

COMMUNITY COLLEGE OPENS DOORS

If I had stayed in Hong Kong, I would likely be working a basic 9-to-5 job in an office somewhere.

When other doors were locked, community college held the key for Justin Chan to pursue the career that he wanted. When Justin, a man with left hip dysplasia, did not make it into the University of Hong Kong, he was in good company. Since the government fixes the number of spots available for local students enrolling in the highly coveted public university system, space is limited. In a given year, only around 20% of applicants make it. That means 80% don't.

Yet Justin knew that he wanted to study environmental science, and he had arrived at an important crossroads in which he needed to make a decision. He decided to start looking for opportunities outside of Hong Kong, and even outside of China.

After he did a project in high school focused on global warming, he realized that he wanted to do something in the science field. Environmental science seemed like the best fit for Justin since he did not prefer the memorization involved in chemistry. It was also a better alternative to disciplines that were heavy in writing such as law.

While environmental science would allow him to focus on areas of strength such as math, there were some classes like botany where he did not feel as confident.

Justin found an open door after he began corresponding with an uncle who had lived in Madison, Wisconsin for the last 30 years as a professor teaching classes at The University of Wisconsin (UW), Madison campus. Justin began reading about courses at UW; however, when he realized that he did not have the test scores to come in as a freshman, he learned about





Madison Area Technical Community College (MATCC).

MATCC has been dedicated to reaching out to international students and internationalizing its campus for the last 10 years. It offers many benefits to international students including low fees, a clear transfer pathway to complete education at UW-Madison, and strong support from professors and tutors. This last part appealed to Justin, especially after he realized from the course catalog that he could take the subjects that he found more challenging with extra support at a small price.

He got in touch with Stephanie Belmas, Senior International Student Specialist, at the community college who in turn connected him to one of the college's Disability Access Advisors. Over the course of a few weeks, Justin would Skype with the Disability Access Advisor to learn all about the college and the community. They discussed topics such as classes, culture and transportation.

After he arrived, Justin encountered a community that was wildly different from the metropolitan center from which he had come. Madison, Wisconsin was a quiet small town, relatively speaking, with a slower pace of life, but that did not mean that Justin was resting.

In Madison, most of the time it was not as stressful as Hong Kong, so Justin had more

I feel like I can spend more time with students and get to know them better and develop my relationship building skills in the future for when I start teaching.

time to explore different ways of learning. While studying at MATCC, the Student Achievement Center helped him a lot with academics, getting through midterm and final exams. While he always struggled with botany, they helped him to understand it better. They showed him examples of different trees, and tricks for recognizing species based on the photo or name.

He transferred from MATCC to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ultimately graduating with his BA in Environmental Science. He is currently completing a Master's Degree in Education at Concordia University, in Mequon, Wisconsin and working part-time as a math tutor at a local high school.

He also enjoys the opportunity to spend time with his family including his uncle, and his sister who recently finished classes at MATCC and began studies at UW-Madison.

