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[GUEST COLUMNS](#)

Alumni column: Don't spurn the joy of now for future career worries



Melanie Gulbas, '20, is a BU alumna and was a Pipe Dream staff writer from 2017 to 2020.

The pressure to make the right professional decisions shouldn't outweigh personal happiness and passions

By [GUEST AUTHOR](#) - MARCH 25, 2021

“What do you want to be when you're older?” That's always the question asked when we're kids on the playground, then teenagers in high school halls and finally young adults in lectures — but why do we stop there? Our career paths shouldn't be decided when we're 20 years old, and especially not when we're barely surviving through a pandemic. Why is it the norm to figure out our lives' trajectory when most of us don't even know how to pay taxes yet?

It's been about a year since I graduated, and it would be a lie if I said it's been easier — college was a breeze, for me, at least. It was easy in the sense that I knew what came next. I had my routine: study, complete weekly coursework, take an exam, write a paper and repeat. It was simple. I was good at it. I graduated as a double-major without ever getting below an A-. Again, I was good at college. I was good at planning what needed to be studied, what needed to be written and what needed to be handed in. I wasn't good at putting myself first.

I tried so hard to maintain that familiar perfection, and I did, but why? I hadn't even applied to graduate school like I assumed I would. I missed parties and nights outs, I missed time with my friends, I missed time with myself. It was going to all be worth it spring semester my senior year — at least that's what I thought before COVID-19 struck. It was going to finally be my time to celebrate my success and, spoiler alert, I didn't get it and neither did anyone in my graduating class. I'm not disheartened by this anymore, but if I could prevent another student from wasting a night to perfect a paper instead of making a memory, then I hope I'm the example.

I can't fully discredit all my work because the extra classes and academics did help me develop my passions, wherever they may lie. The truth is, I was comfortable with the workload and actually preferred to be busy and studious, but here I am, a year later, without a singular career path. It's taken time, but I'm okay with that, because I've never been the type to pinpoint exactly what I want to do for the rest of my life. We shouldn't have to decide if we want to be a writer, teacher or a doctor when it's clear we don't even know who we are yet. I thought I knew what I wanted to do as an “adult.” Now, 23 years old, and I have about five different paths I want to take — why can't I take them all? College can be so restricting, and I'm thankful I had the privilege to be able to take internships and extra courses to narrow down my passions, but some aren't as lucky. That's why we should halt the pressures of answering these questions of the future at a time when we, truthfully, don't have answers.

All I know is I want to be a writer. That's about the only consistency I've had in my “What do you want to do when you're older” question, but there's so much more than that. Do I want to be a television script writer, novel writer, screenwriter, journalist, etc.? Am I supposed to know? I don't think so. I want to try it all — maybe not all today, or tomorrow, or before I'm 30, maybe not before I'm 40, but eventually. It's okay to change your mind, major, dream job, career and it's okay to not know what you want your plan to be. We should be able to change our path as many times as we want because life isn't linear, so neither should the versions of ourselves be.

I was recently told that I'm not lost, I'm just unsure where my passions connect. Then, I was told to write everything I enjoy about life, what I like to do and then the reasons why I like them. I wrote 10 pages single-spaced. If that's not an indicator that I'm indecisive, then I don't know what is. I took some time and connected them. I came to the realization that most of them were tied to wanting to give others a chance to escape reality and life stressors the same way I was able to. I don't know what I want to do, but I know I want to be creative, write and be able to give others a safe place to escape their responsibilities. As a kid, I would read for hours, braving the winters to sit outside just so I could be alone with a new world. Then, I would write anything I wanted, and fiction was my go-to. It's been a while since I wrote that way, but I replaced that with television shows that I can binge for hours and get lost in someone else's adventures. I was

lucky to have my escapes when I needed them, and even now as an “adult,” and that’s what I want to give to someone else, however that may be.

To BU students, and all students, you aren’t trapped in one path or profession. If you want to put all sense of the future aside for a night or two, then do it and focus on right now. Put yourself in the present instead of five years from now. So, if you’re struggling and feeling the pressure of picking a major, an internship, a job — anything at all — just know, none of it really matters to anyone besides yourself. If it makes you happy to take an internship completely outside your major or a job that has nothing to do with your original career path, then do it. Make your path as you go, instead of planning every step of the way.

The only person you’ve got to make proud of in your life is truly yourself, because in the end, you’re all you’ve got.

It’s okay to break the norm and not know for once in our lives. In a pandemic with so much uncertainty, why are we still being programmed to “know?” The question we should’ve been asking all along should never have been, “What do you want to be?” but rather, “Who do you want to be?”

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