

Great Expectations

Katherine Lara

What do you want to be when you grow up? As a child, this is the question I got asked all the time. In first grade, my classmate's mother, a dentist, came to talk to us about her job. She also brought a white lab coat and a toothbrush with her and let us pose with them for a picture. Later, my teacher asked me "What do you want to be when you grow up?" In my innocence, I answered "A dentist!" In my child mind, dentists got to wear cool white coats and have fun brushing teeth. In that moment, I had no idea what being a dentist entailed or the severity of the question being asked of me. It goes without saying that I soon realized that being a dentist was not a profession I was remotely interested in. There are times when I yearn for that childlike innocence. As I have grown older, the pressure of finding the job that I am passionate about has increased. My parents never got the opportunity to go to school to find their passion and dream jobs. So now, it was my duty to them to do what they were unable to. Unfortunately, the journey there has not been easy.

For the first two years of my college education, I have gone in a directionless path. I had been accepted as a pre-Criminal Justice major, but was reluctant to declare it. Prior to applying for college, I had been undecided on what to major in, so I chose a major that I felt I might be interested in. However, every time the period for class registration came, my computer mouse would hover over the add class button on the CRIM 1010 class and then move away to look for other classes. Also, when looking up what jobs were apt for a degree in Criminal Justice, my heart sank when none of them remotely interested me. Although I was not under the guise that jobs in this field were like in the crime shows, I was left with a hard decision. I could change or double down on my choice. At the time, I chose to stay. However, in the back of my mind, the thought of committing to a major I was unsure of tormented me and left me in limbo. In the meantime, I took a variety of different classes hoping that something—*anything*—would catch my interest. It was not until a fateful talk with one of my professors that I would have some semblance of an idea of what my future could be.

In Fall of 2019, my English professor pulled me aside after class. My mind reeled with so many questions. None of my professors had ever wanted to talk to me after class without notice beforehand. After everyone else left, my professor began to talk to me about the paper she had just handed back to me during class.

“I noticed that you did really well this time around. In the last assignment, I noticed that your work was not up to par with your previous essays. What changed?”

“Honestly? I didn’t do that paper last minute.”

“Yeah, I noticed. You have really strong writing skills. What’s your major?”

“Criminal justice.”

“I can see that. You seem to be someone that is very structured and organized. And logical.”

“Yeah, but—”

“What is it?”

I hesitated for a second. I liked my professor but I didn’t have the closeness with her to reveal my biggest struggle. Eventually, I chose to just say it.

“I’m not sure I want to be a CRIM major anymore.”

My professor thought about that for a moment and then asked, “Have you ever considered being an English major?”

It was that question that made everything click. My professor and many other teachers before had always pointed out my potential in English, and it was the subject I most enjoyed. Additionally, in every semester, I consistently went out of my way of incorporating one English class into my schedule. It was a pattern that could not be ignored. I had finally had my eureka moment. At last, I experienced the joy that comes with possibly finding my passion in life. That is, until the realization of what changing my major would entail.

For one, I would need to extend my undergraduate education by one year since I had wasted precious time due to my indecision. Then there was the question of what I would do with an English degree. English degrees have a bad reputation of being useless and not really providing a clear career path. English is such a broad category that my possibilities are endless. Yet there was one thing that made me hesitate more than anything.

What would my parents think? More specifically, my mom. I have never been close to my dad. He would spend so much time out of the house when I was younger working to provide for my sister and I. While we are not close, I will say, he has always encouraged me to pursue my education so that I can have a better future. He doesn’t want me to have to work 40+ hours like him. As far as my dad knows, I am in college studying and this will open up a lot of opportunities for good jobs. On the other, my mom has always been there for me. Her opinion mattered to me, and I feared I would disappoint her with my decision. When I was applying for college, my mom expressed hope that I would be interested in a STEM related major. As a first-generation student, she felt it was important for me to major in

something that would offer me a variety of opportunities after college and to her STEM offered that. She didn't want all my hard work and education to go to waste and for me to end up working at McDonalds (mad respect to anyone working there, by the way). Unfortunately to her, I liked watching science related shows but not the subject itself and hated math with a dying passion. Although she didn't say it, I could tell she was slightly disappointed that I lacked interest in those areas of study. In her mind, most jobs of the future are heavily technology based.

The day I talked to my mom was nerve-wracking. I was not expecting full on yelling and cursing me out but it was scary nonetheless. How would I even explain it to her? This felt very personal to me. When I got home from school, I told her what I was considering to do. At first, she just stared at me and then asked: "¿Quieres ser traductora?" I laughed and then tried to explain to her better that studying English was more than that. By the end of it, I think she mostly got it. However, there will be times when I think she doesn't understand completely. She will ask me, "¿Qué estás estudiando exactamente? Cuando mis amigas me preguntan, no sé qué decir." But I am okay with that. Even if she doesn't fully get it, I at least know she is supportive of my decision to switch. She made it clear that day that she would support me in whatever I chose. She did not want me to study something that would make me miserable. Over everything else, she wanted me to be happy and not regret my choices. Therefore, on March 2020, I officially changed my major from criminal justice to English.

As of now, I have officially been an English major for a little over a year. My life has changed a lot since I made that decision. I am finally starting to look for opportunities outside of school to see what direction I want to go in life. I am still not sure what I am going to do with my degree, but I am sure I will find my way eventually. Publishing seems interesting but only the future will tell. I recently started volunteering as a tutor with this organization helping a student with their reading. I am putting my skills to good use and helping someone. I am a lot more optimistic about what the future holds.