

Graduation evokes nostalgia for college life



Jean Kaul

In a flurry of internship applications, homework and catching up on all the reading due three weeks ago, this semester has flown by. Actually, it has flown so fast that not until Midterm Break did I have enough time for a very important realization to hit me smack dab in the face.

I'm graduating next December. Only 22 weeks of school stand between me and "adulthood." Adulthood in this context means the expectation of living

alone, grafting off my parents no longer and the hope of being gainfully employed. Although the whole adulthood thing has me scared enough, my regret is stronger when I contemplate my post-college life. Did I write every wonderful drop of college living out of the proverbial college sponge? Did I make the most of my Truman experience? After all, your college years are supposed to be the best years of your life.

At times, I can proudly say my time at school has been productive. I've maintained a good GPA, am involved in extracurricular activities, haven't gotten into credit card debt, etc. Sometimes, I'm not so sure. Did I really do all I could do? Although my GPA is good, I wonder: Did I do just enough work to get the A, or did I really passionately engage the subjects I was learning about? The answer: yes and no. If I enjoyed

a subject, then yes, I tried to go above and beyond. Sometimes, I just scraped by. There were times I went to a party instead of doing reading for a class, rationalizing my procrastination by saying, "Oh, I'll do the reading next time."

There's more to all this than being a good kid and not skipping classes. I remember when I was a shiny-faced, idealistic freshman during my very first Truman Week. After learning about all the opportunities for out-of-classroom success, I made a mental checklist of everything I wanted to do while on campus. Do an on-campus internship, participate in the Student Research Conference, work at the Index, be involved in campus politics, take part in campus events, attend the scores of free cultural events offered each year, read the New York Times every day.

With the annual Student Research

Conference fast approaching, I was reminded yet again of my freshman list. My success rate hasn't been very good. Yes, I did do that on-campus internship and obviously I write for the Index. But the other points on the list: I will not be presenting at the Student Research Conference — my two opportunities to do so were spent sleeping in after the revelries of SRC Eve rather than presenting my incredibly eloquent research to an adoring public of fellow students and professors, and this year I was too busy trying to wrangle internships. Also, my New York Times reading quest too often begins with the Thursday Style section (basically, the grown-up version of reading the cartoons first). My main political involvement while on campus? Voting.

If only I had started sooner. Looking back on it all, I do wish I had gotten

an earlier start on everything I wanted to do. Maybe my list would be more complete. Maybe I would be more accomplished. Maybe not. Maybe all the times I spent with my best friends instead of writing research abstracts was time well spent — I might not have the Student Research Conference feather in my cap, but I've had great times with great friends.

I've figured it out. It's all about balance. Making time for fun, work, work that's fun and work that is absolutely necessary (for instance, post-grad job searching). Only 22 more weeks left to further perfect my college formula for success, preferably spent with Asher Roth's "I Love College" playing in the background.

Jean Kaul is a senior English major from Marengo, Ill.

French culture clash offers chance for self-reflection



Megan Klco

I'll be the first to say I'm no expert on French culture. After two months in Aix-en-Provence, sometimes I just don't get these people. I still can't figure out the correct politesse for elevator small talk, and I was flabbergasted when my French host offered me a goopy slice of Camembert to soothe a post-flu stomach.

In a country with such a delicate social etiquette, I've committed faux pas just by looking at someone the wrong way. Smile at a French man in the street and you're sending him an invitation to follow you all the way to wherever you're going. Day-to-day interactions I would scarcely consider in the comfort of my own culture are a set of social booby traps for foreigners.

Before shipping off, I still was under the misguided impression that my limited knowledge of French and a couple of month's readjustment would help me blend in enough to pop escargot with the best of them. Not so. Trying to blend in to French culture is a constant struggle of trial and error that's doomed long before I even open my mouth.

For starters, I am not remotely stylish enough for this country. I put on my best clothes each morning only to be upstaged by eight-year-olds in leather bombers and silk neck scarves. In Aix, a hotspot for wealthy summering Parisians and fashionistas, I might as well accessorize my tie-dye T-shirts with a sandwich board that reads "AMERICAN."

My host once told us a story about throwing students out of her high school classroom for wearing bermuda shorts. When we told her, in turn, about going to class in pajamas and making Wal-Mart runs in our sweats, she was disgusted. Apparently this kind of behavior is reserved for the homeless and the mentally ill.

Try as I might to respect my French comrades with a stronger grooming effort, I still wind up looking like a shlub next to the lanky, high-heeled French women for whom fashion seems to

be second nature. On one of my more unfortunate-looking evenings, a group of French teens actually pointed and snapped a picture of me as I walked by. At this point, I've conceded the impossibility of blending in and aim instead to dress well enough each morning not to be leered at.

On the rare occasion that I succeed at looking French, my expression and volume are usually the next give-aways of my real nationality. The French are notorious for their seemingly cold, proud demeanor — something many Americans misinterpret as rudeness. It's true that French people are more reserved in their interactions than we are. They speak at softer volumes, gesture less emphatically, and their expressions make American facial expressions look cartoonish. But that's not to say they're a hoity-toity bunch.

In truth, the French love to smile just as much as we do, but they like to do it for a reason. Cheeriness isn't wasted on strangers or sales transactions. Smiling to people on the street is reserved for people you actually care about, not just any anonymous pedestrian you accidentally make eye contact with. And there's no such thing in France as a nervous laugh. For someone accustomed to reacting to uncomfortable situations with a polite laugh and a big, stupid grin, this leads to frequent misunderstanding. It took me a while to figure out that one appealing smile would not get me out of an unwelcome conversation in a bar full of persistent French men. It only feeds the fire.

Still, there is the occasional small victory. I've learned to speak more softly in bars and restaurants. I've mastered the social ritual of most business transactions. I even was able to give directions in French to a woman who mistook me for someone who actually knew where I was.

Most importantly, I've learned to tune in to the social cues we take for granted in our own culture. Scrapping your American yardstick and really honing in on day-to-day customs is half the battle. If I keep paying attention, maybe I'll even pick up a better method for shaking French barflies than a pointed, "Laissez-moi seule! (Leave me alone!)"

Megan Klco is a senior painting major from Liberty, Mo.



Tru Rants

Index readers get to sound off about what's on their mind. Keep it under 40 words and no personal attacks or profanity, please!

Got a rant? E-mail us at trurants@gmail.com

"It seems like the weather turns nice only when professors have given you enough homework to keep you in the library for the next five years."

"I hate that we live on such a small campus. Sometimes it seems that you run into everyone you don't want to see."

"The football field turf project was such a failure, I feel like someone should be held accountable."

Grad school is no sure thing



Jackie Gonzalez

Grad schools just aren't that into me.

After months of waiting and the constant anxiety about where I will be in the next year, it is silly and slightly disappointing, to realize I just might end up where I started this whole process: in Kirksville.

For the past few weeks, I have been trying to avoid the fact that I might not be entering a graduate program in the immediate future. With just one school left to hear from, I have been taken aback by how dramatic and exhaustive the whole graduate process has been.

In my naïveté, as a potential graduate student I saw myself as "safe" from the problems stemming from the current state of the economy. I didn't think it had the capability to drastically harm my future in such a substantial way. Big mistake. Not only are more people applying to graduate

programs to avoid the current job market and get a higher degree, but graduate departments themselves are cutting back enrollment. As a result, there are more applicants for fewer spots.

The best way to describe this stress and turmoil is to look at this experience as if it were a serious romantic relationship. I will play myself, and the graduate programs of interest are my potential suitors. In my graduate school attempts, one might call me a modern-day player, the type who leads every suitor to believe that they are my one and only, in hopes that they will reciprocate and make an offer that I can't refuse. I have committed

more than a year to several suitors and was genuinely fond of many. When I finally made my carefully chosen moves and experienced the countless moments of dire anticipation, in the end all I essentially got was that cliché and utterly heartbreaking phrase: "It's not you, it's me."

Was it something I said? Was I just not passionate enough? What did I do wrong?

After months of dedication and interest, all my work ended in a

single sentence that unfortunately was repeated for a number of times that I refuse to admit. For most programs I have heard from, my rejections came down to fit. I just wasn't the best match. And as I stared blankly at the screen in search of something to say, I reluctantly acknowledged the fact that there's nothing I can do to change their mind. They're just not that into me.

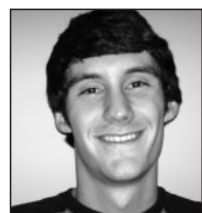
This might sound cocky, but I never saw this coming. I knew graduate admissions were nothing like the undergraduate process, but I never considered the possibility of taking a year off. This "forced vacation" now seems practically inevitable. Since the majority of my desired programs admit fewer than fifteen individuals, I can't fathom the number of other people who are being forced to think about alternatives. From me to you: I feel your pain.

After sharing my story with a professor last weekend, she reminded me of the simplest yet most useful piece of advice to get through this process: "You only need one." She's absolutely right. One graduate program and I'll be on my way. My fingers are crossed.

Jackie Gonzalez is a senior communication major from San Diego, Calif.

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Students need meal options



Tyler Retherford

As I grudgingly planned out a tentative budget for living off-campus next year, I was excited to hear the off-campus meal plan was getting an overhaul.

I know buying my own groceries undoubtedly will be cheaper, but packing a lunch five days a week, and consequently trying to find a variety of lunches that don't need to be refrigerated, is a little daunting to a novice cook like myself. A limited off-campus meal plan really would make this concern a non-issue.

However, when I heard the details of the revised meal plan, frankly I was a little underwhelmed. Giving off-campus

students the same options as those on campus is great, and working to reduce the price, especially given the state of the economy, is a welcome change as well, but certainly it isn't the kind of flexibility I, and I suspect many other off-campus students, actually want to pay for.

In my case — and in the case of many off-campus students — any meal plan I'd be buying would be purely supplemental to my regular groceries. I would be eating on-campus when convenient. If

I were planning to eat on campus several times a day, I suppose I would be a little more excited about the changes, but as someone trying to plan out the most cost-effective and schedule-compatible food budget I can manage, these changes don't mean a whole lot to me.

I certainly don't mean to imply that the work done by those in Student Senate, Sodexo and other groups that helped make this change was a waste of time. A good number of students currently

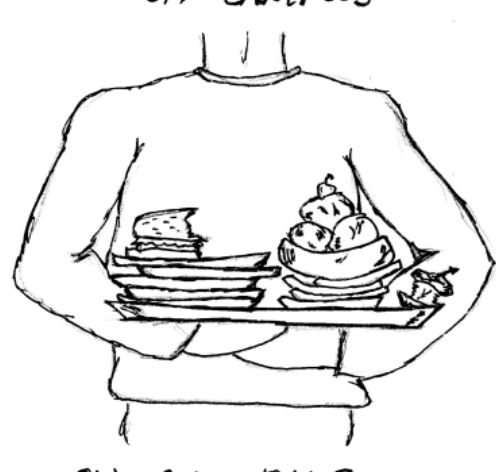
buy a meal plan, and the changes should help them a great deal. I would just like to see more changes in the future to make the University's dining services a little more appealing and useful to a greater number of off-campus students.

The current system of Bonus Bucks works for those in the same circumstances as myself, but a plan with limited meals would make me a little more likely to shift some cash from my grocery funds allotment toward Sodexo. Most of my on-campus meals probably are going to be used while meeting on-campus friends for lunch in a dining hall, which would burn through Bonus Bucks a little too quickly to make it a viable, cost-effective option. Until there's a plan with some real flexibility, it looks like I'll be breaking out the old cartoon lunch box from grade school, although instead of Mom, this time I'll be the one cutting the crusts off of my peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

Tyler Retherford is a sophomore anthropology major from Springfield, Mo.



OFF CAMPUS



ON CAMPUS

Alex Boies/Index

The University's dining services could be more appealing and useful.