

Expectations of returning to college

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When I think about what it must be like to walk down that aisle in cap and gown after receiving my degree, I get very excited. No one in my family has received a college degree, so when I complete my degree, I will be the first. Although my goal is achievable, my trek towards college completion has been a rough one met with many obstacles. Shortly after enlisting in the United States Air Force 11 years ago, I found out about the Tuition Assistance Program, which pays 75% of my college tuition. I was eager to begin classes but soon found out college learning was more difficult, and required a much deeper level of commitment than my high school days. Though I have always been an active learner, easily grasping new techniques and information, I found it difficult in college. It wasn't the material that was difficult; it was the fact that I'd rather be out with my friends than stuck in a classroom. I completed my first course in winter of 1989 and decided to take a break for a while—a big mistake! I did nothing for the next year and a half and was soon transferred to England. The Gulf War ensued and before I knew it, two years had passed, and I didn't have anything completed towards my college education. I remembered my goal of being the first in my family to receive a degree and walk that aisle of completion, and became aggressive taking classes. In April of 1994 I reached my goal by completing my Associate's Degree in Applied Sciences in just a year and a half. I was thrilled, and even received a \$250 scholarship from the Air Force. My goal had always been to go on and complete a Bachelor's Degree. For the next five years I struggled taking one class at a time while trying to juggle an Air Force career, and a family of four. Each time the Air Force moved me I had to transfer credits. I would get discouraged every time a university dropped

credits because they didn't fit the degree program I was enrolling in. There was no light at the end of the tunnel for me and I was ready to give up on it all together. I've been here in California for almost two years now and haven't taken a single class. My wife and I sat down recently and discussed my need to enroll in a course of study that would see me through all the way to completion. At just 29 years old with my Air Force career on the downside, I need to be marketable should I decide to get out or retire in the next few years. With that, we made commitments to each other to stay the tide, regardless of how difficult it might be, until I walked that aisle with a Bachelor's Degree. Now I'm geared up; I have a goal. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. I have made a commitment, and have the support of my family. I am going to walk that aisle and receive a Bachelor's Degree in Information Technology.