Scary Untold Stories: College and Beyond

Joyce Vitales

Abstract

“What are you going to do after college?” — a question I'm all too familiar with as an English major that has the ability to cause damaging effects to the minds of stressed college students. Many students experience school hand-in-hand with work, sometimes the only relationship they'll ever know, but many of them, I'm sure, are anxiety-stricken when they think about how their undergraduate degree and work experiences will lead them to a satisfying future of certainty. I have similar concerns about how my academic career will summon opportunities that fit my interests, but this project has helped me in understanding that my future career will definitely be encouraged by my academic background. My intent is to provide real-life experiences in the college setting from an indecisive student who endures work and school simultaneously, always with the thought in mind, “How will these experiences help me in the future?”
I’ve recently been fascinated by the work that academic scholars have published because they managed to fuse the two most influential things in my life today: work and school. Having one without the other has not been a condition I have experienced since I was in high school. My academic career is imperative to me because the critical analysis techniques and social issues I learn about in my courses give me fire through the veins of my fingers, urging me to write, to type, to educate. Professors who’ve been able to address the topics they’re passionate about have impressed me to no end—these knowledgeable men and women have accomplished the transition of being a student and making a career out of their academic experiences. This synthesis of personas when one publishes his/her work—that is where I would like to explore in my fifth year as an undergrad. Will I be able to continue my academic identity in a potential career?

My growth as a socially aware student has transformed the issues that I have taken interest in over the years. Writing had always been an ongoing passion before I realized I could make a career out of it, but I have never finished a novel I started because the ideas were too thick, too disorganized, too dreamy. I didn’t have the skills to hone my writing until choosing to pursue my Bachelor’s degree in English. Using the knowledge I obtained from being a student has made me realize that I never want to stop learning after I’ve chosen a career. The endless essays and papers that I endure, although cumbersome and stressful, have also opened up another possibility for me: an educator. The inequalities that I’ve been exposed to cannot end with me; they need to be spread out to other minds—but how do I harmonize these aspects, these separate parts of me, and turn them into a lifelong undertaking?

‘It’s a Party in the U.S.A.’

America! America! God shed his grace on thee! And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea!

— Samuel A. Ward

America: the land of the free. That is, of course, unless you are a single mother with dark skin and three children. The struggle of being “free” in America is reflected in
my mother’s eyes, in every glint that shines whenever I look at her. Wise but weary is what I see whenever I look into them, like the future of my eyes is held in hers, but it’s hazy, still unclear to me. She traveled far, mostly on her own, and moved to this beautiful state in hopes that the cliché of America would prove itself to be true and that her success would be evidenced in her children’s futures. Not to say that my mother has to rely on her children to achieve this success; once aged 19, she moved to Japan and did mysterious jobs I can’t understand when she tries to explain them to me, partly because she’s always changing her story and being vague about it. She lived there for years and became a fashion icon throughout her youth, from what I could tell by her many photo albums with her in beautiful outfits and smiling wide for the camera. After getting pregnant with my sister at age 27, she moved back home to the Philippines to raise her family. Life there wasn’t enough, she knew, so she sacrificed everything she learned, left her homeland, and migrated out of her comfort so that she and her children could discover a future that wasn’t rooted completely in poverty.

This future she imagined for us is happening every second I breathe. Every night I plank myself on top of my bed is another night in which I am supposed to ooze success, to prove to my mother that the move to the Big Island from Manila was worth every trouble, every struggle, every bump on the road. That’s completely not too much pressure for a 22-year-old to handle. What I knew of success was the work I put in during school, the only place I could truly experience what success might be like. School is also the first place where you truly accomplish something growing up that isn’t required of you. Just like any negative Asian stereotype, my mother expected a lot from my siblings and me, so really, greatness silently and eventually became a requirement for us in the long run. When I showed her report cards and transcripts with B’s and A’s, she jokingly asked why they weren’t all A+s instead. Little did she know from the badass I-don’t-care-about-school exterior that I always displayed, every B and below (though there were so few) ruined me a little bit inside, not so much physically, but it did something to shape my mind around what I expected from myself in education. As I got older, college gave me more work that was harder to accomplish, especially by stricter deadlines, and the Bs were starting to become a familiar frenemy. Now in my last year...
of my undergraduate career, success is something I’ve started to question myself about—what does success mean to me?

The years have made my mother more relaxed as her children transitioned into adulthood smoothly; this time she would tell us that as long as we were happy and content and financially stable, then we were successful. It wasn’t the multi-millionaire vision I had in mind when I was younger, equaling the amount of money to level of success (still do kinda), but even if her expectations of us have lost their severity, she still worries for us. My sister makes the most money out of the three of us as a Licensed Practical Nurse, but suffers every night with extreme stress and exhaustion, especially since she’s back in school studying to get into the Nursing Program and become a Registered Nurse. My brother has the most potential out of the three of us with two degrees in Math and Computer Science, but with so little motivation and aspirations that he might as well not have gone to school in the first place. And then there’s me, the black sheep of the family who moved to O’ahu to attend the University of Hawai’i (UH) at Mānoa because their English department had more promising courses than UH Hilo. Every now and then when I come home for break, my mother brings up an excruciating subject that I hate talking about. It was embarrassing for me to speak to her about it because it always made me feel like a failure no matter my successes. The question that haunts, I’m assuming, all English majors is: What are you going to do with your English degree?

Oh, the possibilities! Dr. Seuss knew that everybody had potential—it’s comforting to have someone you don’t even know support you through your goals, no matter where they lead you. My mother asks this question periodically because she doesn’t understand what English majors do. She doesn’t know how it will help me financially, help me support myself, and try as I might to make her see that it is where my passion resides, I cannot make her see the benefit if her definition of success is being self-sufficient and independent. Truthfully, practical avenues I could direct myself towards aren’t the best when it comes to wages. Once I get my undergraduate degree in English, I could move into many different fields, like law, business, teaching, etc., so at least I know there are directions I could still go. The thing is, do I want that? Do I want
even more schooling in order to satisfy requirements for certain careers? What do I want? Where can my field(s) of interest take me in the future? Am I preparing myself for what might come next? That’s where my three jobs come in.

‘The More Money We Come Across, the More Problems We See’

*Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.*

— Confucius

I’m trying, Confucius, but you don’t know how it is being dependent on financial aid, living in the dorms, having to eat every day, being expected to socialize and spend money, trading an arm and a leg for books, your heart and your soul and your first-born child for computers and WiFi and printers, and having to pay for your entire life in the thousands. You try this, Confucius—you’ll see why the #brokecollegestudent is a culture of its own. Not to mention the stress-shopping that I do every semester in order to feel *alive.* I knew about this typical American struggle growing up, knowing my mother struggled with money and supporting us, so I had to act fast if I wanted my life to have less debilitating consequences when I got older. So I got a job at age 15. Aren’t there child labor laws against that? Why wasn’t anyone stopping me? Well, according to the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, “a child labor certificate or ‘work permit’ is required for working minors until they reach 18 years of age,” and they provide forms for 14- and 15-year old minors (“Child Labor”). Apparently, it was all legal when I started working during my junior year of high school, so school and work have always been a conglomerate of responsibilities for me for as long as I can remember.
Working at J.D. Keary Observatory was the best first-job experience anyone could ask for. At 15, I was allowed my own desk, computer, and a cubicle wall separating me from my boss. I was hired in the Shipping & Receiving department at Headquarters (so formal-sounding!), which meant our office was basically a large garage to store all the official gadgets that the scientists in the main buildings ordered. I learned what it meant to carry the weight of responsibility, since I had a large role throughout Keary. It was also the first time, I remember fondly, that I was introduced to the necessity of X-Acto knives. I was thrilled at how much faith my supervisor put in me to be handling sharp objects such as that. It was my favorite part of the day when I would get packages, slipping the sharp metal edge against the plastic that held the packing slips. This job was so enjoyable; even if I dreaded coming in, I would always find ways to entertain myself. It was there that I realized I truly enjoyed the office job—using computers (I only ever used them at school at the time, but rarely), having sticky notes at the ready, a bunch of highlighters, pens in different colors, white-outs in the
drawer—it made me giddy to have a sense of success by having my own area to work in, somewhere I could design to my own aesthetic. A little piece of myself was reflected in my workspace, and I was proud of it. According to a 99U article about “The Perfect Workspace (According to Science),” even the simple act of decorating and designing one’s own work area has resulted in improving the worker’s productivity, with happier results and increased commitment (Jarrett). I could feel myself excited as I sat on my chair, the stamps and folders in the exact place I left them the day before—it was a place I could control even as an expendable student assistant. The adults I worked with were friendly and polite, even though some of the higher-ups with fancy accents and salt and pepper hair were intimidating; no one ever made me feel like this job wasn’t good overall.

My first checking account had $182.09, my first paycheck in my entire life, the stub still kept in the drawer of my mum’s apartment. Every check I had ever gotten from my first job at J.D. Keary Observatory in Kamuela was put into my savings account aside from the two or three checks I cashed for self-entertaining purposes in high school. The highest amount of money I had in that account was $8,985.01, all from working 9 months as a student assistant for $9.25. That amount could pay my entire way through both Hawai‘i Community College and UH Hilo with resident tuition. My pay wages were a lot back in 2009, especially compared to the “living” minimum wage in Hawai‘i as of 2014, which is $7.25. Since then, I’ve gotten a checking account that started with $4,000 from my savings, and almost every check has been put into my checking account, and on occasion, towards my savings.

I’ve always tried to be good about money growing up, never using it for my own trivial gains like iPods or fancy clothes or the new “thing” that everyone around me had. I can’t afford that, I had told myself. I hadn’t even realized that buying gifts for friends and family for Christmas was a “thing” since I always had the idea that I was too broke for it. Eating out was never an idea that randomly popped in my head, something I had barely done when I was in high school, nor during my first years of college. It amazed me when friends asked me out to lunch in town, the idea being so new to me, so unimaginable to me—spending money when you didn’t need to! What a crazy, capitalist
concept. My view of the craziness of frivolous money-spending was due to how I was raised and where I was born. The ghettos of the Philippines aren’t memories I have a multitude of, but there are pictures to prove the amount of privilege we did not have. The picture of my sister showering with a bucket of cold water above her body outside a house always pops into my head, even though she looked content, not knowing the luxuries that kids experience elsewhere. The fact that I still unplug cords that I don’t use is proof enough of the tight budgets we allowed ourselves growing up. So it was no surprise that the $8,000 in my bank accounts were untouchable and meant for the future and whatever it had in store for me. It wasn’t until my senior year of high school did I have to buy a desktop because I needed to actually print out a shitload of papers. After graduating, I couldn’t work at Keary because I was no longer a student, so I applied to many other jobs after entering Hawaii Community College. It was harder than I thought—not even McDonald’s wanted me! Ugh! I was so offended, but grateful later on that it didn’t happen, or else the job I did get wouldn’t have been an option.

My sister worked at a Urology office up the hill from our Hilo home and she was able to get me a job as a “filer,” the money being under the table. In that one month of working, I made $600, but it wasn’t an easy thing. The days that I didn’t have classes, I would go to work from 8 in the morning until 4 or 5 in the afternoon. Around 6, I would crash each night for at least an hour and a half, but thank goodness the homework at Hawaii Community College wasn’t at the level of hard that I’m dealing with now. It took a toll on me, surely, having to keep alert all day so as not to give my sister a bad name around her workplace, and having a 30-minute lunch break to eat what little leftovers we had left. The anxiety I developed during that job became a normal thing. I felt like an adult and it was a creepy thing to feel at the tender age of 18. I even had to wear “office clothing” to look more professional around co-workers and doctors and patients, something I never had to deal with at Keary. Very adult of me. Juggling both school and work gave me a sense of responsibility that I secretly enjoyed.

‘Baby You Light Up My World Like Nobody Else’

_Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much._
Mo'okini Crew: the best group of student library workers I ever had the privilege to work beside at Evan B. Mo'okini in Hilo. I wasn’t always close with these guys, but certain circumstances led me to having crazy hours in my spring semester of 2013. Long story short, my first break-up occurred while I was in my second year at college and I couldn’t allow myself long periods of time to be alone with my thoughts. So what did I do in addition to my five classes at UH Hilo (which included three writing intensive courses)? I added 15 hours of work in addition to each class, leaving no room for study breaks, food breaks, or any breaks in general. Yay! For the most part, it worked with what it was meant to do, which was to keep me busy as heck. Getting used to the fast-paced switch of my responsibilities as a student and a student worker left me crumbling. I had lost a few pounds, not only because the toll from the break-up was figuratively weighing me down and shrinking my appetite, but also because I only ate apples or small zip-locked snacks during the day, which physically shrank my stomach. Along with having a combination of work and school tasks, I needed to keep up with my health, which, as many college students understand, isn’t an easy feat. I skipped meals because I didn’t have time to prepare them—the coffee from the vendor next to the library was my savior.

A warm memory comes up from during that spring when I made a friend in class. He was in front of me in line to the vendor, an older man in my poetry class (he later dropped out the day after I accepted his friend request on Facebook) who exuded an easygoing and chill attitude. We complained about the difficulties in class, his voice hushed in case our professor was wandering near us.

“What kind of coffee do you like?”

“White chocolate mocha, usually.”

He stepped up to the barista and ordered his breakfast, then handed me a steamy cup.

“Oh, what?” I asked, confused. “Oh, you didn’t have to!”

He shook his head as he started walking away towards his class, not giving me a chance to at least pay him back. “No, don’t worry about it.”
My hands felt the heat from the cup he gave me and it spread all over my body. It was the first time someone had ever bought coffee for me, believe it or not. Coffee had never been a necessity until that semester (mainly because I didn’t want to stunt my growth—Ha! I was late to my own party). My eyes were bright and soft the entire day, enjoying the coffee that a fleeting friend decided to gift me with during a rough semester. Aside from that one kind gesture, my healthy habits went down the drain. I ate only one fulfilling meal a day (which still holds true as of now) and I started slacking in my studies because time was limited. On Thursdays, I worked late nights until 10 p.m., and during finals week, the library was open later, so I didn’t get home until after midnight. One night, I went to sleep at 1 a.m. during finals and I had an alarm at either 2 or 3 a.m. just so I could finish my last page in an essay before class the next day. Work life and school life were definitely large parts of my adulthood that had intertwined so much that I wouldn’t have known what to do if I hadn’t had both simultaneously. But that didn’t mean a break from it all wasn’t appreciated.

Because of this constant working at the Evan B. Mo‘okini with the spare time I had after getting out of a pointless relationship, I was able to make long-lasting friendships that I couldn’t experience so much at my previous two jobs because I worked, for the most part, alone. The friendships I made while working with the Mo‘okini Crew (a label I helped coin because I have a knack of naming things, people, groups, and concepts) have definitely inspired me and have given me insight that what’s in between the work and the classes is what people should be experiencing. School and work are just necessities in my life, as I’ve grown up knowing nothing but having the need to go to school and to support myself financially, but the conversations and the laughs and the shit-talking are irreplaceable moments that need to be cherished.

It was during my Spring 2013 semester that I found a new side of me, someone I had lost and left behind when I was in a relationship. I realized my need for social interaction was stronger than I had imagined, and once I got to know the Mo‘okini Crew, I realized that work wasn’t the only place we could spend boring time together. I became the official planner for the crew and I managed to get almost everyone out to dinner, something that had been attempted before by former workers, but none had ever
succeeded like I did. (Cue the sparkles around my smug face.) It was I who made the occasion happen, and it fulfilled me like a hot cup of coffee on a cold and rainy Hilo day. My duties as the crew planner became a nice side-project for me among all the chaos that my work and school hours brutally threw at me. I came to be very liked by my co-workers, and some of us have developed very intimate relationships, something I had been craving since I lost touch with many friends when I was with my ex. Because of this crew, I realized that romantic relationships were pointless at our age; having the most platonic fun with friends within a few months was much more worth it than a two-year long relationship. Of course, others would disagree, but I was a new woman with new ideologies about my own life. My focus was finally directed at myself and I was better off that way.

The friendships I helped enhance with my event-planning encouraged other co-workers to plan some of their own, which I always supported. Work became more and more bearable at the library because it was the crew who would be working with me. Albeit the closer we all got, the more frustrated the supervisors became at us because we would always be laughing and conversing during work hours, which they liked to get on our ass for, but it only fueled our conversation when we were in another setting together. The idea that our supervisors had that they were doing much more important work than us was laughable! None of them did any work; I caught them all on jewelry sites, on their phones, on MySpace, you name it. The high horses they rode on during work remind me of 360-degree performance appraisals, the situation resembling how managerial positions claim a superior role to the workers they supervise. If only I could “grade” the quality at which my supervisors actually do their job to encourage their workers and inspire a sense of community—I have a crazy desire in filling out surveys to comment on my experiences, like at a restaurant, or using a new tool—anywhere I could get my word across to better the places I go or the things I use. It would be helpful for the larger institution if people did the jobs they were paid to do.

The crew and I would verbally dismantle the social constructions in our workplace when we got together. I remember the many nights we would meet up at the Wailoa Duck Ponds to drink and goof off—I was still underaged and having cops occasionally
drive around the parking lots was terrifying, but the events were always thrilling. One night, we had most of our crew gather around the bench we would always claim after having watched a movie and had a singing competition with one another (no alcohol involved, surprisingly). Max was actually there, his famous blue sweater, loose on his slim body, bright in the dim light of the sky, Mumu’s sweet voice travelling through the windy air and swimming through everyone’s ears, Alen’s booming laughter and sharp comments—a bunch of characters coming together by their terrible jobs with so little in common until nights like this allowed them to discover each other as friends and realize how similar they all were. We were more than a bunch of whack kids possibly causing mischief and scheming ideas that would trouble our supervisors; we were humans thirsting for conversation and understanding, seeking and receiving warmth from each other.

I never would have thought that I would enjoy being around other people this much, but that was because I never really looked at work as a place where people joined each other’s company without being forced to cooperate. In my naïve eyes, work friends couldn’t be true friends because it was all set up; they wouldn’t have become friends unless they were obligated by someone with a higher status. But then again, isn’t that how most relationships start off? Social interactions in the workplace were more than just fruitless interactions. Friendships, as I’ve learned, aren’t immune to the setting of a workplace, and work sites can become the strongest locations to develop relationships. Especially during college when young adults are experimenting with social groups, the workplace is a healthy environment to establish connections. Even after I left the workplace, the relationships continued to thrive.
Honey Balls and S.T. (Sugar Tits) were nicknames between Max and me.

After I moved islands to attend a different university, I still managed to keep in touch with my work friends through, well, work. I put books on hold from Mo'okini instead of the library here, just so they could see my name pop up and stretch their lips in remembrance. To my surprise, they sent me my books with endearing notes they managed to sneak in before packing it up. Their humor made my voice crack when I searched every book and found a disturbing photo of Nicolas Cage smiling brightly at me. The notes were personal and filled with love and friendship that I knew wouldn’t fade because of the distance I placed among us. The first thing that one of them posted on my wall on Facebook after the semester started was:

> the mo'okini crew is freaking out cuz we don't have you to plan fun get togethers anymore 😞

My mark was definitely left with my previous co-workers.
My warmest memory of that semester wasn’t the smaller parties that I was invited to join—I actually had a social life for once! Wow!—but it was the party that I threw at my own house. I had intentions of having a work gathering at my home for weeks and I finally made it happen. It was one of the wildest nights because one of the supervisors we disliked the least made it and got drunk with us in my garage. My kamaboko and cream cheese wontons were fresh out of the frying pan, joining the table of Ariella’s devilled eggs, Shawn’s spam and rice, and Joan’s pumpkin rolls, mouth-watering goodies that made my stomach clench in pure ecstasy. Immediately after 10 p.m., the familiar lights of cars buzzing past my garage stopped just there, placing a faint feeling of shock in the pit of my satisfied stomach.

The blue lights were dizzying, but called for my attention, so I stood from the comfort of the blankets on the floor, the liquid on my palms forcing me to act sober. I greeted the first officer too happily—he’s a cop for Christ’s sake! No one’s happy to see cops! Get your shit together!—and he greeted me back, his steps heavy and slow, his eyes surveying the odd scene behind me: food half-eaten from each individual dish, empty beer bottles that could possibly belong to an underaged student, and a loopy supervisor still giggling with her much younger co-workers, the Al Green Pandora station serenading the rest of the people in the background.

“Can I speak to the head of the household?”

My sister wasn’t home so I guess “That’s me” was a sufficient answer, my nodding blurring my sight even further.

When the question, “What’s your birth date?” came out of his mouth, I swore the infinitesimal moment of silence that I allowed to pass in order to rack my brain for the correct answer felt like an entire year. I blew my 20th birthday candle last year, smelling like alcohol in front of four cops, with my supervisor jamming to her music, smiles and sparkling eyes all around. The officer admitted that it was the dissonance of our booming lungs cackling for 10 minutes straight that was causing my neighbors to whine. I couldn’t have asked for a better way to get a warning. The stress during this semester was balanced out by the amount of happiness I gained in my memories.
Having gotten used to the hectic schedule of my spring and summer semester at UH Hilo, I unwittingly made it a regular routine for me to adjust my work hours around my class schedule once I got a job as a receptionist at Ko Lākou Mau Leo in my first semester at UH Mānoa. It had only been four months after my last day at Mo‘okini. I wasn’t kidding when I said working was important to me. Those four months were riddled with constant anxiety, with harsh reminders of the loan I owe UH Hilo and the loans that would compile until my graduation at Mānoa. The ridiculous thing about financial aid is that the scholarships weren’t automatically given to me since I was in the top percentage of students—I almost always made the Dean’s List and got, for most of my classes, straight A’s. Why wasn’t the school acknowledging my accomplishments and rewarding me accordingly? It’s not like I worked my ass off in class, something they taught us as early as elementary school to do in order to reap rewards. Great, put me on a list of recognition that dozens will skim over, but don’t give me a fat check; I’d much rather have people I don’t care about see my name in an email and delete it almost immediately. Did the merit-system completely disappear? Couldn’t the gold stars I got in elementary transfer into money as I got older? Who’s in charge of this system?

I was grateful, anyway, to get a job. I applied to at least 20 different positions on campus, interviewed for two before I got the job at Ko Lākou Mau Leo. University jobs were much easier for me to deal with since school always came first for me; working around my classes was more possible with on-campus jobs compared to the shitty hours I would have to work for off-campus jobs. I also applied for at least 13 or more scholarships during November so that I would get something more than the Pell Grant for the next year. The receptionist job paid me just as much as my first job did, but it was higher than my last job at the library. As for my classes, none of my UH Hilo spring courses transferred over except for the three that were writing intensive, but it was ridiculous because the courses I took at UH Hilo almost directly correlated to the ones I needed to retake at UH Mānoa. The system should make these courses in their
separate institutions more similar in content for people who want to transfer. As for my case, my spring semester at UH Hilo practically didn’t exist (which meant their system was fucked up—I have a memo to write a letter to the department head of English one of these days):

- **UH Hilo Courses**
  - ENG 300: Intro to Literary Studies [Instructor Approval]
  - ENG 324: Modern English Grammar & Usage
  - ENG 287: WI/ Introduction to Rhetoric
  - ENG 200C: WI/ Intro to Lit Genres: Poetry
  - ENG 200G: WI/ Intro to Lit Genres: Graphic Novels & Comics

- **UH Mānoa Courses**
  - ENG 320: Intro to English Studies [Restriction: Major]
  - ENG 403: Modern English Grammar
  - ENG 306: WI/ Argumentative Writing I
  - ENG 271: WI/ Intro to Lit: Genre (Poetry and Drama)
  - ENG 271: WI/ Intro to Lit: Genre (Myth and Legend in Graphic Novels)

Mind you, a student in one of my classes was using the same book for his grammar class that I used when I took my 8 a.m. grammar class at UH Hilo. The same exact book. They must have learned the same exact things as I had! How interesting that those three credits weren’t able to get transferred into a sister school within the same system in the state. It’s like they don’t want the 15-to-Finish rule to apply to transfer students, something about graduating on time that many transfers always have trouble with.

The classes I took were really demanding; my days started at 7:30 a.m. and ended at 5. After I got home, all I did was homework—dinner—shower—homework. That was the semester I realized I was a stress-eater; I didn’t figure that out before because I barely had food or didn’t want to spend money that needed to go to the bills I helped my sister pay when I was living with her. But because I was on the dorm meal plan that I paid a thousand-plus dollars for, I took advantage of it. During midterms, I often found myself unable to keep the dull vibration of my professors’ voices in my head.
long enough to connect the ideas that were being put into my brain to ready me for future tests. My eyes would always feel heavy during the 30-minute mark of my morning classes (either from boredom or exhaustion is debatable), and I started falling behind on my readings again. Fall 2013 was the first time I got a C+ grade in my entire college career. The class I expected a C in, I got a B, and the class I thought I was getting by with a B in was the one I got a C in. It was a little heartbreaking, but deliriously, I think I was more glad that the semester was over and I could break away from work and school simultaneously, for three weeks at least.

Before I realized I could handle three jobs at the same time, I thought I was overwhelmed with learning the first job I got at Mānoa. Ko Lākou Mau Leo: Their Voices. A controversial title, I would say, since many believe the school newspaper represents the voice of the people, but who is truly behind the “their” in the title? A lot of the people’s voices aren’t represented in our school newspaper, due to a number of reasons. When I applied, I wondered if I was applying for the wrong position. English majors usually strive for opportunities to get published. I, instead, being the office-junky I was, grabbed their receptionist position and didn’t look back. I knew what kind of experience I had and I needed a job that would pay, a job that I could use my prior knowledge in. I don’t regret applying to Ko Lākou Mau Leo, but it gives me roller coaster vibes; I like being a receptionist, but the job isn’t always easy. I wanted new friendships similar to the ones I made with my Mo’okini Crew, but I also had a cold exterior when I entered Mānoa, telling myself that I wasn’t here to make friends, only to graduate. I tried to be nice in the beginning, but after working there for a few months, I realized all the things that were wrong about my workplace. My co-workers weren’t as open to friendships as the Mo’okini Crew was, and they weren’t as cool, either. A lot of the work would be passed off to me and another co-worker, we being the newest in the batch, and we bonded the most from the shit-talking we would do about our supervisors, our co-workers, and the obnoxious writers we had to deal with. My bank account was finally smiling again, so even though I didn’t take the job seriously, I worked hard enough to make those hundreds every two weeks worth it. I wouldn’t be like the slackers I worked with.
Certain shifts would actually make me proud that I worked at the office. I enjoyed being busy with office things, looking busy with important work that outsiders believed to be very pressing and decisive matters. Being overcome with work wasn’t pleasant, but having the right amount of workload during a certain shift, and then getting it accomplished, filled me with thrill for life and satisfaction as a worker. Setting goals for that shift and having them completed filled me with sensations of success, no matter how small or how often I did that certain task. When working in the front, for the most part alone, it gets tricky sometimes: the phone might ring, so you’ll have to pick that up and direct the call or take a message, then give that message to the correct person, but you might also be dealing with someone who just walked into the office wondering what documents they need in order to get paid as a writer, or worse, a problematic old person trying to complain, requiring a halting of work on your part so as to calm them down before they explode with old-people anger. You might also have been given a task by your ditzy supervisor to help her prepare for the board meeting that evening, so you would need to make 15 copies of 9 papers and staple them accordingly, but it’s almost 4 p.m. and the fiscal office closes soon, even though you haven’t gotten the mail yet and recorded the payments, which takes a good 15 minutes depending on how many checks there are. Also, you might run out of paper receipt rolls to print out the credit card payments, so you would have to spend at least 5 minutes rolling up paper that isn’t designed for the credit card machine so you could finish that task. But then another supervisor might tell you to scan a 7-page document, and you haven’t even checked your email to see if someone needs an immediate response. These are only a few things that could happen simultaneously, and without breaking a sweat, I somehow get my work done every long shift. It’s thrilling to have my own responsibilities and carry them out for the benefit of the organisation, but no one even acknowledges the work we put into being a fiscal worker. The writers and ad reps don’t realize how much we truly do for them; without the front desk, they would surely crumble. This satisfaction is felt solely by me, being content after leaving the office in the evening and checking off my lists. Taking matters into my own hands is a blessing and a curse when it comes to this job; I like doing things that need to be done when I know how to do them, but if I’m
clueless? Good luck! The supervisors don’t know how to help you, so you’re left with work you’re unable to handle. There’s never any perfect balance when it comes to loving and hating work.

A memorable moment that I cannot forget is when I heard one of the writers, now Editor-in-Chief, pronounce the name of the paper disastrously incorrect. Strange, since people around the office say it correctly all the time, yet he just cannot, for the little life of him, tell the damn difference. Instead of saying it as it should be, Ko Lākou Mau Leo, he pronounces one of the vowels incorrectly, prolonging it, which can mean something totally different in the Hawaiian language. Being a Hawaiian language student and advocate, and someone who considers herself immersed in the culture and always up to learning about their traditional ideologies, I was appalled! I told the interim supervisor in charge of the editorial staff, but nothing changed, and the writer has since become our editor-in-chief. I am ashamed to work for Ko Lākou Mau Leo, knowing the head position of the writers and designers can’t even pronounce the publication for which he works. It gave me a certain kind of unexplainable anxiety whenever I heard him utter the name; it made me snarl my lip, crease my brows, curl my fingers to relieve the tension I felt in my body. It was a strange thing to have anxiety about, but I couldn’t help myself. From then on, I knew this position wouldn’t mean much to me in the long run. Although it was sometimes a solace from classes, stress would still accumulate, so it was mainly a source of income.

‘Some of Us Have to Grow Up Sometimes’

A writer—and, I believe, generally all persons—must think that whatever happens to him or her is a resource. All things have been given to us for a purpose, and an artist must feel this more intensely. All that happens to us, including our humiliations, our misfortunes, our embarrassments, all is given to us as raw material, as clay, so that we may shape our art.

— Jorge Luis Borges

When I came back from the disappointing C+ semester, the atmosphere around me changed. I was nominated for a class that was instructor-approval status, and I got
in, surprisingly. I was very apprehensive about this class—it was called Teaching Composition, and I was in no way interested in becoming a teacher (still am not). But the fact that not everyone who applied made it into the class was alluring. I am somewhat a believer in Fate and in signs and messages. I told myself that I would apply for the class (why the heck not?) and that if I got in, then it was destiny for me to attend that class and learn something truly valuable. Perhaps it would help me in my future endeavors, whatever those were. Since taking this class, I have started to become more aware of which of my experiences as an undergraduate I could use after school has been completed. After learning the theories of the writing center, the class got to use their skills in tutoring—something I had never expected to do in my life. I had never imagined getting tutored on my own work, much less become a tutor myself! It was the closest I got to being a teacher without actually becoming one. I started to gather pride at how this exclusive job related to my major and how this could apply to my future, but the questions about wanting to become a teacher after I graduated were getting more and more common.

Many people who don’t understand the English major and its inner workings aren’t as open to the idea that English doesn’t only encompass teaching English, just like History majors won’t suddenly become History teachers because of their major. Because one of my jobs at the university included a form of peer “teaching,” the idea of it becoming my career didn’t stray too far when I told others where I worked. I enjoyed tutoring, though, I admit, even though I still get jitters and butterflies before I work with someone on their paper in hopes of having them leave as better writers instead of just acing their assignment. With my other jobs, they were just duties to an organization and a way to keep money flowing to my checking account, but with tutoring, I am invested in other people, students like myself, and I have a certain standard that I put myself beside in order to excel in my job. By facilitating the writing process for other students, I became a better writer myself, more mindful of my essays and the way I structured them.
I’m in both these photos, surprisingly, and I am indeed holding a bitten cookie on the couch.

The relationships I made with my co-workers at the writing center were different than my previous jobs—these people were very conversational, and we had a certain understanding of life and goals, mostly because a lot of us were on the same path of the average English major. Although they were nowhere near equal to the Mo'okini crew in terms of lifelong friendships, I enjoyed our intellectual conversations. I may not plan a get-together with most of them or hang out outside of class and work, but these co-workers are an important part of my maturity, I believe, because surrounding myself by wise, if not wiser, students, I get a better sense of myself. There are definitely a few that I talk with more than others because our interests match up a little more, or that they seem more approachable than others—I do admit not all of them seem like they would play well with me.

Spring 2014 was the semester of finding my educational purpose. Because my classes were much more interesting during this semester compared to my first semester at Mānoa, I was more myself during class time. I made a harder effort to speak my mind in classes when I felt safe that my opinions wouldn’t automatically be seen as inferior. During high school, if my friends were in my classes, I was much more bold when speaking out during class, not caring if my answers were incorrect (knowing that most likely they were), but in the classes I was taking in my later years of college, I was
educated enough to know what questions to answer and what questions to ask in order to get a better grip on the course work. One of the books I read called *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie became one of my favorites to this day, adding to my small list of favorites and joining Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle* and Haruki Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood*. In *Americanah*, the protagonist starts her own blog about her opinions on race as she sees them in her life, being from Lagos, Nigeria, and attending an Ivy League school in America. It never occurred to me to do the same until after the summer, my first blog post about the slut-shaming I observe on a daily basis around my own community, around my own friends. My duty as a privileged, educated college student was to show others who weren’t as aware as I was about the injustices within society. I had been blogging for many years before, but hadn’t thought of it as an opportunity to carry out the knowledge I’ve learned in school to my community. It was the closest I could get to reaching a public without being officially published.

The stresses of having two jobs were much more severe, I guess you could say, when you add six classes equalling to 18 credits alongside the both of them. Thank goodness only one class was a writing intensive course. Not only did these stresses pile up, but I also did my best to be active and stay healthy, going to the new gym during the last few weeks and drinking with friends. How I endured it all is a blur, I honestly hardly remember that semester. All I knew was that I almost never went a day without having my stomach rumble only to appease it at 5 or 6 p.m. while staying up late, late hours in order to keep up with school work. My 405 class was the first 400 class that I had ever taken, and I made damn well sure I excelled, especially since it was the class that connected me to my tutoring job.

Did I think that was enough, though? For some reason, no! During Fall 2014, I added another job that I wasn’t supposed to add. I applied as a copyeditor for Ko Lâkou Mau Leo, not really needing more money (although it would always be a plus [not that copy editors got a lot of money anyway, unless they were the chief or associate chief]), but I applied for the experience. I thought to myself, *why the heck not???* It was my last year as an undergraduate and adding this work experience to my résumé sounded promising, even though I wasn’t sure what kind of job I’d be applying to that would
remark it with high praise. With another three writing intensives for the semester, I’m sure my truest goal was to kill myself via stress of school and work, a completely methodical suicide that would spread awareness of the pressures that college students are put through. Perhaps I just wanted to grow up to be a martyr.

With my final fall semester coming to a close, I can’t say I’ve truly discovered how my academic life can perfectly mesh with a future career that would fit my experiences to the bone, but I agree that my future career is definitely in writing. I may not publish articles like my professors do, but I can submit articles to smaller publications and get experience and recognition my own way. I’m hoping my work life isn’t dependent on my life as a student, and that once I get my Bachelor’s, I’ll use the time I would have had in class to do my own research into the fields I’m interested in, and do work that inspires me without the pressure of grades and other competing deadlines. The time I have been a student has definitely shaped who I am as a person, and who I am as a worker, rightfully so, since I have been a student for 17 years. Every decision I have made has put me through something that will eventually lead me to the right path I’m supposed to be on (for the time being, anyway). To quote Adichie, I end with a line from her book, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a relevant thought that resonates with my current situation: “You can’t write a script in your mind and then force yourself to follow it. You have to let yourself be.”

**Works Cited**
