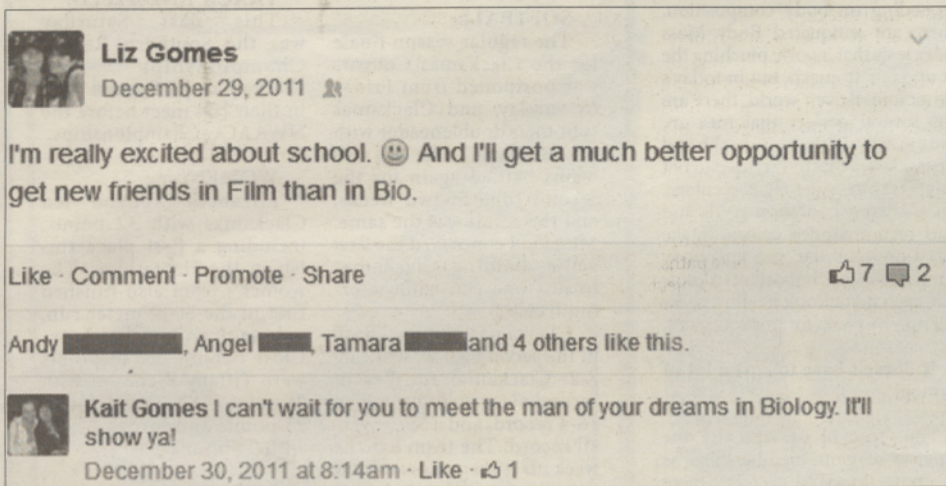


Move over eHarmony, The Print is here

Spring is the time for romance, and whether you're casually dating or looking for something long-term, our in-house dating and relationship experts have some advice to achieve success.



Chemistry sparks in biology class

by LIZ GOMES
associate photo editor

In the fall of 2011, my life looked pretty grim. I'd just been dumped for the millionth time by a guy who liked to change his mind, I'd alienated most of my friends and my roommate to sustain that toxic relationship, and my job had been dead-ending for a while. As I cried reading that last break-up text (yes it was over a text message) something became abundantly clear – I needed a clean slate. Within the month I'd found a new apartment, I dyed my hair (because you always dye your hair after a break-up, right?), and most importantly – I registered to go back to school at Clackamas Community College.

I chose a Biology course and a film course for my first term back, thinking I'd balance work and play.

In Biology, my teacher Heather Carpenter made her students switch tables weekly to get everyone acquainted. Like some cosmic matchmaker, she stopped switching us the week I moved to Jake's table.

We started as competitive rivals gunning for the highest grade, but after discovering a mutual affinity for memes and the show "The Office," I knew that I'd just met someone important. I used a 'study group' as an excuse to exchange numbers, and just like that, we'd established an outside-of-class connection. We created a post-finals hangout with our table mates, and from there started hanging out alone and eventually become official. Today we live together, have a dog and will be celebrating our two-year anniversary on the 22nd of this month.

Our success is based on a mix of luck, trial and error, and circumstantial boldness. If I hadn't picked that term to go back, if we

had been forced to switch tables just one more time, if I hadn't reevaluated what I thought I deserved, we could have missed our opportunity. This brings me to my first piece of advice:

-Know yourself.

Because I was shy and insecure, I was a black-belt bystander for my teens and early twenties. Find a circle of people who make you feel good about yourself (no matter how weird you are, I promise they're out there.) Once comfortable in your skin, you can properly represent yourself to others. Knowing who you are and what makes you happy has everything to do with how successful you'll be at finding a good match.

-Don't be afraid to try.

If you are unhappy with your dating record or unhappy in general – make a change. It could be as simple as talking to someone at a bus stop or taking a class. If your circle of acquaintances is stale, expand it. If you sit on your hands and wait for the right person to appear, you might miss your shot with the guy who smiles when he hands you your coffee or that girl in your class with the great laugh. Worst case scenario – they're not interested or available, but you can't be afraid to find out.

-Don't go in "blind."

Blind-dating is almost always a terrible idea, especially if you haven't made clear what you're looking for to the people who set you up. Throwing someone into an awkward situation and forcing them to talk, kiss, etc. with a stranger whom they may not even be compatible with isn't dating, it's a social experiment. Politeness can lead to misinterpretation, or you can end up taking the max train to a shady studio apartment downtown where the kitchen sink is full of rotisserie chicken carcasses and the floors are lined with the mattresses that he and his two roommates

share (not kidding.) Getting to know someone organically isn't impossible, and if you really don't have time to find someone yourself, have your 'helpful' friends arrange a group event so the pressure isn't on you. Even online dating sites give you the opportunity to weed out the weirdos in the safety of your own home.

-Communicate your thoughts and feelings.

Once you've found someone, it's important that you keep your channels of communication open in both directions. Pent up frustrations can lead to resentment, and the longer you keep it bottled the bigger the problem will become. It's also a good idea to communicate with yourself. "Am I being petty? Is this more about me than them?" If you can troubleshoot and resolve your own issues before bringing them to the table, it may spare you an unneeded disagreement. If the issue is something that actually needs to be addressed, be kind and remember that you care about them.

-Identify your deal-breakers early.

If they don't want kids and you do, if you believe in God but they don't, if they're flirty and you have trust issues – there's little you can do to compromise. Part of knowing what you want is knowing what you can and can't do without. Betting on an eventual change of mind seldom works out and can be a very risky and harmful waste of time, and if you have to force someone to change who they are to fit your mold or vice versa, you're doing it wrong.

An acknowledgment of this advice will take you a long way, but trust your instincts. If it feels right, it's probably worth your time. If not – move on.

Stepping on the dating scene

by BLAKE THOMASON
sports editor

It's funny to be the "expert" on dating advice at only 19, but I guess that's what happens when you have all sorts of experience talking to girls or getting dates. Even among my friends group, I've been the go-to guy for help with relationships. This is just my third term here at Clackamas, but I have met a handful of girls and gone on some dates.

Going to a community college isn't all that different from high school in terms of knowing you're leaving soon to go to a different school. That makes it difficult to find and sustain a relationship with someone. As I mentioned, I have been fortunate enough to find some girls and go on dates, but nothing has worked out so far (which is why I'm writing this part of the story and not Liz's part).

However, experience is an invaluable learning tool. Just recently, I was running an errand and encountered a cute girl. In general, girls can be confusing, but girls in customer service are especially tricky – are they interested, or just being a nice employee? In the past, I probably would've just played it safe and let her go without seeing if she was interested. This time, because of past experiences, I went for it and ended up getting her number.

That leads into one of my tips for the active dater: someone who isn't in a relationship yet but is looking to meet and date new people.

-Be confident.

How many times have you heard "the animal is more afraid of you, than you are of it"? I doubt the girl or guy you're planning on talking to is actually afraid of you, but you get the idea. There's nothing to be scared of when approaching someone, the worst that can happen is rejection. I know nobody wants to face rejection, but out of every person you meet all of them are going to reject you or not work out except for one. If I got discouraged after every time a girl said "no" or "I have a boyfriend", I wouldn't have met the girl I'm currently seeing. Unless you're talking to someone who hasn't shown any sign that he or she is interested, there's a good chance they will say yes to you.

-Be yourself.

I know this isn't exactly groundbreaking stuff, but it really is important. Sometimes when

you're talking to someone you feel the need to act differently to be more impressive, but that will actually hurt you in the long run. There are two main reasons to just be you: acting different and better can set yourself up for disappointment when the truth comes out, and being yourself makes it easier to find someone who is attracted to the real, weird you.

-Know what kind of relationship you want.

This is critical because if you are unsure of what you want and you start dating someone, somewhere down the road you'll either have to conform to the other person's desire or break it off after an unnecessary amount of time has gone by. Communication is key in any relationship, and the sooner you make it clear what you're looking for, the easier it is to decide if you want to move forward with your potential boyfriend/girlfriend or move on.

-Know what type of person you're looking for.

It's easy to jump into a relationship with someone just because they're attractive or share some similar interests. It's also hard to let go of someone who does meet some of your ideal traits. To avoid putting yourself in a bad situation, be upfront with him or her and yourself about what you are looking for in a potential boyfriend or girlfriend, and don't feel bad about breaking it off with someone who just isn't right for you. However, don't be so quick to judge the other person; give it some time so you can be confident before you prematurely end it.

-Don't sit back and wait.

I'm a firm believer in destiny and that there's someone out there for everyone, but I don't think you can just sit back and wait for that special someone to fall into your lap. For some people, meeting that special someone is as simple as sitting at the same table in Biology class. For the rest of us, it takes effort and multiple attempts of putting yourself out there – even if that means getting turned down. All those rejections or failed relationships are practices to make yourself a better person and better boyfriend/girlfriend, so when you do finally meet "the one" you'll be ready.

There are a lot of fish in the sea, but not everyone is good at fishing. That's okay, you only have to catch one. If you find yourself hooking a lot of fish, but unable to reel one in, don't get discouraged, because with each try you get better and you eliminate bad fish. Eventually you will reel in 'the one.'

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