

Learning Outside of The Classroom

Education is not just learning, but broadening your horizons and being open to learning new things. Universities are places where education is facilitated by exposing students to many different kinds of people, study abroad programs, and diverse class subjects. Tara Westover experienced all of these things at University, but these were not her only sources of education. She experienced education through living with people different from her, making the decision to learn about the world, and learning to embrace her past and who she is as a person. Along the way, she had support from family and friends who helped her become educated. Her story contains many examples of lessons college students can learn, and the resources they can turn to in order to learn them.

One of the first lessons Tara learned when she went to college was living with people different from her, and fitting in. Robin, one of her roommates, was influential in showing her how to live with others. Tara had grown up in a messy, dirty home, where being hygienic was unheard of. When Tara moved into her apartment with her roommates, she didn't understand that other people try to be clean. Robin could have judged Tara and made her feel bad that she didn't fit in, but instead, Robin took her under her wing and guided her. Robin took care of Tara when she began to be extremely stressed from school. She helped her with rent and steered her towards getting counseling. Robin showed Tara how to live in the new world that she had jumped into, and played a large role in educating Tara about how other people live, and to take care of herself. All college students are faced with people that have different habits than them. Additionally, college students are faced with the challenge of staying mentally healthy amid the new stress of college. The best way to learn the lesson of living and being around new people and surviving in

a stressful college environment is to stay open to new ideas and perspectives, and to take care of yourself.

More influential figures in Tara's journey in education were Dr. Kerry and Professor Steinberg. Dr. Kerry was her Jewish history professor and recommended her for the study abroad program to Cambridge. He was the first person in academics to show her that she has the potential to do great things and that she deserves to be where she is; she just needs to work towards it. Professor Steinberg continued to nurture this idea in her, and help her continue her higher education. This lesson is something many students have a hard time learning because, in universities, where people are chosen to be there because of their accomplishments, everyone seems to be better than you. Tara also struggled with this, although to a much higher degree than most students can claim. She felt inferior because she didn't even have the basic high school education most students have when they start college. What she couldn't see, and what most college students don't see, is the potential they have to do great things, no matter how amazing the next person is. Dr. Kerry and Professor Steinberg were important academic mentors to Tara by recognizing her potential and encouraging her not to lose hope in her education. College students can get the same help that Tara received by talking with their professors and other mentors available to them, and then they can realize the potential they have and take advantage of the opportunities these mentors may direct them to.

One last influential person in her life was her boyfriend, Drew. When Tara had accustomed to life outside of Buck's Peak, she was ashamed of her past and didn't want to share it with anyone, in fear of rejection. When she started dating Drew, she did what she could to hide that part of her life with him and lied when she said she was okay, when in reality the increased

tension in her family was having a negative effect on her life. Tara finally realized that she can't hide from her past and that Drew deserved to know about it as someone affected by her emotionally. This taught her an important lesson about embracing her past and being true to yourself, by not letting the fear of rejection keep you from expressing your identity. This lesson is important for college students to learn because it's easy to change yourself to fit in with everyone else, but your individuality is important and affects all aspects of your life.

If I had to ask Tara Westover one question, I would ask her: if you could go back in time and change one event regarding your interaction with your family, what would you change?