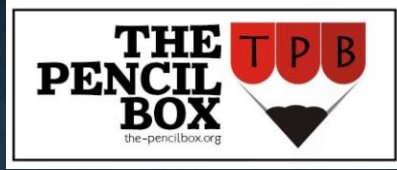


DISCOVER YOURSELF

3 Articles from The Pencil Box to help you accelerate self-discovery at university



Thanks for downloading this guide.

The Pencil Box is dedicated to helping students achieve, not through textbooks, rather, through what's not written in the textbooks.

Go out and explore. It's your university life, it's a time for self-discovery.

If you liked this, feel free to spread it to your friends, as long as it is retained in its original form, and not charged for.

Disclaimer: All three authors listed below were first class honours graduates, who dared to explore adventures outside the classroom.

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Where Do You See Yourself in 20 Years?

By Esther Ling

I was filling out a survey the other day. It was the 'Teach for Malaysia Reflection Survey.' One question caught my eye.

Where do you see yourself in 20 years?

- Being involved in politics/policy making.
- Climbing up the ladder in a corporate organization.
- Conducting research in a specific industry.
- Founding an organization of my own.
- Taking up leadership positions within a community.
- Specializing in a specific field of profession.

When thrown an open question like that, it's easy to be lost in a sea of uncertainty; where do you start? We start day-dreaming vague answers – answers that do just enough to make us feel good about ourselves, despite the fact that we haven't really given our future much thought.

Many of us view life after graduation as a faraway land that "comes when it comes." With Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and all the other forms of social media distraction, planning has become a lost art. We limit our concentration time to a fraction of a minute, a skill much needed in planning. It is much easier to skim mindlessly through the latest happenings of our friends' lives in a news feed, than to sit with a pen and paper to think through of our own life events.

Perhaps, as a start, here are some points we can consider when thinking (planning) about our future.

Translate Dream into Action

A dream is good in that it provides vision and motivation for doing things, but it can remain stagnant if not broken down into bite-sized, directed action. For example, saying “I want to be hired in a reputable company and earn big bucks one day,” may give you reason enough to complete the bare minimum of your course requirements in university, but if not translated to action – like growing your knowledge in your field and being involved in activities for self-development, it probably means you haven’t really given your dream much thought.

Once you know your motivation for your goals, Max Siegel offers his point of view towards this in his book, “Know What Makes Them Tick.” While he is in favor of mapping out your path and goal listing, he writes, “you shouldn’t tie down your future self to the plans written by your clueless past self. You should be able to accommodate smart changes.”

So, plan ahead, know your dreams, but know when to improvise.

Write Down Your Plans

Grab a pen and paper and start writing your plans. This allows you to dig deep, not just scratch on the surface of your ideas. You can question your motives. Challenge yourself. See how much you really want your goal, by writing down the pros and cons.

Sometimes by writing, you start to truly understand why you do certain things – and by having it in writing it may help you to keep moving during times of self-doubt.

Writing is also a helpful method for self-reflection; you can discover how much you've grown by just reading back what you wrote after two weeks or a month.

A Few Last Words

Where do you see yourself in 20 years? It is a question many of us don't pause to think about nowadays.

Look at the earlier list of answers again. They are particularly self-reflecting answers. It is easy to say, "I'll be working at so and so company, having a nice salary, saving up for the next latest gadget." But few pause to think about what they would do to thrive in their area, to be leaders of thought and fine action. To be people who inspire others in their own right. To view their workplace as a place to contribute something noble, not just an obligation to fulfill their paychecks.

Sometimes it means challenging the norm.

- Doing things not just for the sake of doing things.
- Continually reflecting on how things can be done better.
- Occasionally rocking the boat when needed.

And perhaps that's when the "I just work here" mindset, the mindset so prevalent in Malaysia, can be broken. Or, for a student, the "I just study here" mindset.

Three Trains of Thought to help you stand out in College

By Nelson David Bassey

In light of the Four Experiences for College Success; Involvement, Relationships, Creativity and Experiential Learning, here are three trains of thought that you can embrace to leverage on your involvement and creativity in campus which can play a huge part in your success in and outside of college.

Today, getting involved (e.g. participation in club and university events) isn't actually a problem for many students. Many students are getting involved one way or the other. In fact, a study by Bryan Patterson (University of Tennessee) in 2012 revealed that 65% of students in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs) at the University of Florida are being a part of a student organization in college. The numbers can increase at many other colleges. However, the problem is that most of us are getting involved for the wrong reasons, or rather, with a self-limiting mindset. Many students get involved simply because it will look good in their resume. Yes or yes? Now, while you hold this thought, let's talk about creativity.

"Getting involved in college just because it will look good in your resume is a very shallow mindset. Getting involved as a means of accumulating experiences and learning vital lessons that will add value and skills to your life and personal portfolio is way way way more important than getting involved for a sweet spot in your resume."—

Nelson David Bassey

Another prolific writer, Scott Dinsmore, wrote:

"Doing things to build your resume and get experience is kind of like saving up sex for old age (Buffett's favorite way of putting it). Life's too short to build a resume. Do what lights you on fire and your resume will turn to gold. The world will thank you and you'll never look back. By then the resume won't matter anyway. It's time to start building."

On the other hand however, many students have huge problems with unleashing their “creativity” or “building things” in campus. If you read my previous article on the Four Experiences for College Success, I defined creativity “as your ability to identify a problem and create something in an attempt to solve that problem.” I further urged you to “Identify a problem in your campus or community and create something in attempt to solve that problem.” Here’s the deal – it is known that every single person alive conceives at least 8 ideas every year, which could potentially change their lives forever, and the world at large. But sadly, only a handful act upon those ideas. Same applies here, only a handful of students create and unleash their creative ability. Only very few students start revolutionary clubs or programs that will add value to the lives of other people or potentially solve a problem. But the good news is that, you can join in on the team of students who act upon their ideas, and thus leapfrog ahead of the majority and stand out from the crowd. *Sounds good?*

Now, why on earth should you care about your involvement and creativity? Why bother? Perhaps, you should be focusing only on your

studies and doing things the way everybody else does things. Well, that's what the ordinary people do. The ordinary student would not care about their involvement and unleashing their creativity in college, they would say something along the lines of "why am I here, is it not to study?" They would say, "I'll only do this and that when I have graduated from college..." No doubt, that's why they would end up like every other ordinary graduate. But if you say no to doing what the ordinary students do, and want to care. You're welcome to come and join us on our planet, because what we really want is to triple our value and stand out from the ordinary student. Thus, in order for us to do that, we must do things differently. And we must begin to rethink our college involvements and creativity. This is a great place to start from.

Three trains of thought that could change your paradigm about Involvements and Creativity, and help you use them to triple your value and stand out are as follows:

Begin to see your involvements as the foundation to your future successes. Involvements are experiences which provide massive opportunities for self-directed learning and self-discovery. They provide you the first lessons you will need to succeed. They provide you test environment for failures and success. So, in order to benefit from this, begin to think along the lines of "why don't I give this a try, if it goes well, it could be the one thing that can change my life and my future forever." One of my great inspirations and college success consultant, Isa Adney, confirms this thought when she said "even if you try out ten new things and only one works out, it could be the one that changes your life

and your future forever.” It all starts from how you see your involvements. You could decide to see it as another black ink to occupy a spot on your resume, another activity to keep you away from the idlers club, or you can choose to see it as a foundation to something big in your life. Let your involvements go beyond your resume, let it become a part of your success story.

Create stuff, start things, become a pioneer. Your creations could potentially become your first enterprise. That program you started could potentially become your first start-up. Develop ideas and take advantage of the college environment to test your ideas and vision. Don’t be afraid to fail. While still in college, a failed idea may not cause you a huge financial fall, or put your life on a devastating halt. Take advantage of it and be creative. Emulate the six [Latino college students](#) who started “305 Rise”, an initiative to empower young minority leaders in Miami, USA. They attended a leadership program at Harvard, and returned to their college with an idea. Because they acted upon their idea and became pioneers, today their idea has landed them a page on the fox news and many opportunities for success. Why not start developing ideas and creating today? Your initiative could be the next big thing! Seriously.

Cultivate the habit of thinking ____ *(fill in the blank with any number)* **years ahead of you (not just one step ahead).** Expand your vision, expand your purpose, expand your ‘why’ and think outside the moment. Don’t wait until you graduate, but begin to think into the future. When you do, you will begin to see yourself laying a solid

foundation to your future success through your involvements and creations in college. Mark Zuckerberg saw a foundation to something outstanding during the early years of Facebook at Harvard University. He knew that Facebook could go beyond “a Harvard thing” to become a global phenomenon. If he didn’t see it as a foundation to future success, he could easily have downplayed the impulse to expand, to grow, and to get it registered as a company. Just like Facebook, 305 Rise could become the next revolutionary global youth leadership summit, so could be that simple idea that you will choose to act upon in college today. Don’t take it for granted!

With these train of thoughts, I believe you will begin to see your involvements and creativity through a different lens, and thus approach it with a different mindset which can help you stand out.

Why Not Start a Business? Turn Your Skills into a Career

By Lu Wee

You learn a lot in class. You are taught a syllabus and if you manage to satisfy all the requirements of that syllabus, you pass. And if you happen to match the requirements really closely, you get an A. But do exceptional grades in class always translate to skills that make you exceptional after college? Is there anything else you could do as a student to make yourself exceptional?

We live in a world of constant change. Getting a perfect GPA of 4.0 is increasingly common. The world now demands of you to produce something different, something uncommon. While everybody was satisfied with a Nokia, the computer geek college drop-out Steve Jobs wowed them with the iPhone.

It's easy to delay real work until after college. You think you can only start doing real work after you are qualified with a college degree. But that's a lie. You can do something right now. There are many things you could do today that do not depend on a college degree. There are only two things required in a business transaction: a product and somebody who is willing to pay for it.

All I ask is: can you provide that product?

Many successful businesses have grown out of college dormitories. Apple, Facebook and Google were all started by college-aged Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg and Larry Paige.

Zappos.com was an online store which started off with selling shoes and eventually acquired by Amazon.com for a billion dollars (USD). The founder of Zappos.com, Tony Hsieh, started doing business in college selling pizzas.

But you don't have to start Apple, Facebook or Google. What are the skills you have now?

I know friends who enjoy graphic design and started off working as freelance graphic designers as college students. Today, they earn a living off doing work they like.

Do you want to get paid doing something you like?

College is a poor simulation of the reality of life after college. While you are often trained to do something in college, you only become exceptional by being different from others outside of college. And nobody can train you to be exceptional. If there is a manual on being exceptional, it is probably outdated.

Exams and assignments are different compared to real life. In exams and assignments, you are marked on a standard set of criteria. Meet them and you pass. In some ways, real life is also like an exam, except that

you can never know what the criteria are. They change too often. So you can never prepare enough. The only thing you can be prepared to do is to be prepared to respond to change. You can't find this in a book. You can only prepare yourself for it by putting yourself in situations that require you to leave your comfort zone.

What is one thing you like to do that could be turned into a business?

You have read this article and you may think that this was written for somebody else. Somebody with a bit more talent than you or somebody with a higher IQ than you. But no, this was written for you. Yes, you, with your unique talents and skills. Everybody is special in their own way. So are you. Grades do not determine your success. Praise or awards do not determine your worth. You do.

You will be criticized by people who do not understand you, but don't let that stop you from doing something you want to do. Our lives are too short to fit two lives. Steve Jobs, the pioneer of the touch screen phone you now hold in your hands reminded us in his speech to a graduating class of Stanford students, 'Your time is limited. Don't waste your time living someone else's life.'

If what you do satisfies not yourself, but other people, then it is perhaps time to consider a different route.

If you like writing and people tell you that your writing is nonsense, the only thing you should do is keep writing.

If you like inventing new ways of doing things and people tell you that you're wasting time and that you're better off getting a real job, the only thing you should do is keep inventing.

If there is one thing you could do today, why wait for tomorrow?
What do you fear?

Once again, if you liked this, feel free to spread it to your friends, as long as it is retained in its original form, and not charged for.

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