

It is a privilege to speak about my experience at the University of Oregon and how much I have grown over the past four years. I still can remember how nervous I was during IntroDucktion and saying to myself, "Am I really doing this?"

My favorite year at UO was freshman year. This is where I made most of my close friends in my Academic Residential Arc, Umoja. During that time, I did not realize how important and supportive the group of individuals in my corner were going to be.

The first day of my classes was a culture shock as I walked in my first lecture filled with over 200 students. I was quickly reminded that I was not in high school anymore, surrounded by people who knew and understood me. I struggled with feeling comfortable in the classroom and immediately went from the loud mouth girl who could not be quiet, to the girl who barely spoke.

Feeling comfortable in your environment can make or break your experience. I knew this early on and did not want all the work I did in high school to go to waste. Outside of the close friend group I made, I knew I needed to immerse myself within the UO community and the black community here to truly feel like a Duck.

I came across the Center for Multicultural Academic Excellence during my freshman year. I enjoyed the vibe and could see the genuine connections between the students and advisors. I remember thinking, "I will work here one day" which I do now.

I also found my community with the Black Women of Achievement, for which I serve as the communications co-director. Through BWA, I have been able to promote unity and friendship amongst black college women and allies. My goal in joining CMAE and BWA was to show students after me, places where they can feel comfortable, be heard, and seen on campus.

I think the best feeling is to see a student walking on campus, tell them about CMAE, MCC, or BWA, and see them there later. That is overall how retention will continue. And how it NEEDS to continue.

To all the advisors at CMAE, my professors I made a close relationship with, the people who have granted me scholarships, my family, and everyone who has supported me through my college journey, I want to say thank you.

To the class of 2021, congratulations, "Our future kids will never hear the end of us saying how we survived and finished college during a whole pandemic!" Bye!