

## Student Voices transcripts: Renzo 2020 Interview

Renzo 0:00

My name is Renzo and I just graduated from Wimbledon College of Art studying a BA in theatre design. So, we do costume, we do lighting, and we also do set which is a lot, but it's also really fun.

Academic Support 0:18

How do you feel now, uh, being at the end of your degree and ready to go out into the world?

Renzo 0:28

I feel like is a bit anticlimactic in terms of finishing my degree because, well, Corona, a pandemic. I feel like being prepared for the real world is kind of ironic right now because there is no real world. You know, everything's kind of virtual now, especially in the theatre. You know, theatres aren't really open and we don't know if they will be open until 2021.

Even if I wasn't gonna do theatre, I still do events. I still work in that kind of field of getting people together and in that environment of having a stage and, and the collaborative performance of something, but because obviously social distancing, that's a kind of a very questionable thing right now. So, in terms of having a lot of skills from my course, it's amazing because it means that I am still able to do the virtual work that I need to do and have meetings and, and perform virtual events. But in terms of me actually using the main foundation of my skills, which is theatre design, it's like a cliff hanger. You know, I don't really know what's going to happen right now. But I'm just kind of using all the other skills I've learned while studying to maintain my work ethic.

Academic Support 1:45

You've highlighted and pinpointed the situation of a lot of graduates at this moment in time. Can I just ask you to go back and think about why you chose to study at UAL

Renzo 2:00

Yeah ....honestly, I did like a lot of Insights. So, Insights is a program for under 18's to gain a lot of knowledge about universities... basically, what university life is like, meet ambassadors do kind of mini courses. And I did three of those: so, I did autumn, summer and winter for a year while I was at college. And luckily, my level 3 at college was a UAL diploma.

So, it was kind of connected, and that's how I heard about UAL. And then I went to an Open Day at UAL, and it was one LCC and I was like, 'Okay, yeah, this is, it's not really where I'm going to go and it's not really what I'm going to do. I don't know why I'm going here', and ended up speaking to someone that did theatre, I think they were just in different campuses...and we ended up speaking for about two hours.

(2.57) And yeah, then that was kind of it and she ... she taught to me about what she what she does and how she kind of got there. It was kind of like that one to one connection that I had and seeing the art and being in the building and having that kind of feeling is what made me choose UAL over the other universities I was planning on going to. Also, for me personally, I've lived in London my whole life, so university in London wasn't something that I really want to do. I really want to go out and be by myself for a while. So, it was more just having that community and having the teachers be so amazing and the students be so outgoing. It was just yeah, I think it was the whole environment that really got me.

Academic Support 3:35

Okay, so what would you say to someone who's in a similar situation to you're not sure whether they were ready for university and whether UAL was the place to come? What sort of thoughts would you have...in the present situation?

Renzo 3:50

So, for anybody that's worried about coming to university, you're not sure about it...right now, because of this, you know, New World... right now it's just how you feel talking to people about your situation. And maybe writing a list of things that you really want to get out of university. Now, in this new world, maybe it's just like five, maybe it's 10 things. And then literally contacting someone from each uni, whether it's a student ambassador, whether it's someone from outreach program, whether it's one of the tutors of the course that you're interested in, honestly, like, email them, ask them if they can answer your questions and answer anything, any ...literally anything, because right now, honestly, everyone is kind of clueless as to what's going on. But they know more than you do at this point, and any problems that you feel like you may face, they're the people that will answer them and make you feel reassured. So, I would just say, you know, even it's kind of daunting. I know, like, at the time, like sending emails was like the worst nightmare that I had, because I just didn't, I really just did not like sending emails, but just email them and ask them questions and if you do end up going to that uni, that will build that connection for you, so you then feel safer to be like, 'okay, yeah, this is, this is where I belong and I already have that connection with the tutor'. And they know who I am and what I'm going through. And definitely ask at the bottom of the email if they can refer you to someone else if they cannot answer your questions. So that's kind of like what I would say for now.

Academic Support 5:17

Now, I know you are a student, or you were a student ambassador 'til recently. Could you just tell me a little bit about what's involved with that, and how much support students get in the university when they hear.

Renzo 5:30

So, I was an ambassador from first year, which was amazing for me because as I said, I did Insight so I already knew what student ambassadors were like and I was like, 'I want to be one of you guys'. Because I had such a good connection with them because they literally opened my eyes to all the possibilities that were there at UAL. For me, it was more about helping students gain knowledge and being able to provide that bridge between basically being on your own and in a flat and having to pay rent and bills and then have uni work and then have tutors and then make your way to university...So, having all that extra pressure and being by yourself...those are things that... I know it's not it's a lot of things... but those are things that Student Ambassadors could help with. So, they're not there to give you all the answers but there to give you guidance and give you knowledge of things that you may not know before or may wanted to know. And just basically, yeah, just kind of like a guide through university and I think in the Outreach Program it is more about the 18's and people that haven't been to uni yet. And for me, that was so important because. Honestly, like so many people don't know anything about University and there are people that have parents

that haven't been to university, they're first generation... and literally any questions from 'oh my gosh, where do I get my laundry?' you know, like 'how do I ...how do I pay for laundry?' or 'Am I allowed access to this building' or even like 'Will my friends be able to be with me at this time?'

(7.08)

Honestly, ...it's such a, it varies so much. It's basically that connection that you have with somebody on... not feeling like you're completely alone and someone that isn't a teacher or tutor and you don't feel like you're ...you kind of like have that hierarchy or whatever. It is someone that is close to your age has been through and can understand what you're going through very recently. And that can connect with you. And, also, I just, I believe like student ambassadors are so helpful because they also give tours for university campuses. So, they know a lot about the facilities of different university campuses and maybe different rooms and probably know the tutors and can like introduce you to some of the tutors if you have any questions. So yeah, I think that's really what's involved in being an ambassador.

Academic Support 7:58

Okay, so next question is really about you and your development. Looking back from when you first started to where you are now, what's changed?

Renzo 8:10

So, my journey has been very interesting, I'd say. I've always been very focused on my future and I've always kind of known what's kind of next for me, I always kind of know what I want to do. And because I thought I was going to do Foundation to begin with, within a month of UCAS applications ending, I decided to change to do a BA. And that for me, he was kind of like a risk, because I wasn't really sure I was ready. At the time I got offer from National Theatre to do an internship...and I thought, 'okay, yeah, but this is perfect. Like, why would I go to university to do something that I can basically do right now?'. And then I actually had contact with one of the tutors that I did Insights with and I emailed him and I said, 'I don't know what I should do. I don't know what's best. I don't know if there's any point in me going to university.' And you know, he was like 'you gain more knowledge, you gain more experience, you then have work experience' and kind of told me like all the things that I'd end up getting from university. And, yeah, so I ended up changing my mind. And it was kind of like, right for me at the time. So, I was kind of ... I was really nervous, actually, I was I was...thankfully I was with amazing people in my class. And there are so many people with different levels skills, there's different ages, and you kind of meet people that come from so many different backgrounds, and I think I was one of the only ones that was 18. So, I was really like a baby.

(9:44)

So yeah, it was it was it was kind of nerve wracking, and I didn't think I was very good. But at the same time, I was really eager to learn and I was really, really positive about gaining experience. So, I think that's what kind of motivated me to be better and learn.

So, first year was great in terms of you know, going out ...nightlife, working, having uni, living in halls. It was... it was the best kind of like experience for socials but for university, I was still quite a newbie and still quite learning and progressing in my field.

(10.23) And then a second year I went abroad, and I did an Erasmus for the second semester, and it was honestly the best experience of my life. I decided to go to Netherlands, Maastricht, which is a really small town, at Toneelacademie, which is an arts uni and they basically focus on theatre and while I was there, in the theatre world, they have this thing called the PQ, which is the Prague Quadrennial. It happens every four years, artists and designers and an actors and basically people of all arts and performing, they all come together and put on this massive exhibition in Prague.

Thankfully, and I can't believe ... but the year I went to Netherlands is the year that Prague was actually on. And the university that I was with, had work to be presented in the Prague Quadrennial. I'll say, it was amazing opportunity all around.

(11:20)

And as a project, we were set to slow travel to Prague from Maastricht. Now, me and this other student decided to take the flex bus. So we couch-surfed which was very... very challenging for me. I don't like sleeping... I don't shower at other people's houses, just not a thing for me, let alone sleep on someone's bed. Like it was just it was a whole...it was a whole new experience for me. And we were kind of focusing on coming out of each other's comfort zones. So, we ...we backpacked, and we only took flex buses, we only couch-surfed so it was also to basically meet people. And we went through France and Italy and slow travelled to Prague for a month. And we gave each other challenges. So, part of our art piece and what we decided to create ... we are both dances, so each town in each city that we went to, we did the same dance. I bought a new pair of clean white trainers. And every person that we met, had to sign them. I bought my Polaroid camera. So, we gave each other challenges. So, if I saw someone in yellow, anything yellow, I'd have to I have to ask to take a picture with them. If my friends saw a dog, you know, she'd have to ask if he could take a picture with the dog, just the dog ... not even the owner. And when I was in Prague, we were able to present the things that we did when we travelled: so, the dance video that we ..I edited together; I showed my shoes that we had people write on; we had the Polaroids; my friend did some drawings as she's great at landscape drawings of people... and, and things that we saw on our journey, on the buses. And some people left us messages and then you know, doing art and creating theatre and performance in that way was so amazing.

(12.58)

So when I knew I had to go to third year, I really want to continue that same feeling of it being interactive and meeting new people and mixing with different cultures and.. and just keep learning and being able to express that. Because also sometimes it's very hard to talk about your work, not because you don't want to just sometimes because you know... you lived it and unexplaining it is just generally difficult. And I ended up making a book. And creating that and being in third year and... and having all those extra bits that I can be like, okay, you know, this is my experience, I can call myself a designer.

Yeah, I think going on that trip and realizing what it must be like for international students to come to London, I think when I went into third year, I had so much more empathy for basically the whole change, you know. It's a whole change of environment of different people you without your family. You know, you've got a thought, you know, being alone, finding new friends ... finding something to do when your friends are busy, when you're alone ... kind of having that aspect of reaching out to tutors and knowing what tutors to go to, knowing what student to ask to help, you know. Just ... just...it was really... it was really hard.

(14:20)

Having that realization that, wow, you know, sometimes I look back and I'm like, 'if I didn't meet this person then I, ...I don't know where I would have been', you know. 'If I didn't, if I didn't speak to this tutor about this thing, like I wouldn't have known about this whole trip'. Like it was, it was very kind of self-aware of how hard it can really be for an international student and where it really is important that you reach out to people that aren't from London, and are not used to, you know, the culture, not used to the ... basically the academic scheme, you know, it's completely different. It's completely different everywhere. And you're all coming to uni for the first time but also... it's it's very hard for any student. I think that was a very big eye opening for me.

(15:02)

And for any students, international students coming people that aren't just aren't from London, my advice would be use the chat forums. You know, if you're going into halls, get in contact with some of the people that you know you're going to be in halls with. Reach out to anyone that you really feel like okay, I don't know what's going on, I kind of want to know more. Or just basically like meet a friend you know, hi, send a text message. The most they can do is just not respond to you and that's okay. But just keep texting people and keep knowing more about the place that you're going to and knowing things that are happening around the place you are going to. Or, any places that you actually want to go to and ...you know, have like a little bucket list of 'Okay, this is like a like a really cool restaurant, I really want to go to'. And then when you get to halls you can like tell somebody else and there're like 'Oh, that looks really cool' as well. So, you know, have those things in your back pocket of really what you want to do when you get to London and anything that you're nervous about... I promise you, someone else is maybe as nervous as you, maybe more nervous than you. And having that kind of connection with someone else that is also in the same boat as you will really help.

(16:08)

So yeah, just just really reach out and like, for me personally, I didn't know who to ask about accommodation. You know, I asked the university but that, you know, they didn't have connections like that in the place that I was going to. So, I had to really find it myself and I only found accommodation two weeks before I went there, which was stressful for me and very scary. So, you know, just just, for the area, figure out what you need. And who to ask.

(16:33)

Looking back over the last three years, I think, I gained a lot of connections. UAL does provide those connections. I really wanted to use as many resources as they had to offer. And that's what I did ...and I ... I just made sure that I worked at uni. And every time I did an Arts Temps job, you know, I talked to everybody there and get connections, get another job or talk to people that have the same interest as me. Talked to a lot of adults about how they got into working at UAL and what they did before that. And just really talking to people I think really helps as well build my confidence. In doing so, I ended up developing so many more skills than I would have thought I would have got from just doing the course. I tried to go above and beyond like just my course and see what other different campuses and meet people from different courses that had nothing to do with anything of what I was doing. So, I think majority of my three years, looking back, was just trying to get that human interaction and build my confidence as a person rather than just a designer.

Academic Support 17:44

Thank you so much for your reflections, it sounds such a positive three years.