



Most students go to college to prepare themselves for life in the “real world.” George Davis lived in that world to prepare himself for college.

Davis, widely known by his nickname, “Trapper,” is currently an Electrical Engineering major at UNC Charlotte, but, prior to that he worked in the field, first for a small industrial electrical firm and then, for 10 years, with AT&T. Those experiences proved invaluable for him when he began formal study at the University level.

“Things I have seen out in the field relate back to things we are studying in school and vice versa,” he said. “It is one thing to see something processed on paper, and it is something else to see it processed in the field.”

In fact, Davis feels that it is a good idea for aspiring engineers to spend a year in the working world before entering college, a practice that some schools, such as Penn State University, require. Still, after more than a decade of practical applications, Davis was more than ready to advance his knowledge to that of a professionally trained engineer.

“In 2011, I had recently purchased my first home and had been laid off for the second time,” he said. “A friend of mine had gone through the Engineering program at UNC Charlotte, and I thought ‘Why not?’ Let’s do it.”

As a new homeowner at the age of 30, there were lots of reasons why Davis could not be a traditional full-time student living in a residence hall. He took out loans, took in roommates and worked jobs that fit in with his class schedule.

“Things change when you have been used to having a certain amount of money,” he said. “You still have bills to pay.”

In the summer of 2013, Davis again found himself at the intersection of his academic and working lives when he secured an internship with Barrett, Woodyard & Associates, Inc., a mechanical and electrical engineering firm that specializes in commercial power generation. His prior work experience helped him get the internship, and, when it was over, he continued working there 20-30 hours per week, drawing blueprints to be used by Barrett-Wood in commercial projects.

“A high GPA is great for your resume,” he said. “But employers also want to know how much work you can do.”

Still, Davis knows that there is much to be learned in UNC Charlotte’s Electrical Engineering program, where he has embraced study with the same enthusiasm that he has shown for work, posting that a high GPA in a very demanding curriculum. Despite his prior experience, he also was not too proud to start at the beginning when, due to a 12-year gap since high school, he placed into MATH 0900, UNC Charlotte’s developmental math course and, subsequently, took every course up the ladder leading to the Calculus courses that are part of his curriculum.

“Being placed in that MATH 0900 was a blessing,” he said. “It led to everything in higher math, and I rely heavily on it in every class. You don’t want to have to start learning Algebra again when you are taking Calculus II.”

Having learned what it is like to take the long way around to earn a college degree as an adult student, Davis, who ultimately hopes to work in power generation, computer programming or the designing and

manufacturing of cell phones, is eager to serve as a guide for other adult students. He is even serving as a mentor to a new adult student at the University.

The adult-student mentoring program in which Davis is participating is a part of UNC Charlotte's Office of Adult Students and Evening Services (OASES). He has found the office to be an invaluable resource and had a mentor himself during his first semester to go to with questions and concerns.

"When you are an adult student among 20,000 students who are younger than you, the acts of kindness you receive from OASES mean so much," he said. "As an adult student, it can be difficult to integrate your college and outside lives. The advisors in OASES encouraged me to start slowly, to make sure that I was not taking on too much. They never led me down the wrong path."

Davis has also been the beneficiary of OASES' extensive scholarship offerings for adult students, having won the offices' Carol Douglas Reentry Scholarship twice.

"When you are not working as much, the scholarship money really helps, but it is also means a lot to know that someone is pulling for you," he said. "The professors are here to teach you, to see if you are going to do the work. When I get an email from OASES just asking how I am doing, checking to see if I am OK, it lets me know someone is pulling for me. OASES is a blessing. I don't know why more adult students don't take advantage of it."