

I will let you in on a secret, it is a well-known secret, often forgotten, overlooked, or discarded in the face of chaos or disparity. Quiet now, these words I will tell you are important to keep close and secure in the depths of the mind, body, and soul. Keep it somewhere easy to reach for a rainy day, a stubborn week, or a taxing month. This sentiment is your beacon of light in tough situations, or a lifeline pulling you out of a dejected mindset. These four words are short and simple but honest and matter-of-fact.

Challenges make you stronger.

The roots of my being twist and curl around my experiences growing up in London, facing challenges as a woman, a British woman, a British Asian woman, an educated British Asian woman. I never saw myself as an odd one out amongst my peers, even in the face of difference. My multicultural reality altered at eighteen when I moved far up north for university. Suddenly, almost instantly, I was faced with a new reality whereby I sat alone as the only ethnic minority in my accommodation, course seminars, and workshops. I became more susceptible to stares and whispers in a city not blatantly accustomed to cultural difference, but these never felt threatening. My resilience is my greatest asset since I was brought up strong-willed and ready to face challenges or difficult situations head on. Ultimately, London truly is a global city, a cultural hub that has more room for tolerance and cohesion -- moving away from it made newspaper headlines, stories, and experiences much more of a reality.

For me, returning to London three years later was not about navigating a multitude of cultures or new settings. It was about cementing my roots into the foundations of a city I once knew as home. I set my feet down in this city with a new, multifaceted, critical understanding of contemporary culture and diverse audiences from a humanities degree. However, I naively believed I was ready for the cut and thrust of this commercial world. I saw my time at Cass as the cornerstone in my plan for a successful professional career. Previously, I had faced repeated rejection competing against business graduates to secure graduate roles. I did not let the rejection beat me down so this story moves on as I remember the mix of nerves and excitement as I walked one foot in front of the other to 106 Bunhill Row. My outlook for this year was one of hope as I was ready to hit the ground running, hurtling towards my career goals. I intended to grasp all opportunities by both of my hands. What I received however was a slap straight from reality.

New people, new topics, new surroundings. In my first term I constantly felt as if I were running against the clock, frantically searching for more hours in the day. *Job search, lecture notes, train times.* The word “**intense**” was scattered across course publications, introductory lectures, and student experience forums. This was a shock since I am well accustomed to the UK education system. The reality of a master’s degree was something I had not quite expected to blow me away. *My commute, my group meetings, my lectures.* I responded to my challenges by throwing myself, full force, into my studies and job search. The scale tipped. My balance was thrown off and I was left in the deep-end.

America, Thailand, Japan. I responded to the challenges of this unexpected student experience, by bonding with my classmates over the challenges of an unexpected student experiences. *A Friendly nod, smiling face, and a door held open.* Small acts of kindness in and out of the classroom make all the difference between the chaos and stress of keeping up with the holy grail of student life – sleep, study, and socialise. This is where my understanding of my postgraduate education changed and my time at Cass transformed: the education I am receiving is not purely academic.

Cass promotes a socio-cultural learning system that sets an environment where social experiences are equally important to your personal and professional development. Through simply meeting people creativity is encouraged, and innovative thinking is challenged. The challenges to my routine, my experiences, and my future plans truly tested my resilience. However, building sustainable relationships and experiences in an international setting allows me the opportunities to be the best version of myself -- professionally and personally.

A job, a friendship circle, and good grades. Things began to fall into place.

Term one flew by in a muddle of chaos whereas term two is flying by in a whirl of laughter, coffee dates, and networking events. The list of events are endless, but my favourite range from Wine-tasting workshops to Women in Business events. For me, Cass has pinned a true sense of belonging. I have found a place at Cass in the most accepting multicultural environment. It is a special place that allows you to thrive on cultural difference rather than succumb to it.

Challenges *do* make you stronger.