

Being More Than Another Number With a Degree

Many children pick a combination of traditional, unconventional, multiple, and often irreconcilable ambitions. When I was a child, the things that I wanted to become often fell into both categories. At the ripe young age of four, my idea of a grand career path was a garbage truck driver, which would swing back and forth between a number of ideas, with President of the United States laying at the other end. As the years progressed and school became a more important factor in life, my academic successes allowed me to imagine more realistically. Yet somehow, the possibilities remained broad and often times confusing.

Luckily, the past four years at Stony Brook University have given me the opportunity to learn more than I ever could, not only in terms of academics but also about myself and the professional that I one day aspire to be. I have learned to recognize and benefit from an open mind, knowledge and skills in multiple disciplines, as well as the ability to draw on one or more fields of learning to do the work at hand effectively. Having a lack of focus in terms of career is less of a problem, but more of an opportunity to explore many of the things I am enthusiastic about. Not being locked into a particular career path early on has given me the ability to consider the vast possibilities of studying in multiple disciplines - Arts and Sciences - as well as tackling head-on my wide array of academic and personal interests. As I look forward to entering graduate school, I am committed to building on my interdisciplinary interests and skill sets, while continuing to learn more as time progresses.

At the age of seventeen, around the same time I would begin to apply for colleges, I gained a fleeting interest in psychology. Initially, the body of thought alone had lured me in to learning more. My predisposed interest in thinking outside the box, facilitated by the wild imagination that I was often prone to, combined with a growing interest in explaining the complexities of human behavior, caused me to delve directly in to psychology, almost without second thought. At first I found this to be a misplaced passion, but granted, I began to learn much more about psychology, continuing to further explore and embrace it's diversity. As the semesters ticked away however, my remaining my uncertainty was still that I'd chosen a field of interest without a particular career goal in sight.

While a number of my interests developed independently, a handful also grew out of being in a given situation and obligated to make a decision. It is not always possible to know exactly what we wish to pursue without first picking something up and trying it, which turned out to be the case for me. After my first year of studying psychology at

Stony Brook University, I was faced with the decision to remain along the Bachelor of Arts track and pick up a minor, or to change my major entirely and start from scratch. Journalism drew an instant appeal, as it seemed like the only job that could possibly facilitate writing as a way to survive; this idea always outweighed the notion of failure or even a premature death. However, I convinced myself not to go that route and in a moment of brazen confidence, switched to the Bachelor of Science track. This was a considerably more challenging option in my mind but I was willing to embrace it; I found the information learned in science classes to be much more rewarding and applicable towards future usage. In addition to the idea of studying science as seeming more practical, I felt a certain sense of security in that it was also personally satisfying.

Although I was not always sure about what career path to pursue, there were a number of influential moments throughout college that greatly impacted where I currently stand in terms of looking towards my future. As I began to take more biopsychology-oriented classes, my interests became more focused around integrative neuroscience and the biological mechanisms of psychological phenomena. Classes such as Human Brain Function and Drugs and the Brain exposed me to some of the most interesting material I've ever had the pleasure to be exposed to, and did a wonderful justice in sparking trains of thought that would have never else come to fruition. The concepts and ideas posed in linking biology, psychology and neuroscience requires a particular mindset that challenges you not only to think outside the box, but also view yourself and the world around you through an entirely different framework. Psychology requires one to adopt a compassionate view of the world, which creates an intriguing take on looking into certain phenomena when this is coupled with the tenets of physically represented science.

By far one of the most impactful classes I've taken during my undergraduate career thus far was Research Writing in Psychology, for a number of reasons. Mainly, this course exposed me to the idea of research as being somewhat of a career opportunity, a jumping off point perhaps. Combined with a predisposed interest in helping people, this seemed to be the best route to follow if I were to make some sort of an impact in the world. Most of the knowledge we acquire at any point in time is the byproduct of extensive research, and I feel fortunate to have learned so much as a result of exposure to this massive network of academic research. Additionally, this course heavily shaped me as a writer in the discipline of psychology. It exposed me to a new way of writing that is meant to be more palatable and easy to understand. This was another reason why I grew motivated to conduct research; its common goal is to inform the general population by

shedding light on new ideas with a highly dedicated commitment to delivering the information properly.

In addition to gradually being appropriated in the right direction along the track of my major, I did my best effort in college to continue pursuing writing, one of my longest standing passions. After starting to independently write at length near the end of 2011, the beginning of my sophomore year at Stony Brook, I decided to take Fiction Writing as a course in the upcoming semester. At first I felt unprepared as a writer, especially in the realm of fiction, but it was something that I again enjoyed working towards. Satisfied with the outcome of the course, I was motivated to continue writing on my own, and even take more courses within the department. During the fall 2013 semester, my decision to take the Personal Essay as a course ultimately motivated me to pursue a writing minor. This was a highly rewarding decision for a number of reasons. Aside from my personal enthusiasm for writing, the best part about adopting the writing minor was being given the opportunity to truly grow as a writer, in a way that would have been impossible to facilitate on my own. The value of the impact that writing courses in college have had on my personal skill is almost immeasurable, and I am highly fortunate to have been given the opportunity to be exposed to so many of the great minds that surround me. Additionally, these courses promoted me to reinvest faith in the idea that although I may not be able to pursue a career as just a writer, there are a number of ways in which I could integrate it into my life at any time and embrace it not just as a hobby, but in a multidisciplinary fashion.

Considering the impact college held in shaping my thought processes and guiding me towards a career, it has become a bit easier to envision my future than it previously was. My education up until this point has led me in new directions by feeding a thirst for learning, which I can only hope will continue throughout the rest of my life; if we're not learning anything, then why are we really here? Following the completion of my undergraduate degree, I would like to take time off to explore graduate programs centered on conducting research in biopsychology, with a particular emphasis on psychopharmacology and the neural mechanisms of drug therapy. Researching the biological and neural components of drugs effects on the brain, body and behavior are of great importance to our society in terms of medicine and treating a handful of prevalent conditions, as well as purely for the purpose of informing the masses.

Ultimately, I would like to conduct research that could potentially impact the way we treat a number of conditions, such as depression, bipolar disorder, ADHD and addiction, in terms of the administration of certain drugs and the potential for alternate applications of behavior therapy. Highlighting the connections between neurobiological

predispositions certain disorders and the effects of drugs on brain functioning has the potential for paving new ways in which we view the treatment of such conditions. Leading research at a university in this realm of study would be an ideal body of work later in life; however difficult to pursue, surely it will be a long and well worthy process. In addition, a career in research would involve a great deal of writing, a cornerstone of scientific communication and the proper articulation of ideas that in the long run, are actually worth spreading.

Overall, although I am still considerably nervous about where I will be in five to ten years from now, I have confidence in my drive to seek out the right path in life. Over the course of college, I have become much more focused academically and finally feel that I have adopted passions that are worthy of pursuing. In light of this, I feel that although the road to success may be filled with a number of obstacles and the demand for extensive dedication, I will persist in following my dreams and continue engaging with material that I find interesting and impactful. As time continues to pass at a rapid pace, the margin of opportunities also begins to narrow as I approach the first summer in which I will be a college graduate. Although I am eager to jump into any career opportunity or fast track masters program that comes my way, I am dually reluctant to dive into something that may slim my potential choices down the road. However, this is a rather productive tension, as the demand to remain strategic and proactively engaged in the pursuit of a career path will ultimately keep me ahead of the curve.

This spring, I will be the first person in my immediate family to graduate college with a Bachelors degree and although it sounds vain, I couldn't be any more proud. Initially I was alone on this journey, but over the years I have been guided by a number of professors and motivated to continue pursuing my aspirations. In the long run, happiness is one of the key facets of life and it is important to do everything in our power to maintain that. Remaining open minded and actively in pursuit of my career goals will be the best, if not the only way to achieve a true harmony between my personal and professional aspirations. Whether in twenty years I find myself successfully conducting impactful research, writing freelance narrative nonfiction or none of the above, I can almost wholeheartedly assure that I will be able to maintain a positive outlook in terms of making the most out of life and learning from every single one of my successes and failures.