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## “Comeback kid” beats the odds to graduate stronger than ever



Sarah Summers

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Photo: Je'nine May

Co-creator of popular web series [Coloured Mentality](#), identity activist, filmmaker, land and housing activist, queer activist: these are just some of the ways to describe Sarah Summers and the many ways in which she has already made her mark on the world. Added to this is her story as the “comeback kid” who dropped out of the University of Cape Town (UCT) only to return years later, stronger than ever.

After matriculating from Springfield Convent School in 2008, [where she'd struggled to fit in as a person of colour](#), Summers enrolled at UCT for a BA in film production. She managed to pass the first year but at the end of the first term of the second year, she took a leave of absence.

It was a combination of stress about tuition fees (her grandmother had already taken out a loan to fund what she could), feeling disconnected from the university, and, in hindsight, an undiagnosed mental health condition that led her to drop out.

But a decade later, Summers graduated from UCT with BA Honours, a successful WhatsApp series that stemmed from her research project and a long list of achievements accomplished in the time since first leaving the university.

After dropping out, Summers joined a spiritual movement, hoping to find herself. But while it initially helped, it would also be the environment in which she experienced her first psychosis, which led to her exiting the movement, depressed and even more uncertain of who she was and what she was meant to do with her life.

Four years down the line, aged 23, Summers returned to UCT to complete her undergraduate degree. Initially, she struggled with being older than her classmates, but soon her maturity paid off.

"It was easier to focus on doing the work and not take everything so personally. Before I was quite dramatic about my own ideas," she said. "But by the time I went back, I was ready to just put in the effort."

Her graduation film, *Gatvol*, was initially not a resounding success and Summers got the lowest mark in the class. But *Gatvol* was one of only two films in the class that made it to the Durban Film Festival and now, some five years after she produced it, Summers' film will be shown at Festival Griot, a Brazilian film festival.

In December 2016, while sharing a coffee in Bootleggers so that they could use the free Wi-Fi, Summers and Koopman launched Coloured Mentality, a web series and conversation platform.

Within the first hour, there were thousands of shares and comments and within the first couple of days they had 10 000 followers as well as many media requests. "And this is literally just Kelly and I doing our own thing, figuring things out," Summers shared.

Since launching, Coloured Mentality has garnered over 36 000 likes and followers on Facebook; Koopman and Summers have fielded numerous media interviews and spoken on panels alongside the likes of renowned scholar on race Associate Professor Zimitri Erasmus; and they were selected as part of the inaugural cohort of the [Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity \(AFRE\)](#) in 2017.

In the same year she joined AFRE, Summers suffered another psychosis and was, around this time, diagnosed with bipolar disorder. And although she managed to travel across the world, complete the fellowship and host workshops on social media for activism, it was a difficult year.

"Oh, I had a lot of failures. I can talk for days about the failures I had that year," she said. Among these so-called failures was trying to set up her own media business, and another was a theatre production that didn't go ahead. She spent many months in what she described as "bed depression".

Certainly, financial difficulties, struggles with mental health and an often gruelling journey to find herself could not stand in the way of Summers making a comeback, over and over again.

***ENDS***

***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

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