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Perspectives

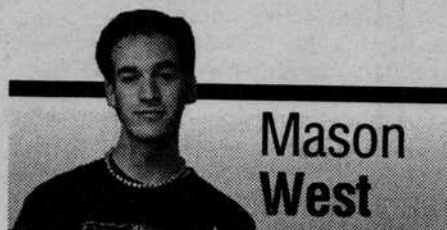
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second thoughts

A rapid change in environment and the changes forced on students can make the experience of being in college more overwhelming than appealing.



Katie Nesse Emerald



Mason West

College is supposed to be one of the most exciting times in a young person's life. I know that I'm having a blast. I love being on my own and all the responsibility that comes with it. I love being in a new place and meeting new people. But not everyone adapts so well.

A fair amount of students drop out of the University every year. In the most recent statistics compiled by the Registrar's Office from 1997, 19 percent of the 1997 freshman class dropped out after their first year. That was a total of 425 students. Looking at data from previous years, the percentage of students who drop increased every year. Why?

Losing a fifth of your class would seem like a noticeable event. But I would have never thought of this were it not for my roommate, James. James is thinking about leaving the University at the end of the term. Now, I wouldn't mind having a room to myself, but when I first heard that James

wasn't enjoying his college experience at the University, I was surprised. Mainly, I couldn't understand why he wasn't having fun because, like I said, I love it here. I also felt sad for him because college is the first time you get a real choice about where you are and what you are doing in your life. This is one of those big life decisions that you should feel good about.

So James and I had a chat about how he was feeling. But before I get into the discussion, you need to have a little background on James. James likes tractors, John Deere tractors to be specific. I know it sounds odd, but that is what the man loves. You know the part of "Forrest Gump" when he just mows the lawn at the local college for fun? That would be James.

I am by no means saying that James represents the average college student. What I am hoping is that other people who aren't happy here are dealing with some of the same issues.

Unfortunately for James, the last time I checked the University has no classes on mowing lawns or the history of John Deere. "There aren't any classes here that I want to take," James said. "[There's] not anything that I'm interested in."

James, like others I assume, is having trouble adapting to his newfound independence. Why are some people better than

others at this? Did your high school prepare you? Did your parents prepare you? Is it just innate ability?

I mean, coming to college is a big step. I know what you're thinking: "Hello Captain Obvious," but it's still true. As long as high schools have mandatory attendance and closed campuses there is no way they can adequately prepare anybody to deal with the freedoms of college.

Another big difference from high school is the teachers. "The teachers aren't as flexible as in high school," James said. I'm not going to say yea or nea to that, but some advice my mom gave to me comes to mind. She said that school is what you make of it. (Actually, I think that advice is written on page one of the parent handbook ... but, I digress.) What I will say is that having a teacher who may be better suited to working as a drill sergeant doesn't make school any easier.

Here's one for you: I spend less time in class at college than at high school, but my brain is thinking about school more. That's not right. As soon as I step out of class I want nothing to be on my mind but the next meal of the day and what video games I'm going to play that night. Of course, it isn't that way for James, me or anybody else.

"The pressure to do work is so great that I don't feel free to go have fun," James said.

"But I get so stressed out about the work that I have to do that I don't get it done."

Does this sound like something you would say?

Aside from the educational side of college, the social change is just a drastic. Many people go from being "Steve Fantastic" to just another face in the crowd. The anonymity of college makes meeting others terribly difficult for shy people.

"I find the social scene here difficult," James said. "I don't want to be part of the frat scene, and most of the campus-sponsored activities aren't something I want to do."

James expressed the desire for a campus-sponsored party. No theme. No scheduled activities. Just TV, music, food and people. Who knows, it could work.

The University and Eugene won't work for everyone. If you are having second thoughts about being here then take some time and re-evaluate your choices. Just don't do anything hasty. But, for James, there is one sign that maybe he shouldn't be here.

"The hippies scare me."

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