

Balance

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“Please, mom!” I cry, standing in the university’s hallway, tears streaming down my face. “Don’t you understand? I can’t just *choose* something, I don’t know what I want to do yet!”

“You have to,” my mother says, her arms crossed, her ground firm. “We didn’t bring you all this way for registration only to turn around. Pick a major, and we’ll figure it out later. Now come on.”

She drags me to the registration office. I wipe my tears away, but it does nothing to subside the panic in my chest. How in the world can I decide, at this very moment in time, what I will be doing for the *rest of my life*? How do I know if I will be good at it? How do I know if I will like it? And how do I know if I’ll even have a *job*? These are impossible questions that can’t be answered in one day, and the fact that I have to choose crushes me.

Looking back on that day, I thank my mother for pushing me through. I wound up selecting a transfer degree focused on art and theater, because it was something I participated in high school, but had no idea where to go from there.

Yet, somehow, I arrived at University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point with not only an Associate’s Degree, but completely confident in what I wanted to do with my life: become an interpretative park ranger in our national forestlands. This conclusion, however, was such a stark contrast to the way I began college, and the way I tackle it now wasn’t at all easy to reach.

I loved sociology. I loved psychology. I loved English. I loved history. I loved meteorology. I loved geology. I loved everything I learned because not only did it answer questions I had burning in my mind, but because it brought me closer to understanding human life on our planet and beyond. I hopped from major to major – art to physics, criminal justice to information technology, history to environmental biology – thrilled with each field but stunted as to which one I would grow in. How could I decide when I liked them all?

The answer came to me in a geography class. At that point in time, I was an education major. Like all of my other classes, I was engrossed in this one, learning about weather phenomena on urban life, manufacturing industries on arctic ice caps, and how we could gain an understanding into both the natural world and the one we've created. The course itself was interdisciplinary, branching out to two very different fields to form a relationship.

Everything clicked. I could recognize how intimately human beings were connected to the environment. The bonds that we share with our natural resources are so incredibly strong, that they are almost invisible to the way that we carry our daily lives. Water comes out of a tap, light appears flick of a switch, and the ground beneath our feet is solid and paved. We rarely consider the elements and work that were put into these luxuries, yet they come from our very backyard: We find water in both the sky and oceans, coal for electricity buried deep into the earth, and stone for concrete stocked in the mountains. I found myself walking out of class every day wondering what my carbon footprint was like, how I impacted my natural surroundings, and above all, how in the world I could explain this to other people.

We see in the news how difficult it is to reach a mutual understanding of science and humanities. Technology is quick to skew fact into opinion, examples ranging from climate change to overusing a microwave, from Ebola outbreaks to contaminated Doritos chips. Studies are manipulated to favor the author or politician, and surveys become biased to a desirable answer. Modern methods of information are rapid and simple, but unfortunately, rarely precise.

If our world is connected by Facebook statuses, Twitter updates, and Instagram photos, how can we teach people true science in a way that embraces these social outlets and provides accurate information?

The answer, I believe, is in a solid and diverse education. By observing people, culture and the environment, I have learned how to separate fact from opinion. Yes, it is a broad spectrum with many disciplines and even more concentrations, but a jack-of-all-trades understanding of the world's diversity is not only critical to my future career, but absolutely vital to everyday life. The ability to balance logic with emotion is how we thrive and make progress, not favoring one over the other.

This balance is why we can never remove a biology course from an illustration design degree, or a film elective from an engineering program. We need to see both sides of the coin. We're lucky here at Steven's Point to have a blend of humanities and science, with our nature murals on the walls and our modern art alongside student-planted gardens. Not every campus can function in such harmony with differing views of the world. We should consider ourselves leaders in more than science, more than humanities; we should consider ourselves leaders in understanding the many facets of life, and be eager to teach others to do the same. I know that I certainly am.

People, however, will only learn when there is an incentive behind it. If the class is not directly related to their field of future employment, why bother taking it at all? No matter how much I could speak my heart out about the critical importance of conserving our natural resources, it could very well fall on deaf ears.

Therefore, learning is something that goes beyond the classroom - and I don't mean homework, study guides, or chapter readings. Learning is a tool that helps us discover ourselves and what exactly we're doing in our daily lives. Science and humanities challenge us to think differently, to truly evaluate our ways, and then synthesize them. We think and express ourselves on whole new levels that we had never imagined ourselves capable of.

Without exploring both science and humanities, I never thought myself capable of being where I am now. I thought I would remain stuck, torn between majors, and fall behind with the rest of my

graduating class. However, by loving everything I learned, I gained so much more. I know where I am headed, what I want to do, and if it doesn't work out? I have the flexibility to experiment with different options and approach it from a variety of angles, as a reflection of my diverse education. If the perspective isn't right, then neither will the overall piece; it's in the same vein that if your data is wrong, your results will be wrong. I am absolutely certain that by identifying the core principles of these two wildly different fields, that I will be successful.

My mother is thrilled for me as well. She always talks to her friends and our family about my potential success, because she knows that once I have put my mind to something, I am driven to do more than complete it. I am driven to surpass it. She probably won't remember that first day, when I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, but I will. It marks the moment that I began to think for myself, and when the idea of balancing both science and humanities was born within me.