
THE COLLEGE | LOOKING
ESSAY | FORWARD
LOOKING
BACK ←

IF YOU COULD APPLY TO UVM AGAIN
WHAT *you* WOULD WRITE

WE ASKED SIX BRAVE ALUMNI TO TAKE ON THE MIND-BENDING
TASK OF WRITING A POST-COLLEGE COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY

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Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.

The events in my life I have learned the most from are the times when I have royally screwed up. Mired in the colossal misery of these blunders lay hidden precious nuggets of wisdom; not to say that I treasure every mistake—there are boys I wish I had not kissed, jobs that leached my energy away with the sucking power of a Dyson super vacuum, and an early affinity for stirrup pants I may never get over.

Triumphs are wonderful, there's no doubt about it, but life's important lessons are not earned from winning and succeeding. The failures, the missteps, the tragically bad choices—those are life's advanced level classes. This is the kind of advice wise aunties lever at you “never make the same mistake twice” or “do not have sex standing up in a hammock—there are consequences” (that second one may be unique to my auntie). But what those sage darlings often forget to mention is that you're doomed to repeat mistakes if you fail to take the time to learn from them.

The rub about massive missteps is that you are unable to appreciate them while you're still shackled in the vortex of hot garbage you've created. It is only after, sometimes long after, the living nightmare of your mistake is over than you can glean any benefit from the unfortunate incident. If you make the effort to examine yourself objectively you'll come to understand why you did what you did and know not to do it again.

I'm not saying anyone should court trouble, the very nature of trouble and chaos means they'll find you just fine without any help. I do, however, support a hearty disdain for caution. Not the kind of prudence that makes you look both ways before you cross the street or that flare of instinct that tells you meth is a bad idea—that kind of advice you should heed. But I do encourage everyone to err, not on the side of caution, but err in general.

Trust me, you will disappoint people, you will have your heart broken so badly you think it will be the end of you, you will wish a million times over that you could take it back, you will fall flat on your face. But you will survive these catastrophes, you will make it up to the people who love you, you'll not fall prey to false charms and empty affection, you'll come to understand that nothing goes backwards and forwards is the best anyone can do, and you will learn to pick yourself up and keep going.

If you play it safe you may manage to avoid mistakes altogether. You'd be a paragon of human virtue untainted by the ill effects of poor decision making. I have actually met some of these people and they are impressive—successful and well groomed with pristine pedigrees. They are also, almost without exception, total bores and obnoxious to the point of causing diarrhea, not literally but as an excuse to get away from them. Join me and my fellow flawed scoundrels—we will drink too much, tell tall tales of our misadventures, and have a hell of a time.

<http://alumni.uvm.edu/vq/spring2011/essay.asp>