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Launching into Life After College

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CHAPTER 6

LAUNCHING INTO LIFE AFTER COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on a course that is designed to facilitate the students' transition out of college and into life after graduation. It describes how the course foregrounds the problems students face, both the technical aspects of the transition and the emotional experience, unthought out ideas about what the students want, their goals, and how they might go about achieving their goals. The authors report on the course culture, assignments, observations from teaching the course, student feedback from focus groups, surveys, behavior, as well as summaries of data on the student's experience.

The need for this course is supported by the research literature on emerging adulthood. In addition, the authors report on focus group and survey data gathered. The modern discourse on the post-college transition commonly emphasizes economic and practical hurdles, such as educational loan debt, student employability, skill transferability, career networking, and job interviewing. Receiving far less attention are the psychosocial and developmental dimensions that color the student experience of the graduation transition.

Yet very few colleges and universities have paid attention to this glaring need, especially public institutions with many first-generation college students. This chapter describes a college course dealing with the problem of transitioning to life after college taught in an intellectual, communal, and personal atmosphere.

AQ1

We evade the burden of freedom by embracing pressures to conform. We clothe our nakedness in literary or philosophical illusion. We immerse ourselves in the power of our weapons, our machines, our corporate enterprises. As T. S. Eliot put it, mankind cannot stand very much reality. In learning to live with less self-awareness, we also diminish those distinctively human possibilities for freedom, creativity, caring, and ethical insight which are based on that awareness. (Cell, 1984)

> Here is what a college senior in one of our focus groups said when asked, "When you think about graduating from college, what concerns come to mind"?
> "I feel like I am standing in the middle of a busy city intersection, with too much noise and too many lights – I am not sure which direction to go."

This chapter reports on a course that is designed to facilitate the students' transition out of college and into life after graduation. It describes how the course foregrounds the problems students face, both the technical aspects of the transition and the emotional experience, unthought out ideas about what the students want, their goals, and how they might go about achieving their goals. We report on the course culture, assignments, our observations from teaching the course, student feedback from focus groups, surveys, behavior, as well as summaries of data on the student's experience.

Our first goal in the course is to unlock the student's own curiosity about the answers to the questions "Who am I now, and how did I get this way?" This begins in the first class, when we ask them to briefly explain what their motivations are for taking the course. We then walk around the room and mime the handing out of an invisible "license to think about yourself" to each student, individually. Our goal is to signal the beginning of a classroom ethos of egalitarianism, openness, and self-disclosure, which each successive class will reinforce.

In what follows, we present a brief review of the research literature on the psychosocial and developmental dimensions of the transition to young adulthood. Next, we say a bit about how before teaching the course, the four authors of this chapter worked for several years in discussing the idea for this course, followed by collecting data – both survey and focus group data – on students' thoughts about graduating, then later feedback from students who took the course, what we learned from the data and from teaching the course and how that shaped how

we taught the course, teaching decisions we made, how the assignments and class communication were chosen to support metacognitive and constructivist principles, and finally suggestions for others interested in teaching this course.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The modern discourse on the post-college transition commonly emphasizes economic and practical hurdles, such as educational loan debt, student employability, skill transferability, career networking, and job interviewing (Baytiyeh & Naja, 2012; Diepenbrock & Gibson, 2012; Hora 2018). These matters are of pressing importance, but much more is at play in considering how well students will fare once they graduate from college. Receiving far less attention are the psychosocial and developmental dimensions that color the student experience of the graduation transition. Emerging adulthood, from age 18 through the decade of the twenties, is recognized as a distinct life stage with developmental phases characterized by "self-focus, instability, identity explorations, feeling in-between and sense of possibilities" (Arnett, 2015, p. 9). Identity disequilibrium, loss of community and support systems, redefining family relationships, navigating new work or geographic environments and establishing autonomy are some common challenges facing college graduates. Without adequate attention to the developmental aspects of the transition, common stresses can morph into prolonged setbacks, encumbering progress and a sense of adult competence. Universities are uniquely positioned to attend to these realities as students move toward graduation.

Damon (2009) stresses that for a surprising number of young people, the transition into adulthood "triggers a sense of vague foreboding or worse, debilitating anxiety that can lead to further developmental paralysis" (p. 6). Turkle (2011) was early to recognize the growing digital culture with digital natives. She pointed out that "We fear the risks and disappointments of relationships with our fellow humans. We expect more from technology and less from each other" (p. xii). In her aptly titled book, *Alone Together*, Turkle tells us that "we are lonely but fearful of intimacy" (p. 1). As for human communication as we have known it for centuries, Turkle says: "Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other" (p. 1). Twenge (2017) dubs those born in 1995 and later the iGen generation. She writes: "they grew up with cell phones, had an Instagram page before they started school, and do not remember a time before the Internet" (p. 2). She describes the iGen'ers as far behind past generations in being prepared for the adult world as we know it. They drive later, date later, work later, manage finances later, spend less time on homework, have sex later, and spend less time with other people. Her extensive research on people born after about 1995 describes a generation growing up more slowly than past generations (p. 290). iGen'ers represent the dominant demographic of our current college student population. Yet, colleges have not fully adapted services to meet the particular needs of this cohort of students.

Commenting upon the state of American teens, Lukianoff and Haidt (2018) wrote "Teen anxiety, depression, and suicide rates have risen sharply in the last

few years" (p. 5). They maintain that "what is new today is the premise that students are fragile" (p. 7). They hold

> that even when students are reacting to real problems, they are more likely than previous generations to engage in thought patterns that make those problems seem more threatening, which makes them harder to solve. (p. 8)

For many, this suggests a transition fraught with sudden and jarring change waiting at graduation. Lukianoff and Haidt warn that if students reside within a bubble of intellectual safety during college, "they would set themselves up for even greater anxiety and conflict after graduation" (p. 9). Yet very few colleges and universities have paid attention to this glaring need, especially public institutions with many first-generation college students (Burnett & Evans, 2016; Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998). Gardner and Van der Veer describe a course whose objectives are similar to ours, but with a stronger emphasis on employers' needs and the needs of the institution. Dealing with the problem of transitioning to life after college in an intellectual, communal, and personal atmosphere is needed and innovative. To address this, a team of four faculty conducted some initial research on student perspectives and experiences anticipating the post-college transition. From this work, they developed a new course at a public regional university, *Launching into Life after College* (LILAC).

The LILAC Faculty Team and Course Development

LILAC was developed by four university faculty at a public, regional university in the northeast United States. We have found that designing a course such as this, which serves a very diverse population of students, is aided with a team who are also diverse: in particular, diverse in their life experiences and in their choice of disciplines. Our team has an artist, a researcher, an engineer, and a social worker. This diversity has led to fruitful disagreement (no single individual feels that their mastery of their discipline is in question), frequent new ideas, a willingness to question both our own and others' established practices, and an approach to problem-solving from different perspectives, which allows us to join our students in a learning community. Our team worked for over two years in preparing for the course, including conducting focus groups and collecting survey data of college juniors and seniors. This provided preliminary data about the need for a course like LILAC. Armed with these data, the curriculum was developed and proposed to the university administration. LILAC received enthusiastic support and was approved to be taught in spring 2019 and has been taught during four subse-quent semesters. In spring of 2020, due to COVID-19, LILAC was moved online in the middle of the semester. Hence, we have some experience with teaching the course with Zoom meetings. The course is taught as a seminar with a maximum of 15 students.

Summary of Survey Data

Prior to the development of the LILAC curriculum, our survey of college jun-iors and seniors revealed a compelling need for a dedicated course focusing

on the transition to life after college. Institutional Review Board approval was given for each of our pre-course data collections. Qualitative data gathered from three preliminary focus groups of students led to the creation of a survey about the college experience and anticipating life after college. This survey was administered to juniors and seniors over two years at our university ($N = 145$). The survey used both Likert scale-style questions and other questions with set response options from which to choose. Demographic information was also gathered.

Description of Student Population

Demographic data collection of survey participants revealed that 62.8% were traditional aged students (18–24) and 22.1% identified as non-traditional (25–35), with the remainder 36 and older. Almost all of the respondents (91.7%) indicated they were employed while in school, holding outside jobs, campus-based jobs (e.g., work study), or some combination of both. Only 8.28% of respondents reported they did not work while in school. First-generation students accounted for 35.8% of survey respondents; 76.5% identified as female, 20% male, and 2.7% other. In terms of race and ethnicity, 85.5% indicated Caucasian, 14.5% were identified in a variety of other racial/ethnic identities (black, African, Asian, Native American, etc.). As for relationship status, 55.2% were single, 34.4% in domestic partnership or married and 3.45% divorced (6.9% with no response). Most of the respondents, 85%, resided off campus in a range of living arrangements, including living with parents, roommates, or partners, and 91.7% of student respondents indicated they fell in the low to middle income range. The average grade point average of respondents was 3.4, ranging from 2.0 to 4.0. The areas of study of the students in this sample were diverse, with students majoring in computer science, math, English, business, nursing, social work, communication, political science, history and theater (see Appendix A).

The 10 survey questions pertaining to the college experience and anticipating life after college are presented below along with key ideas we took from each one. These data along with focus group data brought our attention to student needs that we took into account as we developed the course (see Appendix B for Tables B2–B11, survey responses).

Table B2: Do you feel you have been successful in college? (see Fig. 1).

Key ideas from Table B2: The students feel they have been successful in college.

Table B3: In thinking about life after college, how important are the following to your ideas about success (building my confidence; support and knowledge from professors; study abroad; self-promote; value my opinion; internships; my own voice; interacting; relationships with professors and advisors; motivation; coping skills; and research assistantships)?

Key ideas from Table B3: What is most important to the students is support and knowledge from professors, identity, internships, relationships with professors, motivation, and coping skills.

Table B3: In Thinking About Life After College, How Important Are the Following to Your Ideas About Success? (money; applying my education; travel; social
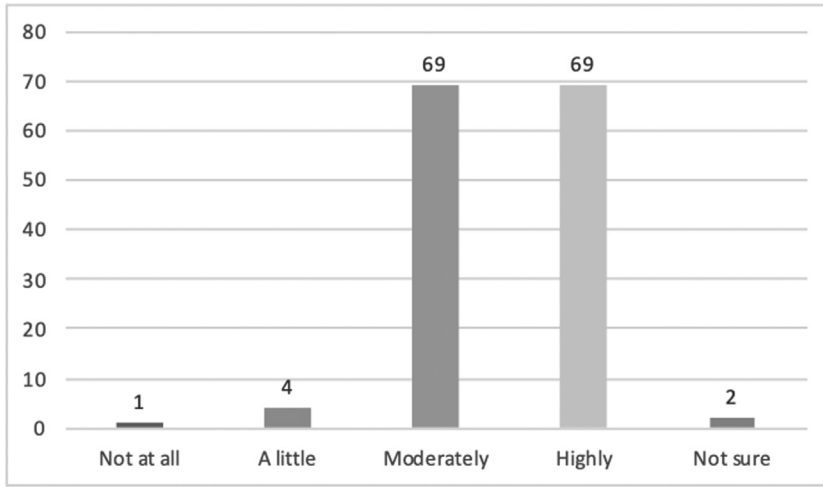
AQ3   *Fig. 1.*   Do You Feel You Have Been Successful in College? *Note*: This bar graph
                shows the number of students who selected each choice.

class/mobility; being happy; satisfaction with career; giving back to the commu-
nity; financial security; career; and establishing a family)? (See Fig. 2.)

Key ideas from Table B4: What is most important to the students is money;
applying my education; being self-sufficient; being happy; satisfaction with career;
financial security; and career.
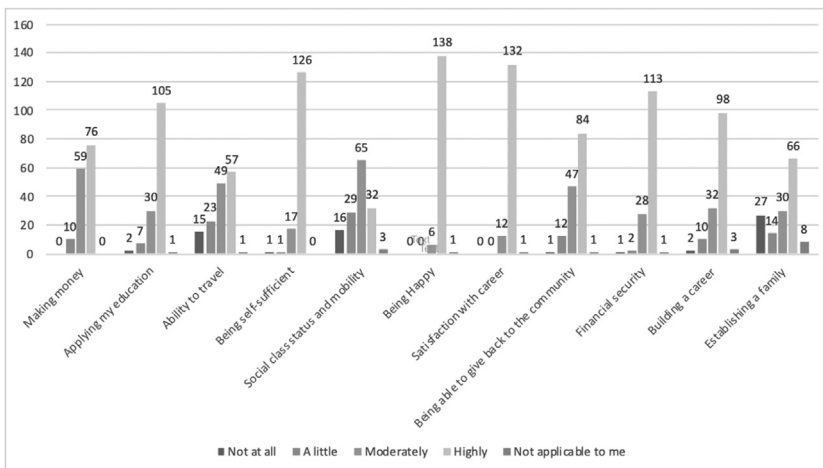
AQ4   *Fig. 2.* How Important are the Following as you Think of How Your College
        Experience Prepares you for Success?

Table B5. What have been barriers to feeling prepared for success (personal stress; fear of unknown; lack of confidence; social isolation; money struggles; having a job outside of school; lack of support and engagement from faculty; lack of opportunities for engaging with peers outside of class; family not supportive; health problems; student load; family problems; and housing in instability)?

Key ideas from Table B5: Students reported that they are held back by lots of personal stress, fear of the unknown, and having to work while going to school.

Table B6. In what ways has college influenced you?

Key ideas from Table B6: Students believe that going to college helped them to mature, gain a broader worldview, feel more in charge, increase their love of learning, find what they enjoy, find what they are good at doing, be more well-rounded, and increase interests.

Table B7. When thinking about graduating from college, what concerns come to mind?

Key ideas from Table B7: Students are concerned about facing what is ahead, making decisions about jobs/graduate school, anxiety about responsibility, money management, being able to afford the cost of living, fear of the unknown, and having enough money to support themselves and enjoy life (see Fig, 3).

Table B8. What do you think the university could do to better prepare students for the transition into life after college?
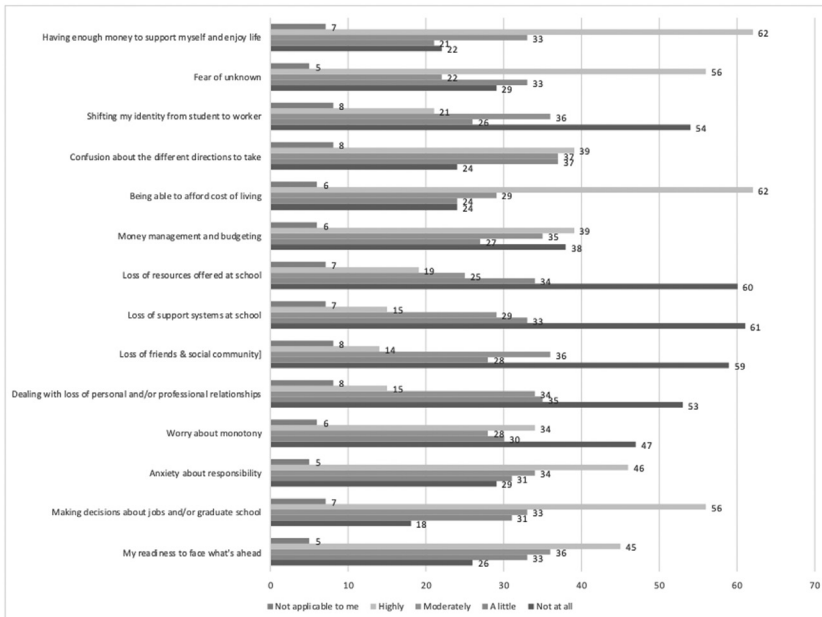

Fig. 3. When Thinking About Graduating from College, What Concerns Come to Mind? *Note*: This bar graph shows the number of students who selected each choice and the strength of each choice.

Key ideas from Table B8: Students suggested more applied courses, mentoring, alumni connections, connections to professors with real life experience, an exit year course, and resources for seniors.

Table B9. How well has your college experience prepared you for: (developing a career; graduate school; and achieving personal goals)?

Key ideas from Table B9: The majority of the students feel prepared for a career, graduate school, and achieving personal goals.

Table B10. What are you expecting to do once you graduate (check all that apply)?

Key ideas from Table B10: The great majority of the students have either secured employment or will be seeking employment, followed by those interested in graduate school.

Table B11. Prior to taking this survey, how much had you thought about the transition to life after college?

Key ideas from Table B11: Before taking this survey, most of the students had thought a lot about the transition to life after college (see Fig. 4).
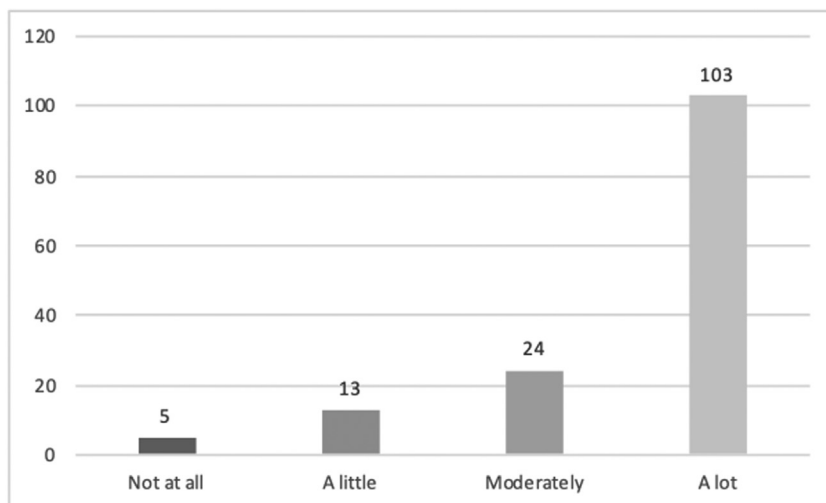
Fig. 4.   Prior to Taking This Survey, How Much Had You Thought About the Transition to the Life After College? *Note*: This bar graph shows the number of students who selected each choice.

LILAC has been taught for five semesters. With student consent for participa-tion, at the end of each semester, the last class session is devoted to conduct-ing a focus group with the students who took the course. Each group ran for approximately 1.5 hours and was conducted by a researcher who was not a course instructor.

Focus groups were conducted at the end of Spring 2019, Fall 2019, Spring 2020, and Spring 2021 (Spring 2021 data are not included here). The Spring 2020 session was conducted on Zoom. Data were gathered by posing questions and allowing students to discuss responses. Student statements and comments were documented on a flip chart in the front of the room, visible to all. After each ques-tion was exhausted, "member checking" was employed to review the response and ensure validity of the documentation. The data were collapsed across the three focus groups (Total $N = 28$; May 2019 = 9; December 2019 = 8; May 2020 = 11; see Appendix C for Table C12, summary of focus group findings).

Lilac Focus Groups: Data Analysis Summary

Key ideas from the focus group responses overall. We note many common themes across all groups. As you would expect, not everyone agrees on what worked and what did not work. Some of the comments that influenced our shaping the course were as follows:

Student Feedback on Assignments and Classroom Activities   AQ2

- Too many readings, too long, too little time to discuss in class – maybe use more podcasts or TED talks instead of long readings.
- Open class discussion to reflect.
- Transition plan made me focus on things I didn't want to.
- Increase interactive activities – most engaging discussions were personal.
- Helpful assignments: autobiography, letter to future self, journals, and transi-tion plan.
- Journals helped with stress to get it out there and stop internalizing – made it less scary – instructor comments meaningful.
- I wish we could have talked more about hands-on budgeting.

Student Feedback on Course Culture

- Sense of community/bonding around shared issues.
- More about the professors teaching the course.

Student Feedback on How the Course Affected Them

- What would you tell a friend who is thinking of taking the course? The course is about you; good way to exit senior year – fall is best time to take it.
- Before and after taking the course: Before it was high stress/anxiety; now it is low stress/anxiety.

- How can the university better help students: LILAC should be institutional-ized as a mandatory core requirement in senior year.
- You find yourself in the elevator with the university president. He asks you what you learned in this course. What would you tell him: I learned about myself; what I want after college; how to find uses for my degree; the impor-tance of self-reflection and introspection in planning ahead; resources avail-able; and invest more in courses like this with small groups to engage in the transition planning process.

LILAC: CREATING SPACE TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM

Armed with what we learned from the survey and focus groups, we designed our course and over the five iterations of offering it, we have shaped it with the help of our students' feedback. The instructional design principles that we applied emerged as we interacted with our classes. An overriding principle that we set for ourselves was for the course to work with the student in helping him/her prepare for life after college as opposed to requiring the student to meet our demands. We engaged our students by having them work on a real problem of interest to them, preparing for life after college. We included the student in an open view of what we were trying to do. We made discussion a central method of interaction with a question of the day (QOTD) each week, and questions derived from course readings, all of which related to their futures. We provided a steady stream of feedback on journal entries and other written assignments.

In LILAC students work toward a plan that enables a smooth post-college transition. Throughout LILAC, students take an active role in thinking through important decisions as they simultaneously confront more of the nuanced and confounding ethical, philosophical, emotional, and social realities of the transi-tion. The student was encouraged to consider their own ways of thinking (meta-cognition) and to seek meaning and purpose in their lives (constructivism). We did our best to limit lecturing and used brief lectures only to prime the pump for discussion. We sought to ignite wonder, not closure. This course is not sim-ply about finding and securing employment. By choosing this elective course, students at some level are anticipating – and fearing – the unfamiliar territory ahead. Students enroll in LILAC to tend to these issues. The anticipatory stress of how to manage the planning process for post-college life fully engages student attention and emotions, impacting decision-making skill. LILAC invites students to reflect on and share their fears, self-doubts, ideas, successes, disappointments, and concerns head on, including their values, views of success and happiness, ideas about meaningful work, ethical considerations, and intuitive and delibera-tive decision making. Students are not expected to have ready answers – LILAC is designed to provide a place for students to pose curious questions, learn from and support each other, hear about the instructors'(imperfect) journeys, and begin to understand how life decisions unfold and take form.

The LILAC classroom itself is a community consisting of students and fac-ulty, with atypical qualities. It is taught as a seminar to ensure the environment

is intimate, supportive, caring, and conducive to deep reflection. Students come to know each other and faculty well in this context. Employing an open, conversational, relational approach in the classroom creates an accepting environment where unpolished ideas, life stories, and feelings can be readily explored. The instructors model honesty about their personhood, setting aside the image of the perfectly poised and collected professor. The humanity of the professors sets the stage for self-disclosure and the development of insights that are greatly needed for people facing major life transitions – and something that has been glaringly absent on most college campuses. Students are given the option to take the course on a pass/fail grading basis. At the end of the course, they recommend their grade for participation. This decision was part of our wanting to build a culture of community, not hierarchy. It is no wonder that students to date have responded very positively to LILAC. They have been highly engaged in a self-exploratory process, deeply committed to authentic participation in discussions and by the end of the course they report increased confidence and diminished anxiety about post-graduation decisions. They leave the course saying that LILAC was life changing and should be required for all students.

A number of assignments are used as tools to meet the overarching aim of the course which is to reflect on the past to understand the present and integrate that into the future. To stimulate that process at the outset of the course, an autobiography assignment calls upon students to examine their past, to bring to mind the evolution of their beliefs, life milestones, family influences, turning points, and other experiences in life that serve as identity building blocks. On the first day of our course, we ask students to consider signing a consent form to allow us to use course derived, unidentified data, for example, assignments and surveys. Most of our students have consented.

The autobiography is one of the major assignments of the semester, rated at the same point value as the Personal Transition Guide – described later – that comes at the end of the course. It is a foundational document of the course. First, it constitutes a base-line study of each student's self-perceived status at the threshold of graduation – the how I got to here factor. Second, by its nature as an assignment submitted for credit, it validates the practice of self-reflection as a learning activity – something few undergraduates encounter in major and core curriculum course work (and something this course relies heavily on). Third, as the topic of class (or small group) discussion, it typically discloses details of one's personal life to an audience of strangers (and in doing so, steps beyond introduction toward acquaintance). Finally, it provides a specialized context, to revisit later, for subsequent topics of discussion: values, decision making, and ethical issues.

The autobiography assignment is the bedrock of subsequent assignments, accessing who they are now and the implications of this awareness for their post-graduation identity, ultimately culminating in a Personal Transition Guide at semester's end. Weekly journal entries are also required, as private communication between the student and them self and the student and instructors, with content generated by the students. Carefully curated readings, videos, and films are selected to stimulate class discussions about large life questions. Each class

session begins with the QOTD and students are asked to deliberate and discuss responses.

At our first class meeting we ask students to respond to this prompt:

Think about this, it is our first Question of The Day. What are four or so difficult decisions you will face in connection with graduating? Prepare to discuss in the next class.

At each succeeding class meeting, we ask a QOTD. At a subsequent meeting we ask, "With regard to the four difficult decisions you will face in connection with graduating, why are they difficult?" These questions signal to the students from the very start of the course that they are expected to contribute to discussion, they are expected to be active participants, and they need to put on the table the decisions that they believe they need to deal with.

Closely connected to the QOTD is weekly journal writing. The instructions for writing in the journal emphasize that the journal is a place to pour out whatever is on your mind, to write freely about your concerns. For instance:

- Just open to the journal and write about whatever is on your mind.
- What have I learned this week about myself?
- What have I learned this week about my emotional responses to graduating?
- What were your most optimistic moments in thinking about graduating and what were your most pessimistic moments this week?
- What was the most significant insight into graduating that I got this week?
- What do I feel I made the most progress on this week?
- What do I feel most dissatisfied with as I look ahead to graduation?
- What did you find most valuable from class this week?
- What did you find most valuable from any readings that you did this week?
- Did any events occur to you this week that you think made a difference in your journey to graduation?

Students write in the journal feature of our online course environment, Brightspace. The journal is not public – only the individual student and the instructors have access to it. An instructor may comment in the journal on a student's entry. The journal assignment is another opportunity for the student to inspect ideas that have been playing beneath the surface. One student commented about the journal that sometimes she/he finds out what they are thinking by writing in the journal. It is a place for students to share private thoughts with them self and the instructor, and a place where faculty can enter into a private conversation with the student. It is often a way for the instructor to build the relationship with the student and to be supportive. It is a very important part of the course.

Another example of an assignment that stimulates self-reflection, s e lf-disclosing, deliberation, and connecting to how we live our lives is the "Letter to Yourself." Here is the assignment.

Instructions:

A Letter to Yourself. Given what you have uncovered as you wrote your autobiography, write a letter to your younger self. We will put this letter in a time

machine and send it backwards in time, addressed to you. In order to do this, we need to know what day you want it delivered on, so pick a day early enough so that when your younger self reads this letter they will be able to do something constructive with the wise advice and observations that it will contain. What should you write in this letter? You may want to encourage the reader with news of all of the wonderful things they will experience. You may want to advise the reader to do more of certain things and less of others. You may want to ask your reader to make certain decisions differently. You may want to warn the reader about some upcoming events and give some advice on how to make decisions concerning them. But you know you best, so you will know what to write better than this assignment description can possibly surmise. Bear in mind, as you write this letter, if you advise your reader to change in significant ways your current self will reap the harvest of these changes. There may be unintended consequences. Have fun!

A Few Excerpts from Student Letters to Their Younger Self

Stay brave – stay gentle, don't let hurt make you hard.

Time is going to move by slowly. This is going to mess with your head.

Stop thinking everyone hates you. You're pretty awesome, and you'll know that by the time you're me.

The Personal Transition Guide

The decision to allow the students to design their own assignment meant that submissions were not strictly comparable, complicating their use for course research. But it demonstrated our respect for the students and our commitment to the notion that the course was to help them not test them on our questions. It transferred the responsibility for relevance from the instructor to the student – it was up to them to come up with a valuable result for themselves. The best submissions took this to heart.

The actual submissions were mixed: some were still obviously done at the last minute, covering very short periods of time, often as a to-do list, with little insight as to how the learning outcomes had affected the author. But some were superb, very thorough in the short term, but also recognizing that what they had learned in the course and in doing the assignment was applicable in the very long term. The best recognized that they had themselves created a methodology and a process for thinking through a difficult transition. This in the middle of a pandemic that exemplified uncertainty and anxiety. We feel confident that content and activities in the current formulation much more successfully reflect Rodden's (1993) observation that education should speak more directly to "how people live their lives."

A Thread Running Through the Course

You can see that there is a thread running through the course, in assignments, in class discussions, readings, and videos that all call for reflection. In as many ways

as possible, the course is designed to find the decision points that contribute to the transition out of college and into life after graduation. We do our best to stick to the idea that this course is for the students to use to prepare for the transition out of college. In other words, it builds upon their motivation to expand. The purpose of all LILAC assignments is to stimulate thoughtful self-reflection and sharing of perspectives with others in classroom discussions.

And of course, we witnessed how the students responded to the course. Using a brief pre- and post-course survey, the main thing that we were told is that by the end of the course the students felt much calmer about their impending transition. Our students were deeply immersed in planning their transition. Student feedback and our own observations make it absolutely clear that the course is life altering. We announce that we have perpetual office hours. Well after the course ends, we often hear from our students telling us how they are doing. That in itself speaks to the emotional bonds created in the course, the need it fills and its effectiveness.

What students might gain from this course was stated well by a traditional college age student at the end of our course:

> At a time in life when it would have been very easy for me to feel isolated and alone in my struggles, these professors did not try to solve my problems for me, but they held space for me and helped me to understand that it was okay to feel whatever I was feeling. They let me know that they had been there, too. I felt overwhelmingly supported throughout this course. I hope juniors and seniors will always have the ability to take this course or another course of this nature because not only do I believe it is helpful, but I believe it is absolutely necessary.

TEACHING DECISIONS

We bumped into a number of conceptual tugs of war pulling us in different directions, for instance, nuts and bolts versus socio-emotional factors. Others include content versus process in the form of standard academic readings and lecture versus emphasis on discussion, giving reticent students room versus pushing them to speak up, lecturing versus discussing, public versus private, short term planning versus long term planning, theoretical/philosophical versus practical, and perhaps more. The decision to include, in addition to the nuts and bolts, the emotional aspects of the transition, placed significant constraints on the content and process of the course. Of the two, the easier component to deal with was the nuts and bolts. In thinking about this tug between providing information and dealing with emotions, we introduced ideas based on social intuition theory (Haidt, 2001, 2006; Mercier & Sperber, 2011, 2017; Shedletsky, 2021), the idea that emotion is integral to reasoning and cannot be ignored if we are to understand how humans think. According to social intuition theory, gut feelings or intuitions play a major role in decision making. We could invite content experts to tell our students how to build their digital presence in an online world using things like LinkedIn; we could invite a panel of alumni to tell about their journeys from college to the present; we could invite a financial advisor to explain how personal finance works. She/he could tell our students what to do and what not to do. All good. All useful. All highly recommended for teaching this course, and we did all these things.

But the new ground for all of us and the tougher component to activate was the emotion laden one. Students come into the course with some degree of knowing that they are going to experience a major change in life. To a good extent, while there is knowing, there seems to be a hazed over knowing, with a good deal of anxiety, a bitter-sweet reaching the goal of graduation, the end of a familiar road and the start on an unfamiliar road. Here is a second tug of war between knowing and facing issues directly and hiding behind not facing and not knowing. Eyal and Li (2020), in their insightful book, *Indistractable: How to Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life*, highlights this phenomenon of avoiding thinking about tough questions. He writes:

> Only by setting aside specific times in our schedules for traction (the actions that draw us toward what we want in life) can we turn our backs on distraction. In order to live our values in each of these domains, we must reserve time in our schedules to do so. Without planning ahead, it's impossible even to tell the difference between traction and distraction. (p. 62)

And the domains he speaks of refer to yourself, relationships and work. We agree.

Having taught the course five times now, we continue to work and rework this pull between giving information and drawing it out of our students, between bringing into the light and allowing our students to move at their pace, between assigning content in the form of academic readings and offering brief stimuli to try to foster discussion, between avoiding tough questions and confronting them.

In a wonderfully lucid essay about teaching and learning and living, John Rodden (1993) wrote:

> The word "instruction" is revealing and well-chosen. To educate (educare) is to "draw out" students to grapple with basic questions, to make the material come alive; to instruct (instruere) is to "build in" data and methodologies, which closes down questions and furnishes packaged answers. Here again is the assumption that university teaching, even undergraduate teaching, has nothing to do with how people lead their lives, that it's all a matter of "information transmission" and "professional training." No wonder our students are alienated! No wonder many of them choose courses according to the time of day, read only the Cliff's Notes, and worry chiefly about their "credit hours," for when they reach the magical number they'll be released. No wonder they hearken to sports heroes and rock stars, who at least engage young people on issues of emotional and even spiritual depth in their lives, who at least remind them: You're alive! The outrage is that the academy rather like the Church, invariably pretends to uphold a higher ideal. (p. 130)

Some students are reticent (Daly, McCroskey, Ayres, Hopf, & Ayres, 1997). This can make it challenging for a course built upon discussion, even frustrating at times. Students differ significantly (sometimes dramatically) in their ability and willingness to speak in discussion and their comfort level with the discussion of both their own and others' personally sensitive information. At times we felt a temptation to be coercive, but we avoided this because not only does it stress the student being coerced, but it stresses all of the other students as well. We also felt a counterbalancing desire: to protect the student's privacy and their prerogative not to participate. (More accurately, we should substitute "speak" for participate. Reticent students can participate even when they don't speak.) You cannot ignore this inevitable dynamic.

McCroskey, Richmond, and McCroskey (2002) wrote this about dealing with reticent or communication apprehensive students:

> Teachers (K-college) who are not prepared to deal with these students are most likely to engage in behaviors which have been found to increase the problems these students face. The lay orientation of most people who have not studied the impact of these communication traits is to try to help the student by either encouraging or requiring increased student participation or giving presentations in the classroom. These are precisely the worst things which can be done, because these teacher behaviors directly lead to increased, rather than decreased, problems for their students. (pp. 386–387)

It is good to remember that these students do not choose their particular classroom style, but rather are victims of that style. We chose to address this inequity by introducing a continuing assignment: The Personal Journal. This is a completely private online posting designed not for deep reflection but for thoughts of the moment. Although this assignment is not completely successful in ameliorating the inequity of low participation, it does encourage some to comment on their personal experiences and the classroom experience. In fact, some of their postings showed evidence of a significant appreciation of what we were trying to do, and even an element of guilt that they were not living up to "our expectations" of participation. We suggested that students set their own goals for participation and we gently reminded them that participating in the work environment will be expected and is, if for no other reason, a good reason to work on it in a safe environment at their own pace.

Class often started slowly, tempting the instructors to transition to content-focused lecturing. This is when we decided to start off with a QOTD. Starting this way got us right into discussion mode and kept us from lecturing. At the end of most classes we raised a question to think about for our next class.

This stratagem worked well. Discussion of the QOTD sometimes extended for half an hour, delightfully disrupting our schedule for the class. Not only did this energize the students, but it seemed to help define a routine for the class; a kind of familiar pattern. These discussions were not just diverting: some were very substantive and productive and would engage even the reticent students. Not all instructors are equally comfortable with what one professor called "delightful disruption."

CLOSING REMARKS

The topic of "change" is central to our conception of this course. Change is driven by the following:

- Environmental change, typified by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Stylistic change, typified by the selection of two "teachers of record" for each semester (two of whom get paid for teaching the course each semester and two of us take part as we wish).
- Change driven by the composition of the students in the class.

- Change driven by data – the readings, assignments, journals, and focus group results – that represents learning from our students how best to deliver the course.
- Importantly, change to evolve the course. This desire for change is a striking feature of the mindset of all four of us – we seek change, not just because it is forced upon us, but because we believe that the course should evolve through experimentation.

Helping the Student Change

Lewin (1947) has formulated an influential theory of change, with the following features:

- The necessity of "unfreezing" before change is possible.
- The importance of a "liminal" period with an appropriate duration during which change is being assimilated.
- The importance of context when "refreezing" after change.

It may seem odd to characterize a college student as "frozen" in his or her way of thinking about their life, but we have found that even graduating seniors in our course are initially unwilling to examine themselves and are thus prevented from constructive change even as they face the dramatic transition forced on them by graduation.

The next step in unfreezing is the autobiography writing assignment. We review the written autobiographies in small groups which then "report out" to the class as a whole. It is often a powerful moment. Each of the teachers of record also present their own autobiographies verbally, to equalize their role with the students. These are also powerful moments, both for the students and for the teachers.

We have an important additional goal: to underline the assertion that "You are not alone" in the broadest possible sense. We have often observed students confessing that they felt ashamed of their anxieties, be they financial, intellectual, or emotional; their inability to confront change, and their self-conceived deviation from normality. The autobiography is key to supporting the assertion, as are the teachers' autobiographies and, later in the course, the alumni panel.

With the autobiographies, the students' liminal periods commence. Note that students who do not take the class may find their liminal period drastically shortened: they have virtually no time at all to leave their student identity behind and assume their post-graduation identity. The effects of this stunted liminal period may be felt for some time after graduation, affecting their ability to adapt to the post-graduation environment.

TAKE AWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

This course works. We have not taught it with just one teacher so we cannot say how that will go, but it certainly should not be counted out. As is, the course is

likely to meet with a certain amount of resistance from administrators for several possible reasons. It is expensive to run. Although it remains an open question whether or not providing this sort of course would attract more students to a university. With two paid faculty and a limit of fifteen students, it may seem less attractive from an economic point of view. Additionally, the course needs to find a good home. Should it reside in individual departments, in a CORE curriculum, in a university-wide institute? Should it be teamed up with an entry-level course? These questions remain unanswered. The answers likely depend upon the specific university. But institutions of higher education need to take seriously why this course works. It serves a body of needs, needs students have, needs employers have, needs of the society, and needs of the institution. It provides support to underserved individuals. It is the responsibility of institutions of higher education to serve these populations and we believe that it is to the advantage of the institution to do this. It is a net plus.

It will be important to develop a community of people interested in a course like LILAC, a community of practice. We need to work on scalability. A next step that we propose is to hold a symposium to hear from the stake holders, from faculty who are interested in this course, some who have taught a related course, some who would be interested in hearing more, from students, student support staff, administrators who could make the case for the value and the cost of such a course and for the question of where to place the course in the curriculum. Let's work together (lenny@maine.edu).

NOTE

1. Thanks to Jo Temah Gabrielski for her work on the tables and the figures for this chapter.

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APPENDIX A[1]: SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHICS

Table A1. Demographics.

	19–22	23–29	30–39	40–49	50+		
Age	73	35	21	10	6		
Gender	Female 111	Male 29	Other Than 4				
Ethnicity Race	White/Caucasian 124	Other Than 17	N/A 3				
Relationship Status	Single 80	Domestic Partner 23	Married 27	Divorced 5	NA 10		
Year in School	Other 5	Senior 73	Junior 67				
First Gen	No 93	Yes 52					
Grad Year	2018 29	2019 66	2020 42	Later 8			
Residence	Off Campus Commuter 123	On Campus 22					
Commute Time	0–15 min 40	16–30 min 50	31–45 min 21	45–60 min 26	61+ min 8		
Class Type	Live 110	Mix 22	Online 13				
Living Situation	Alone 10	Domestic Partner 42	Parents 36	Friends 9	Other 21	Other Family 11	Roommates 16
Enrollment Status	Full 123	Part 22					
SES	N/A 2	Low 35	Mid 98	High 10			
Experience	N/A 60	Internship 22	Community Service 8	Multiple 45	Service Learning 6	Study Abroad 4	
Work	Work Study 15	Campus Non WS 11	Off Campus Work 74	Multiple 33	Unemployed 12		

Table A1. (*Continued*)

Age	19–22	23–29	30–39	40–49	50+	
USM Attendance	Less 6 months	6–12 months	1–2 years	2–4 years	4–6 years	6+
	5	17	25	78	12	8
Student Status	Traditional (18–24)	Non-Trad (25–35)	Non-Trad (36–45)	Non-Trad (46+)		
	91	32	11	11		
Veteran Status	No	Yes				
	138	7				
Parental Status	No	Yes				
	122	23				
Dependents NC	No	Yes				
	136	9				
GPA	2–2.5	2.6–3	3–3.5	3.6–4		
	4	9	62	67		

APPENDIX B: TABLES OF SURVEY QUESTIONS AND DATA

Table B2.   Do You Feel You Have Been Successful in College? [Success in College].

Not at all	A little	Moderately	Highly	Not sure
1	4	69	69	2

Table B3.   In Thinking About Life After College, How Important Are the Following to Your Ideas About Success?

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Highly	Not applicable to me
[Making money]	0	10	59	76	0
[Applying my education]	2	7	30	105	1
[Ability to travel]	15	23	49	57	1
[Being self-sufficient]	1	1	17	126	0
[Social class status and mobility]	16	29	65	32	3
[Being happy]	0	0	6	138	1
[Satisfaction with career]	0	0	12	132	1
[Being able to give back to the community]	1	12	47	84	1
[Financial security]	1	2	28	113	1
[Building a career]	2	10	32	98	3
[Establishing a family]	27	14	30	66	8

Table B4.   How Important Are the Following as You Think of How Your College Experience Prepares You for Success?

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Highly	Not applicable to me
[Building my confidence]	7	14	46	78	0
[Receiving support and knowledge from professors]	1	15	37	92	0
[Studying abroad opportunities]	40	36	19	18	32
[Learning to self-promote]	7	26	45	65	2
[Learning to value my opinion]	9	16	41	79	0
[Internship opportunities]	10	16	41	61	17
[Helping me to find my own voice]	10	22	42	70	1
[Interacting with others in the classroom]	6	25	59	55	0
[Relationship with professors and advisor]	4	14	54	73	0
[Increased motivation]	9	14	46	75	1
[Building coping skills to overcome adversity and challenges]	7	21	38	77	2
[Research assistantship]	29	29	32	32	23

Table B5. What Have Been Barriers to Feeling Prepared for Success?

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Highly	Not applicable to me
[Personal stress]	6	18	48	73	0
[Fear of unknown]	29	22	43	51	0
[Lack of confidence]	31	37	38	39	0
[Social Isolation]	49	38	35	21	2
[Money struggles]	20	37	33	54	1
[Having a job outside of school]	21	20	43	53	8
[Lack of support and engagement of faculty]	56	40	31	15	3
[Lack of opportunity for engaging with peers outside of class]	54	42	29	20	0
[Lack of real-world experience outside of the classroom]	50	35	22	36	2
[Family not supportive of my educational pursuits]	115	9	9	5	7
[Health problems]	78	24	22	12	9
[Accruing student loan debt]	41	29	31	40	4
[Family problems]	69	37	20	12	7
[Housing instability]	95	22	11	7	10

Table B6. In What Ways Has College Influenced You?

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Highly	Not applicable
[I am more mature]	16	22	35	66	5
[I have a broader world view]	9	18	37	77	3
[I have increased independence]	18	19	23	78	6
[I feel more in charge of my life]	12	26	33	72	1
[I increased my love of learning]	10	24	40	67	3
[I discovered what I enjoy]	7	25	41	69	1
[I discovered I am capable of adapting]	9	20	39	74	2
[I discovered what I am good at doing]	4	37	42	57	4
[I am more well-rounded]	9	21	39	75	1
[I have more expansive interests]	17	24	48	53	2
[I feel more competent to achieve my goals]	12	17	47	66	1
[I improved my social skills]	22	30	45	42	5
[I am a better critical thinker]	5	16	50	73	1
[I am more confident overall]	10	28	45	61	1

Table B7. When Thinking About Graduating from College, What Concerns Come to Mind?

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Highly	Not applicable to me
[My readiness to face what's ahead]	26	33	36	45	5
[Making decisions about jobs and/or graduate school]	18	31	33	56	7
[Anxiety about responsibility]	29	31	34	46	5
[Worry about monotony]	47	30	28	34	6
[Dealing with loss of personal and/ or professional relationships]	53	35	34	15	8
[Loss of friends & social community]	59	28	36	14	8
[Loss of support systems at school]	61	33	29	15	7
[Loss of resources offered at school]	60	34	25	19	7
[Money management and budgeting]	38	27	35	39	6
[Being able to afford cost of living]	24	24	29	62	6
[Confusion about the different directions to take]	24	37	37	39	8
[Shifting my identity from student to worker]	54	26	36	21	8
[Fear of unknown]	29	33	22	56	5
[Having enough money to support myself and enjoy life]	22	21	33	62	7

Table B8. What Do You Think the University Could Do to Better Prepare Students for the Transition into Life after College?

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Highly	Not applicable to me
[Applied courses that matter in the real world]	8	22	30	82	3
[Build mentoring system with faculty in our fields]	9	19	42	73	2
[Fostering alumni connections]	21	29	47	42	6
[Keeping students involved at USM after graduation]	25	40	39	35	6
[Maintain connections to professors with real-world experience]	12	20	48	63	2
[Hosting job fairs]	21	35	39	41	9
["Exit year course experience" to support the students to make a successful transition]	19	24	45	54	3
[More resources for the senior student]	12	21	37	70	5
[More organized social events for alumni]	38	33	34	33	7

Table B9. How Well Has Your College Experience Prepared You For:

	Not at all	Not very well	Don't know	Moderately well	Very well	Extremely well
[Developing a career]	4	21	3	76	27	14
[Pursuing graduate study]	16	22	9	46	35	17
[Achieving personal goals (e.g., managing my life, being a good citizen, self-improvement, self-care, etc.)]	6	25	6	47	36	25

Table B10. What Are You Expecting to Do Once You Graduate (Check All That Apply)?

	(Check All That Apply)
Applying to graduate school	63
Accepted to graduate school	26
Secured employment in my field	55
Seeking employment in my field	93
Seeking any employment	36
Travel	34
None of these	2
Service or volunteer work	27
"Gap" year	17

Table B11. Prior to Taking This Survey, How Much Had You Thought About the Transition to Life after College?

	[Thought about transition]
A lot	103
A little	13
Moderately	24
Not at all	5

APPENDIX C: SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Table C12. Focus Group Findings.

Focus Group Questions	Summary Categories	Examples
1. For you, what was the most helpful aspect of this course in preparation for life after college?	• Discussing, reading and learning from others in class and small groups • Interpersonal connection • Open class discussions for sharing common concerns and uncertainties about transition • Self-reflection • Facilitated introspection • Focus on identity and values • Understanding resilience • Thinking about the "why" of decision making • Perfection is not goal • Transition planning • Guest speakers: Alumni panel, Career Hub and Financial advisor • Instructors sharing their mistakes • "Holding Space" to seek own answers • Instructors really care • Journaling with instructor feedback • Transition plan • Small group work in class	• Sharing anxieties about transition with others • Learning I am not alone in struggling – not everyone knows what they want • Sense of community/bonding around shared issues • Autobiography and journal assignments increased self-reflection and introspection • Open class discussion to reflect • Learning from alumni • Readings help to stimulate thinking about important issues • Learned how I got from point A to B • Identity, values, and resilience exercises – usually don't think about these things • Instructors "holding space" for exploration versus being directive • Instructors offer personalized, thoughtful journal feedback – emotional connection • Transition plan made me focus on things I didn't want to
a. Least helpful?	• Reading volume • Employee and alumni profile assignments • Financial discussion topics need change • Journal • Two-part autobiography – only one needed • Structure of transition plan structure • Siddhartha • Need different organization on Blackboard • When there were lectures	• Too many readings, too long, too little time to discuss in class – maybe use more podcasts or TED talks instead of long readings • Limited number of pages to read each week or break up longer readings over weeks • Financial discussion should focus on investing modest amounts of money and budget management • The longer autobiography assignment more helpful than shorter one • Siddhartha – about privileged about – need more modern story • More structure for transition plan assignment • Journal tied to "question of the day" (QOD) • Increase interactive activities – most engaging discussions were personal

Table C12.   (*Continued*)

Focus Group Questions	Summary Categories	Examples
2. Which readings, assignments or films were most meaningful or beneficial to you and why?	• Assignments: Autobiography, Letter to Future Self, journals, and transition plan • In Class Exercises: identity and resilience • Readings: Peppercorn article on happiness, Haidt article, comparing college and workplace, Article on first 30 days of job, Siddhartha, Use of ONet • Films: Modern Times	• Autobiography was cool to go back and see where I've been and think about graduating from college • Letter to Future Self helped guide transition plan • Journals helped with stress to get it out there and stop internalizing – made it less scary – instructor comments meaningful
a. Least meaningful or beneficial?	• Journal • Letter to past self	• I'm not good at journaling – not my style – use QOD as guide • Letter to past self less helpful than one to future self
3. Complete the following sentence and discuss: In thinking back on this courses, I wish we could have talked about_____.	• Journey from high school to present • Budgeting • Interviewing • More on Career hub at USM • Updating resumes • More on starting small business • More on financial planning • Mental health and stress management over lifespan in real world • Graduate school decision making • More about the professors teaching the course	• How we are the same and different from high school • Hands on budgeting workshop • Mock interviewing exercise in class with instructor feedback • Require everyone to meet with Career hub • Assign resume and cover letter • How to invest and plan for retirement • Maintaining emotional stability over time • Professors should do present as a panel about their lives and transitions • Would like 1:1 conferences with professors
4. What would you change about the organization of this course?	• Career Hub and financial presentation should be earlier • Organization of class folders on Blackboard • Increase discussion of completed Transition Plans • Outline/structure for Transition plan • Class breaks during each session	• Career hub and financial planning earlier would give up time to make appointments to explore • Folders should have all materials (readings, assignments, etc.) for the week they are due, not in the folder the week before.
5. What would you tell a friend who is considering taking this course?	• Strongly recommend this course • Unique, personal class • Heavy focus on building relationships, reflection, sharing of self, networking and working on yourself • Prepares you for real world unlike in your major • Course subject: YOU • You get out what you put in • Engaging instructors • Small seminar = close knit group • Raises questions about plans for post-graduation	• Talk to your advisor and make it a senior seminar • Good way to exit senior year – fall is best time to take it • You will get a lot out of it • Relaxed class, in a good way • It is a good push to look at your future • This might make you re-think things that you were sure of before taking it

Table C12. (*Continued*)

Focus Group Questions	Summary Categories	Examples
6. How does your thinking about the coming transition to life after college now compare to your thinking at the beginning of the semester?	• Increased comfort with inherent uncertainty of transition • Lowered anxiety about transition • Answers unclear but know what must be considered • Improved job search ideas • Increased knowledge of personal finance • More confident about what's ahead • Learned to navigate stressors • Better knowledge of resources • Not alone • Seeing the success of others • Trust the process • Transition plan changed positively during course	• Before I was jumping out of a plane – I'm still jumping out but I have a parachute • Its ok not to know what lies ahead • Before it was high stress/anxiety; now it is low stress/anxiety • I was wandering not knowing what to do but I am now more confident • I was scared and confused, not knowing what to do/where to go, I am now settled down and prioritized the preciously confusing questions • Introduced me to what I need to think about as graduation approaches – learned to navigate stressors • Feel better knowing others are in the same boat • Things may not work out as planned but it will work out • Transition plan changed because of mindset shift – started questioning and that's a positive thing
7. How could USM better help students prepare for life after college?	• Make COR400 required • "Bookend" courses: EYE and COR 400 • Increase marketing of resources available to students • More real-world experience • Increase ways to get students thinking about graduation early on	• Should be institutionalized as a mandatory core requirement in senior year for the university of "everyone" • This class should always be offered • EYE should focus more on preparing students to make most of college and plan for what's ahead • Embed real-world volunteer work in more courses • Need better marketing of networking events to students • LILAC is great but it happens late • Freshman should be planning internships • Students who don't do internships are at a disadvantage

Table C12.   (*Continued*)

Focus Group Questions	Summary Categories	Examples
8. You find yourself alone in the elevator with President Glenn Cummings and you tell him you are taking COR400. He asks you to tell him what you learned in the course. You have just a minute to talk – what would you say?	• Learned: About myself; What I want after college; How to find uses for my degree; The importance of self-reflection and introspection in planning ahead; Resources available • Increased: My confidence, resilience and capacity for building relationships • Invest more in courses like this with small groups to engage in the transition planning process • Students need to be taught about starting a career • Open communication and connection about the college transition • To make an effective Transition Plan • The connection between the personal realm and post-graduation planning process	• Great course for commuter students for social connection and support • Didn't consider how helpful introspection is in planning ahead – how I got here, where I am going and how to manage that • Confidence builder – exposure to risk/resilience and that we need to be adaptable in life after college • Learned to be more introspective – deeper learning to bring into the future. • USM should invest more in courses like this – surprised it isn't offered more. • Benefitted from open communication and connection through the transition from college

Note. $N = 28$.

AUTHOR QUERIES

AQ1:   Per style, only 6–10 keywords are required. Please delete the remaining keywords.
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