



# Q&A with Adult College Student

## “Cary” from Madison Co., IL

### 1. Why did you decide to go back to school?

- a. I never finished college when I was young – I only went for 2 years and then got married. I never really wanted a “career” when I was in my early twenties. I decided to have kids and stay home to raise them. When my second child was born my husband was out of work for a summer and we had to buy very expensive COBRA health insurance for our kids that we couldn’t afford and my parents helped us with. I realized quickly that I did not have the same earning power as my husband and that if something happened and I needed to go back to work full time to support my family I only had secretarial experience and I wouldn’t make enough money. I needed a degree, if not two, to make a better living at something I might enjoy.

### 2. What college(s) did you attend and what did you major in?

- a. I went to SIUE and decided to major in History, which doesn’t sound very practical but was something I loved and knew I’d devote time and energy to. At the time I thought I wanted to work in museums or teach. After trying their Museum Studies program for a while after I graduated, I realized that I liked archives best and learned that I really needed a Masters in Library and Info. Science to succeed in that field. Luckily one of the best Library Science schools in the country is University of Illinois – I attended there as well.

### 3. Did you get a Bachelor’s and/or a Master’s?

- a. In 2006 I got my Bachelor’s Degree in History at SIUE.
- b. In 2010 I got my Master’s Degree in Library and Information Science at U of I (*through their distance learning online degree program*)

### 4. Had you ever attended college before, or is this your first time being in school since high school?

- a. In my twenties I attended SIUE for one year and Eastern Illinois University for one year before I got married. When I went back to school as an adult I had been out of school for over eighteen years.

### 5. Did you approach anyone for advice?

- a. I approached everyone for advice! My parents, friends, co-workers, people working in the field I was interested in – everyone who would talk to me! Actually, it was some archivists I knew who recommended that I do the U of I distance learning program. I might not have ever found out about that if I hadn’t asked around.

### 6. How did you decide which school was right for you?

- a. I was limited to the St. Louis metro area because of my husband’s job – I knew we weren’t going to move – so I stuck to Illinois colleges to save money with in-state tuition. However, some St. Louis colleges allow metro-east folks like us to have the same tuition costs as Missouri residents so it’s worth checking out. I chose SIUE because it was the closest four year university to my house and I was already familiar with it. I chose U of I for my master’s because they had an online program that I could do from home and were highly recommended in the field I was studying.

**7. Name the most challenging things about going back to school:**

- a. Borrowing the money! It's hard to decide if you are going to get a return on your money. I did not qualify for Pell grants, but we don't make enough to pay for school outright so I had to take out student loans. Since my kids were entering their teenage years and would be getting ready to go to college, it was a big decision to spend money on myself.
- b. Balancing kids, work, and homework. I worked out a deal with my husband ahead of time – that I would be less help around the house and with the kids and he agreed to take on more responsibility. I needed time to not only go to my classes but also to do homework. I found it easier to work fewer hours when I drove to school, and then I added more work hours when I started taking classes online. The balance is an individual thing, but your family, if you're living with others, needs to know ahead a time what kind of commitment this is. Communication with them is important because home life will change.

**8. What was the best part about going back to school?**

- a. How fun it was. I loved the classes because I majored in something I was very interested in.
- b. Meeting so many people of different backgrounds and ages. SIUE is very diverse and all ages attend. There were other people in my classes in their forties like I was. At Univ. of IL I had classmates that ranged in age from 20 – 60. It was amazing to meet people from all over the country and sometimes the world.
- c. Realizing how much I could accomplish when I set my mind to it. When I was young I made very average, mediocre grades. As an adult I made A's because I was so dedicated to do so. It gives you a real sense of accomplishment and builds self confidence. I finally learned how to get up and talk in front of others without freaking out!

**9. What would you tell a friend thinking about going back to school?**

- a. If you think the outcome – the degree – will really benefit your life then go for it. Don't be afraid. It is way more fun than you think.
- b. Don't go back to school to get a degree you think you "ought" to get – or that someone else thinks you ought to get. Only go back to do something you really, truly enjoy. It is too much work and too much money to waste doing something you don't even like that much.
- c. Plan on letting other things drop – you can't do it all and will have to say "no" to some things for a while, but it's worth it.

**10. Did your degree give you the job you envisioned?**

- a. I have had my master's degree for over a year. I am currently working in a library environment that is not at all where I thought I would be, but that's good because I love it. That's the great part, working internships and getting to know people at places you'd like to work leads from one thing to another – some you hadn't imagined. I am still not salaried, but am building enough experience with my degree to be in a position to move into a salaried spot when one opens up. The current economy makes jobs scarce as we all know, but my experience and degree will give me an advantage when those few jobs do appear. I am happy with the result and do not feel like I wasted time or money.