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The Case Against Short Cuts

By Scott Klausner



Three years ago I set foot on the Santa Clara University campus for the first time as a Bronco. I began my college career with a wide-eyed optimism. Everything seemed new and exciting; every class was interesting and challenging. College was shaping up to be everything I expected and more. I loved it.

But with time the charm of college began to fade. I quickly came to realize that, despite my best efforts, I was not

going to learn anything by hanging out with my friends and eating top ramen at 1:00 a.m. An education, it turns out, is something that has to be vigorously pursued, something that takes a lot of time and energy. I wasn't exactly sure I was ready for that.

To make matters worse, I thought I had found what I wanted to do with my life. In the vast majority of circumstances, I suppose, the realization of a vocation is a good thing. My freshman year of college was not one of those circumstances. In fact, deciding that I wanted to go to law school was perhaps one of the worst things that could have happened.

On the path of education, there is nothing worse than when someone with floundering motivation finds a shortcut. For me, the decision to go to law school was that shortcut. With a goal in mind, I began to tailor my education towards meeting it. I decided that all I needed to focus on were the classes that were necessary in order to get into law school. All I needed to remember was what I had to remember in order to excel in those classes. I deemed everything outside this realm of information irrelevant and therefore unworthy of my attention. Suddenly, I was not sitting in a classroom to learn, I was sitting in a classroom to make the grade so I could meet my goal.

But I soon became aware of how seriously detrimental such a mentality could be. Pursuing an education with a particular agenda in mind left me resistant to learning anything that I deemed unnecessary to meet my goal of getting into a good law school. I would get my grades back and forget just as easily everything that I had learned the week before. Meanwhile, people all around me were having fascinating discussions centering on material they learned in class. And there I was, having forgotten the bulk of what I had learned during the previous quarter. With time, I slowly

ly began to see that what I was learning was not only valuable insofar as it served a function, but rather was valuable in its own right.

This realization helped me to see how misadjusted my priorities had become. I chose Santa Clara in the first place because I found the Jesuit ideals to be important. I liked the emphasis on a complete education, the focus on the whole person. Yet, at the onset of my college career, I had already begun to lose focus of why I was there.

The embarrassment I felt after this realization motivated me to make a concerted effort to pursue an education without an agenda, to pursue an education that is not merely functional. This effort has helped to usher in the return of the wide-eyed optimism that accompanied my first few weeks at Santa Clara.

By allowing myself to enjoy my education rather than merely use it, I have learned more than ever would have been possible otherwise. Had I continued to conceive of school as a means to an end, learning only that which I deemed necessary to succeed, I would have shut myself off to so much knowledge. Perhaps the most valuable things I have learned are entirely tangential to the class I learned them in. Whether it be something as trivial as learning how to predict a storm in a literature class or something as significant as redefining my conception of faith in a philosophy class, my life has been indelibly affected by the education I have received. I consider myself lucky that I realized my mistake and opened myself up to receiving the education that I was meant to have. ■

Scott Klausner majored in English at Santa Clara University.