



Photo: Chantall Van Raay, WESTERN NEWS

Challenge is her middle name

By Chantall Van Raay

Erika Hegedues is not new to challenge.

She has overcome obstacles before, including immigrating to Canada and starting from nothing.

So when the full-time administrative assistant in the Office of Faculty Relations decided to work towards a degree seven years ago, she was not naive to what she might face.

It meant a lot of sacrifices. "I can't say it was an easy road to take," she admits. "But anybody who wants something really badly needs to make sacrifices and needs to make a place in their life to accommodate that."

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Erika Hegedues

Although still in a state of disbelief, Hegedues is anxious to receive her degree in Administrative and Commercial Studies (ACS) in Social Organization and Human Relations this morning. She says it is a key that will help open the door to her goal of getting a job in management at Western. "I feel like I am in front of a big door and I am going to walk through it eventually, but it hasn't opened yet," she says.

Like all Western staff, Hegedues was eligible to receive financial support from the university to pay tuition fees. "I think it is a huge advantage that Western employees have and unfortunately not everybody uses this," she says.

Hegedues began her plight in the fall of 1995 with Sociology 20. In 1996, she doubled her course load and then tripled it the next year. "I took three courses a year so I could finish in seven years," she says. "It was challenging but I was confident I could do it."

Now that she is graduating, she hates to see it end. In fact, she

plans to continue her studies. "Since I like suffering so much" she jokes, "I want to do a graduate degree. I am in preliminary talks to get into the Master of Public Administration program at Western. I also may consider an MBA. Since I have been doing this for seven years it is really hard to quit. It is like I am addicted to it."

Hegedues is a firm believer in furthering one's education. "I think education is never too late to start and there really is no time that you finish your education. There always is something that you can learn, especially now with technology changing."

Since Hegedues loves working with people, she feels ACS was a clear route. "I really do love people at Western," she says. "I really think that people are trying to do their best to move this university forward and face the challenges we have been facing."

Born and raised in Hungary, Hegedues immigrated with her husband to Canada from Germany in 1991, during one of the country's most difficult recessions.

They started from nothing. "We came with two suitcases and two bags. And my husband didn't speak English," says Hegedues, who speaks five languages fluently — English, German, Russian, Polish and Hungarian.

Her husband got a job with a German landscaper about two weeks after arriving in Canada. Hegedues found employment in 1994 in Western's psychology department, through the Landed Immigrants of London.

The placement led to part-time employment in the Office of Associate Vice-President (Academic Affairs). In 1997, she began working in the Registrar's Office full-time until June 2000, when she joined the newly established Office of Faculty Relations.

Hegedues hopes her story is an inspiration for others. "If you really want something then you can do it," she says. "I would like to inspire people and show them that yes, it can be done."