I don't know what I'm doing, help. I think I can talk to most people on my course that way. We're all kind of in it together. We can certainly talk to our tutors as well.

Academic Support 15:14

One final thing, what do you want to do next? How do you see...how have you changed? Actually, that's first one, how have you changed?

Ann Marie 15:22

I said to one of my tutors that my brain has changed. But I find it really hard to articulate exactly what that means. But I feel that my outlook on the world has changed. The way that I see myself has changed. I have a lot more confidence in the impact I can have in the world and the change I can have in the world from doing this course, which is amazing.

Academic Support 15:48

And what do you hope to do?

Ann Marie 15:50

I hope to change the world.