

# Success in First-Year University: A Survival Guide For International and ESL Students

Edited by Laura Taylor, Stacey Platt and Joanna Mackie

University of Toronto Mississauga: Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre, in partnership with  
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## Introduction

Welcome to a new chapter in your life, not just your academic life but your personal life as well. How excited you must be as you begin your first year of university! There's so much available to you. There are clubs to join, sports to play, societies to get involved with, and of course there are classes to register for, professors to meet, and studying to be done. Hooray for university life! You are finally out on your own. We bet you couldn't wait to leave your parents, family and friends behind as you embarked on this new and exciting adventure. Your new apartment is awesome, you say? Your roommate is fantastic? Perfect.

Oh, wait...so you're excited of course, but also nervous? Anxious? Shy? Unsure? Frightened? Confused? Stressed? You feel like everyone else knows what they are doing and you can't even figure out how to login to the university's wifi network? Your new apartment is cramped and has a strange smell to it? Your roommate snores? Is dirty? Seems a bit strange? Your professor talks too fast? Talks with an accent? Talks too quietly? Don't worry; we've heard it all before. We've heard the happy and excited stories, but we've also heard about the struggles. There are bound to be struggles, it's a part of life. The goal is to manage the struggles the best way that you can without getting too stressed about the whole process. University life is challenging. It's a new chapter in your life, and our goal is to help you write a happy ending.

This book has been primarily written by students. It's a compilation of stories related to experiences that current students have already gone through. Each story talks about a struggle, or it gives a piece of advice that we think you should know. Not all stories are going to apply to you, as not all situations are relevant. There will likely be struggles in your university life that aren't written about in this book (if that is the case, we would love to hear from you so we can add your story to our next edition). We wholeheartedly hope that the struggles you experience are minimal and are easily overcome, but you should know that if the struggles get to be overwhelming, there are people around to help.

With that said, we'd like to make you aware of two essential services available to you throughout your time at university. The first is the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC). The centre, which is on the third floor of the library, is able to help you with matters related to your academic life. So, if you are having difficulty listening in class, you are struggling to take efficient lecture notes, or you are finding the language of your textbook overly difficult, the RGASC can help with study skills, note-taking, or time management. If you have an essay due and you don't know where to start, the RGASC can help with brainstorming, outlining, sentence structure, or grammar. If English isn't your first language, we can help with that too. There are English language workshops and personalized appointments available.

The second service that you need to know about is the International Education Centre (IEC). Whereas the RGASC focuses on all things academic, the focus of the IEC is much more personal. In addition to fantastic programs that encourage students to overcome language barriers and meet other international students within the university community, the IEC offers drop in advising on matters relating to immigration, orientation and transition, probation and suspension, students in distress, healthcare and insurance, and other essential requirements associated with living, studying, and working in Canada. The IEC is located on the main floor of the Davis Building, room 2071.

This book is divided into two main sections: New Beginnings and Getting Organized. Students have written stories related to one of the categories contained in each section. This book is not necessarily designed to be read front-to-back (though it can be). Instead, we suggest that you pick the categories you think are most relevant to you and start there.

We wish you the very best of luck as you embark on your first year of university. We know the journey can be long/scary/stressful but it also can be wonderful/thrilling/fun. Remember that there are people who can help and support you if you need it. Welcome to first year!

## **Part 1: New Beginnings**

### **Getting Started**

#### **Let's Begin**

*Dr Laura Taylor, RGASC*

I thought I should start out this book by giving you my experience before I let the students take over and tell you theirs. My personal desire to create this book surrounded a desire to hear what students were saying about university. While I was interested in the struggles, I was also focused on how each student that contributed a story was able to overcome problems at the university level. The students who contributed this book were truly amazing; not only were they able to conquer first year, but they were brave enough to share their stories with a wider audience. For that I am overwhelmingly grateful. The following is my story.

I signed up to take intermediate calculus in my first semester at university. I signed up for 'intermediate' because there were no beginner calculus classes. I later discovered that beginner calculus is taught in high school in the United States. Being from Canada, I missed out on this content. No big deal, or so I thought.

I went to my first calculus class armed with a high powered calculator, textbook, notebook and a pencil, I found a seat and a friend that I recognized from 'welcome week'. The professor came in shortly thereafter, introduced himself and began the lecture. As he began to talk about derivatives and things that looked really complicated to me, I tentatively raised my hand and asked, 'what's a derivative?' Thinking that I was asking a totally appropriate question for week one of classes, I was surprised by his response, 'Are you retarded?!'

I cried. Right there in front of 50 of my classmates, I burst into tears before collecting my things and walking out of the classroom. I was mortified. Clearly I had done something terrible, or so I thought. Maybe I wasn't ready for university.

Standing in the hallway outside of the classroom, I was now faced with another dilemma: the lecture had only been going on for 10 minutes and it was a two-hour session. I either had to go back in, or leave. My friend from 'welcome week' eventually came out into the hallway, told me the professor was a jerk and that I should ignore him. She convinced me to go back into the class. I did, tentatively.

The professor later apologized. This doesn't excuse his behavior or the way he treated me that day; it doesn't excuse the completely inappropriate language he used, or the way he made me feel in my first week of classes. But I get it; we all have bad days and sometimes we use words and phrases that we shouldn't.

I ended up with a B in intermediate calculus. I took advantage of the extra help sessions offered by the math department to finally figure out what a derivative was (and once I realized what it was, I was in a way better position to be successful). It has now been well over a decade since I took that class, but I can still remember his words, how hurtful they were, and how they made me feel. I can still remember what the classroom looked like (and the hallway) and how awkward it all was. These weren't the memories I was expecting from university, but they are part of the experience.

Now, I am a Lecturer at the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC) at UTM. I see students all the time who are having difficulty in one area or another. While it may be difficult to get started or to stay motivated, remember that university isn't an experience that you should complete alone; it's a community and there are lots of people out there willing to help if you need it.



## **The Journey to Success**

*Shadia Zaman*

Congratulations on making it to one of the best universities, the University of Toronto – Mississauga. Success in your undergraduate university degree is the first step in getting into or becoming who you want to be in the future. University molds and transforms each and every individual and helps them to shine. University helps one to improve, and helps in bringing out the best. University challenges each student to get out of the comfort zone. For the next four years or more, this university will become your home, so embrace your journey. You have the chance to start fresh, and rebrand yourself. Don't ruin chances to become the top scholar, and use your time wisely to be a successful person.

Now let's get down to business. I understand you came here to get an education. But you also need to grow your network. I know lots of scary questions are running through your mind.

I have no friends. I am the first generation child from my family. I have no idea how to accelerate my career. I am feeling very lonely. Am I doing the right thing? Am I in the right program? Competition is everywhere. How to balance everything? How to find success in this challenging university environment when I have never had the exposure?

Relax, calm down, take a deep breath and say, I can do this. Say it to yourself, I have come so far, and I must use each and every opportunity that comes along the way to success. Imagine yourself at the top of a mountain after four years with a gold medal. Do you desire to be there? Do you see yourself? Always dream big. If you can dream it you can do it. Believe in yourself. Realize you are not alone in this journey, and you have the support as resources are available. All you've got to do is ask for help! Help is just around the corner.

The key to success in academics is to study something you have a passion for. Take courses that you are interested in learning about. You are more likely to enjoy the material and be more engaged in class. You will notice that getting a great grade is not that difficult if you put your heart into the course. Trust me, you can do it!

Throughout your journey at university you will get a deeper understanding of your interests, passion, and values. Having a clean transcript is necessary since both graduate schools and hiring managers would like to see it. The key to having strong transcript record is being open to change. Change your program the moment you notice you are not doing well. You have to be very open about exploring, discovering new things, and trying new things. This will provide you the opportunity to discover boundless possibilities. University is an excellent platform to make new

friends, meet new people, and grow your network. University experience allows you to develop professionalism, change your attitude, and shift perspective.

A technique I have used for success in my career includes attending workshops to familiarize myself with the school, and the services it has to offer. I worked to expand my skill set, and always sought advice from others to gain information. I was always very involved, and maintained a full course load in addition to my personal commitments. I understood my syllabus, and was organized before the start of my first lecture. I always studied daily to be on top of everything. Time management skills and learning to keep a balance is crucial to acquire throughout your journey at UTM to success.

Finding a mentor will enhance your experience as you will have the opportunity to learn lessons from others. Having a mentor is crucial as they can always provide you with valuable lessons. A mentor is always there to guide you, give you tips and tricks to climb up the ladder of success. Feel free to reach out, if you've got any questions. Just ask!

May I, Shadia Zaman, be that mentor for you?

## **University Can be Scary at First**

*Christina Vander Mey*

I may not be an international or ESL student but I know what it feels like coming into a new environment and experiencing something completely different than what I am used to. When I first arrived at the University of Toronto Mississauga, I was nervous about finding friends and finding my way around the school. But what the school had to offer and the things I tried myself made first year a good experience. Now, I can share my experiences with all those who are beginning university for the first time.

I was told that living in residence is good, especially if you are really far from home, because it gives you a chance to connect with those you live with, and there are activity nights that occur so you can meet people then as well. There are also orientation days before the school year starts that include little sessions according to your program, and tours are provided by the older students to help you feel more comfortable when school begins. I attended an orientation day known as “Welcome Day” and went to a session involving the ‘5 Ways of Well-Being’ and a session for my program. I did a tour of the school and found it really helpful, especially when arriving on the first day and actually knowing where my classes were. Something else that is helpful is a course called FYE or First Year Experience (now known as utmLaunch). Higher year students are there to answer any questions you have and help guide you. This co-curricular course is good for transitioning into university life. It gets first year students involved by having them attend events and seminars.

If you need help with finances or anything involving academics, the Office of the Registrar is there to help. Sometimes it is hard to start school and you feel uneasy with questions about how you'll manage to pay off the school tuition or what classes will benefit you. If you need to go to the Office of the Registrar in the Innovation Complex building by the bus stops, you should go early because there are many other students who need it, especially at the beginning of the year. Besides the Registrar, there are sessions before the start of school that are helpful with finance and academics.

Getting started can be hard but everywhere you look, there is always something. It is good to go to as many events as possible, whatever seems right for you. And even when there are no events happening, there are places in the school that offer a hand or advice. It is good to get involved in school activities that go on and even opportunities in the local community. Luckily, the university does a type of orientation week at the beginning of the school year called “Welcome Week” which gives you an insight about the school and all that it provides. For a whole week, they allow students to talk to higher year students about different clubs, activities, and opportunities available. There are many ways for students to get involved. The school has something for everyone, like gaming, videos, sports, archery, dancing, food, a gym, and much more. If you want to enjoy school and do things in between school work and studying, there are

days where you can do meditation to help clear your mind. There are also events that happen in the library and Student Centre throughout the year. The library has things going on every month, thanks to Student Union. There have been massages, crafts, henna, playing video games, and puppies when it is a de-stress week. If you want to get involved with the community outside of school, fairs come to the school where you can see all the different volunteer opportunities being offered. If you want to start thinking about grad school, there is fair for that. There is even a job fair and the University of Toronto Mississauga has a Career Centre that can provide more information if needed.

It is okay to be scared when coming to a new place, especially if you are from another country. But the school welcomes you with open arms and has something for everyone. There are people from many cultures and there are things that appeal to all. Different booths that pop up around the school could have something you are interested in. Everyone gets nervous but before you know it, you will feel at home. You start to learn short cuts and things you never knew when coming in. School is also something for you to explore. Not everything should be handed to you or else you cannot expand your horizons and discover yourself. University is the place of new beginnings.

## **Hit the Ground Running**

*Larissa Fleurette Ho*

I have known that ‘getting started’ on something is the hardest part of anything I set out to do. For me, at least, the beginning is always the hardest. Whenever I sit down to write an essay, create a project from scratch, or plan an event, I find myself stuck. I think a lot of people feel this way, no matter what year they’re in at any point in their undergraduate careers.

I think we don’t know where to begin partly because we don’t know what we want to end up with. We don’t know how to get from the starting point to the ending point because, well, what is the ending point? We don’t even know most of the time. What is the final product we’re trying to achieve? It’s a hard question to answer. It can be overwhelming.

I am confident when I tell you the feeling of being overwhelmed doesn’t go away after first year, because I am in my fifth year as I write this and, trust me, I know that we don’t usually know how or where to begin an assignment or essay, how to start making friends, or where to start beginning to exercise more and get fit, to say a few examples.

I found starting out at university to be overwhelming, exhausting and difficult, and I wasn’t even an international student. However, I wanted to help international students because I know the struggle as a first-year international student is huge. (My father came to UTM more than twenty years ago as an international student. I have friends who are international students. I know what the experience is like from hearing their stories.)

It’s because I know the struggle at the beginning of university for international students that I decided, in my fourth year, to volunteer at the International Education Centre at UTM as someone who would help to plan the first International Students’ Welcome Week at UTM. It’s a week full of events just for international students, but it had never been done before at UTM when I signed on to assist in the planning.

Elvis, the International Student Development Officer who was in charge of the planning, got me and nine other students to help him plan the entire week. We decided we’d have international students stay in residence on campus for that week if they wanted to, and we’d have a barbecue, a scavenger hunt on campus, breakout sessions (so we could all get to know each other), a session so that students would be able to meet their future professors, a tour of Mississauga, a tour of Toronto, a fire pit night, and a day enjoying the Canadian National Exhibition, plus many more activities throughout the week.

We planned from March to August and finally, the big week arrived.

The international students were tired because many of them had just arrived in Canada for the first time and had experienced a long plane ride to get to UTM. Myself and the other leaders who planned the week showed the international students to their rooms on residence, set up games and icebreakers so they could learn each other's names, and, over the next few days, we all toured Mississauga and then Toronto, went to lunch and dinner together, did the team challenge around campus, went to 'Academic Essentials' sessions hosted by the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre, and visited Niagara Falls and the Canadian National Exhibition, as we planned.

The international students became friends with each other and with their team leaders so quickly because we did everything together that week. They got to get their T-cards earlier than the other first-year students coming into campus that September; they got to see Niagara Falls and the CNE and Toronto, and moved into residence earlier than anyone else.

It's March now and the international students who were part of that International Welcome Week are still friends. I am going skiing with a few of these students in Toronto tomorrow! We hang out with each other during lunch and between classes, work out at the RAWC (Recreation, Athletic and Wellness Centre, otherwise known as the UTM gym), and study together in the Hazel McCallion Academic Learning Centre (otherwise known as the UTM library!)

The international students came from different parts of the world and knew different languages, customs, and religions, but I realized that most of them (most of any of us who come to university in first year) have the same expectations, hopes, dreams, and fears... We may have the same fear that we're not going to make any friends, we may hope we'll find a class we really like, we may dream of making it to the basketball team or to become an executive on a club or academic society, and we may expect a certain level of pressure from our parents to do well academically. Most of us, both international and domestic, have the same reality coming into UTM. We just don't realize that we do.

I am confident that it's hard starting out as an international student at UTM, but it doesn't have to be as difficult as you may think it will be.

There are plenty of things you can do to make it easier. First of all, try to come to the International Orientation planned by the International Education Centre. Go also to the frosh week events (hosted by the UTM Students' Union, UTMSU, which is where you get your UPass) if you feel like meeting even more people and having even more fun! The people you meet at these orientations may end up being really good friends for you. The friendships could last the whole four or five years you are at UTM.

Try not to seclude yourself – as in, stay alone and by yourself all the time. Studying is important but so is socializing. You need to stay healthy by finding a balance. All work and no play is unhealthy. Trust yourself that you know what's best for you and you know how to balance school/work and having fun or relaxing with friends.

It's important at the beginning, I think, to think of what you want the end to look like. I know that's the hardest part – the way you see yourself in four years is going to make a difference to the way you live your daily life in first year. It's important to set that long-term goal of graduating and maybe hitting a certain CGPA or committing yourself to being healthier or fitter or happier, whatever your goal may be! Set it and stick to it in the next four years. That way, you won't feel like you're not sure where you're going in life.

The international students that I met during International Welcome Week last year taught me a lot about how to make the best of the beginning of your undergraduate years. They were determined to make the best out of the beginning – which we already know is the hardest part – and they were enthusiastic about learning new things and meeting new people.

I learned a lot from them – about having a good attitude right at the beginning, feeling proud about getting into UTM, and taking advantage of everything that can help to make life during first year easier.

It was a fresh start for each of them and the way they embraced that really inspired me.

## **Becoming Involved**

### **University, Here I Come!**

*Jerry Tang*

24th of August, 2014

As I'm sitting here writing this diary entry, I am conflicted as to how to begin. So much has happened in the span of a single day! It seems as if only 16 hours ago, I was still sitting on Flight A21 from Beijing to Toronto.

Oh, wait. That's exactly what happened.

Allow me to start from the beginning.

My name is Jerry, and as of today, I am officially a student of the University of Toronto. I was born in China, where I lived for most my life. In August, I received my acceptance package in the mail, and when I showed my parents, they were ever so proud of me. They gave me this diary to write down my adventures. Typical parents.

Anyways, fast forwarding, I arrived at the Toronto Pearson Airport this afternoon and was rushed to the campus. During the ride, I looked out at the landscape flashing by and couldn't help but feel a little bit homesick. Fighting back anxiety and a sense of foreboding, I paid the taxi driver and placed my bag in my temporary room.

Oh, yeah, forgot to mention. I am enrolled in International Welcome Week. Apparently, it will help me meet new people and teach me stuff which will ease me into the university lifestyle. I dunno, sounded like fun.

Okay, back to the story, no more interruptions.

I was guided to Spiegel Hall, where most of the other international students were having dinner and bonding. Four big tables were set in the spacious room. Burgers and hot dogs were being cooked outside and a salad bar was set up next to the tables. About 30 people sat around the tables, eating, talking, and occasionally laughing. I saw a Sprite dispenser and shuffled towards



it. At this time, I was positively shaking. “How am I supposed to talk to all these people,” I thought to myself.

I downed the Sprite and filled the cup again before looking around and choosing an empty seat at the table which seemed to have the most Chinese students. The moment I sat down, the students started introducing themselves, as if they had been waiting for me to pick their table.

“What’s your name?” asked a Chinese girl.

“Jerry,” I said, trying (and failing) to sound confident, “and you?”

“Jerry, you say?” asked a guy sitting across from me. He looked a little older than the rest of the group, and had a Brazilian accent. He looked at a clipboard on the table. “Ah, yes, I see! I am Yuri, and I will be your team leader for this week! Welcome to UTM. How do you like it so far?”

“It’s great,” I said, forcing a smile, “I love how there are trees everywhere.”

This was, apparently, the right thing to say. Yuri enthusiastically launched into a speech about the history of UTM and I was left alone to match the names to faces.

25th of August, 2014

Today could have gone really bad.

First of all, it turns out that the people I saw yesterday at dinner were not the entire group. 5 more people joined us for the official welcome, which meant more names to remember. We each received a support bag that came with everything our leaders believed we needed to survive: A pencil case with stationary, cup noodles, granola bars, and two condoms. Apparently, Yuri thought of everything.

After everyone hid their support bag back in their rooms and changed (it was really hot and everyone was sweating from an earlier activity involving running around and completing tasks), lunch was served. Everyone slowly flowed into the Temporary Food Court. I got my food and was about to sit down at an empty table, when a guy from my team waved me over to his table.

I tried to remember his name, but the food was very distracting, to say the least. Suddenly, my mind fell upon a name. "Brian. Yes, that's his name," I thought. I was feeling pleased with myself until he pointed to another guy and said, "There's Brian. I'll call him over". Brian came over, and said "Hey, Tony. Hi, Jerry."

"Hi, Brian," I replied, realizing that I almost called Tony the wrong name.

Definitely dodged a bullet there.

26th of August, 2014

Today we spent the day at Square One.

By we, I mean Tony, Brian and I. Ever since the 'almost accident' yesterday, we've been hanging out. It was a lot more fun being around people instead of just being alone. Don't get me wrong, everyone I've met has been really friendly ever since I've landed. It's just better to have some people you can constantly hang out with.

It turns out we have a lot in common. We could always find something to talk about, whether it be Doctor Who, sports, or Brian's lack of knowledge about mainstream media.

I'm serious, he's never even watched Harry Potter.

It's really weird, because just by looking at us, one would never have thought we shared so many similar experiences and hobbies.

As the old saying goes, "Never judge a book by its cover".

27th August, 2014

This will be my last entry for this week. There are still two more days to go till the end of Welcome Week, but due to the sheer amount of activities, I can't write down everything. So what I am going to do is wait until the weekend to write in here. However, when I write, I will jot down everything I can remember about the week. This way, I will have time to do other stuff such as watch Netflix and study.

Ok, I'm not really sure about the second one... We'll see how it turns out.

Thinking back, I'm really glad I joined this event. Hanging out with other international students gave me the confidence I needed to face university. I now know that I'm not the only one who is facing problems, whether it be school-related or socially. I know that there are people I can count on.

## **The Fitness Frontier**

*Kaitlyn Fernandes*

On most university campuses, there exists a unique place where academics won't help you. It's a place where your mad calculus skills and your insightful opinions of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* mean absolutely nothing. In this foreign land, for at least a little while, your GPA is just an irrelevant number, and your academic standing is nonexistent. It's a place I used to fear but have now come to love, and I invite you to join me and come for a visit sometime. It's called the gym.

When I started university, I, like many other first years looking for a fresh start, made the resolution to live a more balanced lifestyle. I decided I'd start going to the gym, a simple idea that took much more effort to implement than I'd originally bargained for. My plan was to start during the first week of school and to maintain that momentum for the rest of the year. But during the first week of school so many different activities fought for my attention. There were friendships to be made and clubs to be joined and soon enough the gym was the last thing on my to-do list.

At some point every day I passed the gym, which was raised up on open space level, literally out of my reach. It was in passing that I consistently saw what appeared to be the university's most athletic putting me to shame on their treadmills and ellipticals. They were machines, so focused and fit. And then there was me, looking up at these perfect physical specimens, wondering if it was possible to be born fit.

As months passed my excuses for avoiding the gym started to become more creative. At first they were pretty reasonable: I had way too much homework to schedule time to go to the gym; but when it became evident that I definitely had some free time on my hands, my excuses evolved. I couldn't go because I didn't have the right gym clothes, or my hair looked really nice that day so it shouldn't be wasted by going to the gym and messing it up. By the end of my first semester of school, I'm embarrassed to admit that I didn't even know where the entrance to the gym was.

Over all, what overwhelmed me was the logistics of it all, rather than any unwillingness to exercise or sweat a little. Where was the entrance? Where were the change rooms? How did the machines work? Where should I start my work out? These were the questions that kept me far away from the gym and from the well-balanced lifestyle I'd craved at the beginning of the year.

After talking to other first years, I found out that I wasn't the only one with these questions. Several of my friends were unwilling to go to the gym out of a fear of looking inexperienced or unfit. While I tried to get my friends to conquer the gym with me, conflicting schedules and a

general lack of close friends continued to deter me; however, talking to all of those first years made me realize that my concerns were shared. And it was that awareness that empowered me to finally take the plunge and visit the gym, what I considered to be a heroic act of investigative journalism that would help out my fellow uninformed friends.

Finding the entrance to the gym proved easy enough by just wandering around nearby to where I could see people exercising. And two steps away from the entrance was the women's change room. I walked in with purpose and tried to pretend that I knew exactly where I was going. I picked the first locker I saw and quickly changed into a simple pair of black leggings, a loose fitting T-shirt, and a bright white pair of running shoes that I'd never used before. I followed another girl out of the change room to find that the gym was at the top of a staircase, and soon I was on the raised platform I'd passed by every day. I felt so far out of my comfort zone that I couldn't even see it anymore, but I refused to turn back.

In preparation the day before, I'd googled how to structure my workout and stuck to the plan that was in my mind. I looked around for a stationary bicycle to use for a quick 5 minute workout and quickly found a row of them. I hopped onto an open bike beside an intense looking male student. With my feet on the pedals, I looked at the unlit monitor and tried to find some kind of power button. But alas, it did not exist. After pressing every button on the panel, the screen remained unlit. Was the bike broken, I thought to myself. After playing musical chairs with the bikes, no amount of button pushing made any of them start up.

Five minutes later I swallowed my pride and walked over to a gym attendant.

"Hi there," I started. The attendant looked at me with a friendly smile.

"So, I've never been here before and I don't really know how anything works, could you possibly help me out?" It was a tall order but the attendant was eager to help.

"Is there a particular machine you were having trouble with?" he asked, glancing sideways at the stationary bike. "Yeah," I laughed, "how do the bikes work?"

"You just have to hop on and start biking," the attendant politely explained.

I couldn't help but laugh. Leave it to me to overcomplicate biking. Sure enough as soon as I started peddling the screen lit up prompting me to choose a workout type. I hit warm-up and smiled at the attendant. From the exposed platform I could see other students on their way to class look up at me as they passed by.

During the rest of my visit to the gym, I mostly just wandered around and tried out every single piece of equipment. I shamelessly adjusted every weight machine to the lightest weight, but contrary to what I imagined, no one else seemed to pay any attention to me.

That day I left the gym with a satisfactory smile and patted myself on the back for a job well done. Since that day I've continued to visit the gym at least twice a week, and encourage my friends to do the same, offering to go with them.

My pilot workout, although fun, was lonely, so I started attending the free drop-in classes offered by the gym and started working out with a group led by an instructor who gave me a much more fun and satisfying workout than just hopping from one strength machine to the next. I continued my athletic momentum by also joining an intramural field hockey team and met a whole new group of friends to work out with.

What helped me to start loving the gym was finding the kind of workout I most enjoyed. Maybe you're the kind of person who likes to work out alone with just the company of an iPod. Or maybe you prefer slower, calming workouts like yoga. Or maybe you're all about high intensity and free weights. In a lot of ways finding your place in the gym is like finding your place in university. Maybe you're someone who likes to keep to themselves, or maybe you like to take things slow. Or maybe you're someone who jumps into new adventures feet first.

At the end of the day, a step out of your comfort zone can be just as meaningful as a leap. When I finally crawled out of my comfort zone, I discovered a new way of life, and have never looked back.

## **Can I Get your Number?**

*Sana Barakat*

I swipe my phone with my finger to unlock it. I open Whatsapp and message Farah, my best friend.

Hey I'm at the library, fourth floor where the couches are, meet me here.

Ok. She responds.

Papers, highlighters, pens and my submarine looking pencil case lay scattered on the round wooden table in the UTM library, and my MacBook is set to sleep mode. I press down the mouse key to wake up my laptop, while the opened blackboard page sits glaring at me. Wednesdays are my favorite, I have no classes and I get to catch up on anything I need to do, of course I tend to procrastinate and get nothing done.

How do I start this assignment? I read all these readings and I still can't figure out arguments... What was the last reading even about?

I look over my notes, highlight a few points and slowly crunch the paper and throw it in the garbage. They never look good enough. I look around and to my left, there are packed study rooms with people's sleepless faces, puffed up eyes, and exhausted smiles. I lift my legs up on the table, center my laptop on my blue denim jeans and start tapping my fingers on the keyboard. Halfway through my outline, I look up to see Farah, who I've known for 5 years. She is wearing an oversized jacket, grey sweats and her UGG boots – the usual gear that Farah wears in the winter.

She smiles, "Heyyyyy!" She always extends her "heys".

"Hey!" I say with a sigh.

"I literally cannot do this anymore, I'm so tired of studying." She removes her jacket and throws it on the couch. That's Farah's known introduction to any conversation.

She has the urge to let everyone know how much she studies, yet, she doesn't.

I reply with the answer she always is relieved to hear, “Same, I haven’t been studying that much either.”

This relaxes her. It’s kind of a reassurance that she is not alone, she breaks out with a grin, lifts up her legs and places them on the table. For two hours we talk about boys, clothing, home décor, possible baby names, and our dysfunctional families.

Farah pushes her hair with her right hand over her shoulder and comes in closer to me.

“That guy has been looking at you for the longest time.” She whispers with a grin.

“Don’t look now, it’ll be obvious!”

“Is he cute?” I ask. I take a glance from the corner of my eye and see a guy wearing a black and white dress shirt, about a head taller than me with light ash brown hair.

I redirect my head towards the computer screen, “Okay Farah I need to finish this! Stop distracting me!” I laugh,

He looks cute, could he actually be interested in me?

“It’s 5, should we go home?” Farah asks.

“Yeah, I’m exhausted.” I yawn, stretching my arms into a “Y” shape.

Shit. That was unattractive. He probably was looking. I should’ve put my hand over my mouth. I’m gross.

I pack my laptop and take a quick look; he still had his head stuffed into his book. Thank God.

I zip on my jacket and plunk my black hat on my head. He starts getting up as well. He stands tall, chest puffed up, smiling showing his nice white set of teeth.

“Hi, my name is John and I think you’re beautiful.” He motions his hand towards me to shake it.



I hold my hand straight and firm connecting it to his. He's hand was soft and gentle, but had a nice grip to it. I didn't want to let go.

"Aww, thank you that's really nice of you to say, my name is Sana."

"Can I get your number?" His dimples carved in his cheeks.

I stutter, "Uhm, I'm sorry I have a boyfriend."

He places his phone back in his pocket and accepts the rejection.

"Oh, I'm sorry but I must say your boyfriend is a lucky one." He waves his hand and walks away.

And your future girlfriend will also be a lucky one." I mutter the words out. I throw myself on the couch with disappointment.

"Are you dumb, why didn't you give him your number?" Farah says annoyingly.

"Farah, you already know why." I grab my bag and swing it over my back.

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"Hi Mama!" I shove my boots under the bench and lock the door.

"Hi, how are you?" She replies, wrapped up in her red blanket while sipping on her green tea.

"I'm good. SO this guy wanted my number today." I smile.

"Okay, look at you, how many numbers do you have now?"

"I can't count that high," I reply sarcastically.

"Did you give it to him?" She asks.

“No...I’m not ready yet.”

She rolls her eyes, and directs them to the TV screen again.

“Keep rejecting people so by the time you’re thirty, you will be still living with me.”

“Wow, thanks mom! I really appreciate your heart felt words.”

“Don’t be like me Sana, I was dumb and I never really knew how to be open about my feelings. My parents didn’t give me that confidence and that culture I lived in always looked down upon that. However, you were born and raised here, you shouldn’t have this mentality, if you want a guy and he is genuinely interested in you and is looking for a serious relationship, don’t shoo him away.”

“Ok...woah Mama, too deep, all I’m saying is that I think I have more time to meet more people, grow and get to know who I am more. I have a plan, don’t worry about me.”

“If you haven’t realized by now, life doesn’t go according to plan.”

She raises the volume and asks me to grab the piece of cake she left on the counter.

## **The Great Balancing Act**

*Laura Krajewski*

I awake to the sound of the radio blaring in my left ear. “Don’t worry about a thing, ‘cause every little thing gonna be alright” sings Bob Marley, as I angrily roll over to slam the snooze button on my alarm clock. My heart skips a beat as I realize the time, and I fly out of bed and hastily begin to get ready.

6:30 a.m. - better hurry up or I’ll miss my bus!

As I rush to get ready, I make a mental checklist of all the things that need to be done today:

Attend chemistry, physics, environmental science, and math lectures

Attend math tutorial

Attend biology lab

Prepare for upcoming physics lab

Start studying for chemistry quiz

Finish last week’s chemistry lab report...and this week’s pre-lab assignment

Ok...got it.

Oh, and I have to catch up on my readings, can’t forget about those!

As I inhale my cereal, I glance through the back window and feel a deep sense of sadness as I peer out at the blackened sky and the bleak, snow covered backyard. Winter is here, and that means that my first set of university exams are right around the corner. I shudder at the thought. As quickly as the thought enters my mind, I shove it aside and rush out the door. Once at school, I direct myself to the clean and quiet study rooms on the second floor in the Instructional Building. I walk into an empty room and crack open my chemistry textbook. As I attempt to complete my reading, I find it difficult to focus. Instead of concentrating on what I am reading, my mind runs though the 20 other things I need to complete, alongside a constant stream of worry and self-doubt at the prospect of not finishing everything on time.

Who knows, maybe I’m just not cut out for this.

After reading a few pages, I cover the text and try to recall what I had just learned. My mind draws a blank. Something about electrons...but what exactly? I can't say. I realize I just wasted 10 minutes and feel my heart begin to race even faster. To distract myself, I draw my attention to the large glass window facing the beautiful forest on campus. I spot some deer grazing and merrily strolling through the forest. I wish I could be as calm and graceful as they are, instead of this constant ball of nerves. It is in that brief moment of stillness that the words of a very wise woman flood back into my mind. This woman was my Babcia (grandmother), who was one of the kindest, bravest, and most selfless women that I have had the good fortune of knowing and loving. Babcia used to tell me that in order to lead a fulfilling and successful life, we must lead a life of balance; all that we do must be kept in moderation. It was in that moment that I realized that I was doing the exact opposite.

I take a few deep breaths, and by doing so, begin to calm my mind and decrease my heart rate. Upon entering university, I, like many other first year students, felt completely overwhelmed by all the newness thrust upon me in my first year. In my first week of classes I was introduced to many amazing campus resources, clubs, and opportunities, and as a result, was filled with a sense of joy and excitement. As the demanding reality of academics sets in, I realized just how limited my time was, and part of that initial excitement was slowly replaced with worry. In the hope of becoming academically successful, I set my entire focus on my studies. As a result, I completely abandoned all other hobbies and activities that had previously been a huge part of my life by somehow convincing myself that spending time doing anything other than studying was a waste of my time.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

The education you gain at university extends far beyond your classrooms and textbooks, and this was one of the most important lessons I learned during my first year. Taking time to decompress from your studies and doing something you enjoy is actually much more beneficial than using that time to cram in more studying. For me, a huge de-stressor was getting involved in the campus community and volunteering with clubs and societies which I was curious or passionate about. Making friends outside of my program opened me up to completely different perspectives, and enriched my life in a way I couldn't have ever imagined. Remembering to eat healthy, exercise, engage in my community, and feed not only my mind but also my spirit, was essential to my happiness and well-being. Ignoring any of these core aspects of your being may leave you feeling disconnected and unhappy.

Each one of us is on a different journey in life. We come from different pasts that have shaped our perspective thus far, and have different dreams and aspirations. That's what makes our world so beautiful and diverse.

So my advice to you upon entering university is to always remember that you are a unique and capable individual with an enormous potential for growth, learning, and positive change.

Remember to trust your instincts, and although it may not always be easy, remember to never compare yourself to others, because we are all at different stages in our own growth and personal development. Be patient and kind towards others, as you have no idea where life has taken them, and remember that help can always be found by those who seek it.

For me personally, remembering to lead a life of balance has given me a whole new perspective on life, and though it is not always easy, it provides a sense of comfort and stability in our ever changing world.

Every once in a while, I feel as though I have returned to that dark and cold morning, with an anxious mind and a racing heart. In these instances, I simply remember the power of my breath in calming and grounding myself, and I remember that I have the power to consciously redirect my attention to the task at hand.

Remembering your own significance, power, and light is one of the greatest lessons of all. I hope you never forget it!

## **Becoming Involved**

*Mina Boshra*

My name is Mina Boshra, and I am currently a second-year student with a double major in Biology for Health Science and Psychology. I arrived at Canada on June 19th 2013, only two months before I started my classes at UTM. To be honest with you, the total twist I have had to go through in my way of thinking and acting was difficult on me, especially when it came to being involved with extracurricular clubs and activities.

I was born in Egypt and studied in an all-Arabic school until Grade 5. In Grade 6, I moved with my family to Saudi Arabia where I was put in an all-English international school with an American curriculum. The 180 degree change from studying in one language to another when I was already 12 years old was tough, even sometimes impeding, but I passed that test and ultimately received a GPA of 3.8 which allowed me to apply to the University of Toronto.

During the first week of orientation, I got to see more clubs and activities to do than I have seen in my whole life. Although I was in an American school, I never really had any opportunities to join clubs since they were minimal and were mostly sports (choosing me on your team was always a bad decision). I was very excited to join them and discover a new way of life that I have not experienced. But alas, the pressure of keeping up with my studies and subjects pushed me to ignore everything that had nothing to do with my grades.

Even though my grades didn't suffer as much as I thought (I was over-estimating how bad my grades were just because of one bad grade, something I am sure everyone new to UTM will relate to), I never had the chance to try this new opportunity of being part of a bigger organization, that is, not until my second year.

In my second year, fuelled by the hope that the subjects will get easier after the shock of first year, I decided to find a club to join. I have tried a couple of clubs, trying to find something that's both interesting and that relates to my passions. With each club, I got more knowledge about how this new system of being in a club and volunteering your time to a cause works, but unfortunately none of the great causes they advertised interested me.

On September of my second year, a representative of ECSpERT, which stands for Erindale College Special Response Team, came to my class and invited everyone who wanted to join the emergency response team of UTM. The words emergency response and responsibility kept on ringing in my ears after the representative (who became my friend and team mate Alice) left our class, and during the break, I went right to their office and picked up an application.

Since that day, everything flew by so fast. I went through the initial interviews, I took an SFA course with my friends and my future team-mates, and I went through Pre-MFR testing and MFR training every two weeks to improve my abilities in saving lives. I passed and was enrolled in an MFR course which took about 47 hours to complete and various tests. It was a lot of hard work and effort, but I came out at the end of it as a certified Medical First Responder that is responsible for protecting the lives of everyone on UTM.

Now as I write this, I am sitting in the office, with all my new friends around me, laughing and having fun, but always ready for action at a moment's notice. I finally found a place where I belong in this new country that helped me with feeling more at home. It also helped release most of my stress through the close group of people of which I receive support and help.

Coming to a new country is hard, and when the change is accompanied by the first shock of being a university student (which even domestic students face trouble with) can be extremely hard.

## **Give It A Try**

*David Fu*

I watch as swarms of students pass by in front of me; students of different ages, ethnicities, interests, cultures, and goals. Well that's the University of Toronto Mississauga for you. A multitude of different people all gathered here for a myriad of different reasons.

“Why would anyone want to waste their time listening to someone uninteresting like me?” I tell myself.

I certainly wouldn't.

My legs dangle over the edge of a long, grey booth table, currently being used exclusively for ‘Clubs Week’. Like most clubs, mine stood alongside the walkway outside the CCIT building. On one side of the walkway, a blockade of trees spreads out across the dark brown soil, obstructing the view of a large soccer field. On the other, the giant-sized windows of the CCIT building reveal people's reflections. In front of the windows, dozens of club booth tables line up along the walkway. The second table belongs to my club.

On top of the table, a large rectangular cardboard cutout stands next to me decorated with pictures, memories of past events, all put together by several artistically-talented members of the club. Right in the middle of the cutout, printed in big colorful letters, read the words “UTM Agape Impact Club.”

I watch as two of my fellow members Sam and Andrew approach strangers and share with them about our club. With big smiles across their faces and an endless supply of enthusiasm, the words seem to effortlessly flow out from their mouths.

I wish I was more like them.

“I don't understand how they do it so easily. I mean, what if I'm not interesting enough?” I say to my good friend Harry, who stands next to me holding a stack of printed Agape Impact handouts.

“I can never be like that,” I add. I stare at the ground and distract myself by admiring the different pairs of shoes that walk by. Harry smiles as he places his hand on my slouched shoulders.



“You know David, it’s not the end result that matters. What’s important is that you give it a try. Because at the end of the day, it’s really not the eloquence of your words that will change someone’s mind.” He passes me a small stack of handouts.

He’s right, and I can’t deny that. But I just can’t help but feel uneasy about approaching strangers, even if they’re just students like me.

I look down at my stack of handouts, its thickness about the size of a small sandwich.

Taking a deep breath, I push my palms against the edge of the table, and slide my bum off the comfort of my seat. Clutching on to my sandwich of handouts, I scan the hordes of students for a potential target to approach. My eyes lock on to a tall, brown-skinned male student with dark curly hair.

“He probably won’t be interested in a mostly-Asian Christian club,” I think. “Even if he does come to one of our weekly meetings, he’ll probably feel out of place, have a hard time fitting in, and—” Harry’s words echo in the back of my head.

“Do it,” I tell myself as I block out all other thoughts. I straighten my posture, take a quick breath, and exhale the carbon dioxide out of my lungs.

“Hi, my name’s David and I’m from the Agape Impact Club. We’re a Christian club on campus, and we welcome everyone no matter what your beliefs are. I can’t promise you much, except that we do have a lot of interesting, friendly people here. That I can assure you. So if you’re free on Tuesday evenings, we’d love to have you at one of our meetings,” I say as I give him a handout, with a smile stretching across my face.

He skims the handout in silence.

“Sorry, not interested,” he says in a monotone voice. He returns it to me and continues through the parade of students. My smile instantly dissipates.

“I knew it. I’m not cut out for this.”

As I contemplate retreating back to an empty chair behind the booth table, I feel a hand pressing gently on my shoulders.

“Hey, I’m proud of you man,” Harry tells me.

## **Being Part of Something Bigger**

*Larissa Fleurette Ho*

I came to the University of Toronto Mississauga on the first day of school knowing that I didn't want to spend my whole time here studying and writing assignments and essays.

I wanted to have the opportunity to think of things in a way I'd never thought of them before, work on different projects that were bigger and more worthwhile to me than my own personal achievements, and experience so much more than just studying.

The thought of simply studying and not doing SOMETHING BIGGER seemed so boring to me.

I didn't know what I would find at UTM, but the first thing I noticed on the first day of first year when I walked through the doors of the William G. Davis Building (called South Building at the time) at UTM was something I'm sure nobody else immediately noticed on that first day of school: the newspapers.

I had always wanted to be part of a campus newspaper, because I loved to write, but I'd never had the chance to be part of one before.

I opened up the newspaper by the door. The newspaper was called The Medium. Inside, I found an ad asking for people to contact the News Editor using an email and volunteer to write for the News section of the paper.

Of course, I did just that and a couple of hours later, I received an email from the News Editor saying she had a news story for me to write. I had no idea how to do this but the excitement and determination that I be part of the newspaper drove me to research how to write a news story, read other news stories in other newspapers and in The Medium, and write my own using the topic that the News Editor had given me. The topic was "the wage gap between male and female professors at post-secondary institutions."

I wrote different stories (at least one story each week; usually two) for four weeks. In October, the News Editor asked me to be her Associate News Editor... and when the end of first year came, I ran in The Medium editorial elections to be the head of the Features section as the Features Editor, since I wanted to try something other than News, which I'd already been writing for that whole of first year, while also working at the VP Research Office as a freelance writer.

I got the position of the Features Editor. That summer, I also ran in the elections for the English and Drama Students' Society to be an executive, and to be the Vice-President of the new Sociology and Criminology Society, both student-run academic groups (kind of like clubs but academic-based) dedicated to helping English and drama students and sociology and criminology students through study groups, essay-writing workshops, meet and greets with professors, and other social events, like pizza and movie nights.

When second year came around, I became a mentor for the AccessAbility Resource Centre, the centre on campus devoted to ensuring that students with disabilities are able to participate in all parts of university life. As a mentor, I met once a week with a student assigned to me to chat, maybe have coffee or go to the movies, about what resources he needed, what study strategies he could use, or even how to tackle talking to professors in a professional way. We talked about anything that was bothering him.

Being a mentor to a student with a disability was such a rewarding experience that I did it again the following year, and that third year I decided to run in The Medium elections for the position of News Editor, a position that I would hold for nearly two years in a row. It involved finding stories on campus to report on, sending out topics to be written about to a group of volunteer students, editing and fact-checking the stories that the writers would send back to me, arranging for photos to be taken, and then designing the layout of the News section, by putting in headlines, by lines, photos, captions, and other necessary parts of the paper.

It was a busy five-year undergraduate career for me, where I tried different exciting and scary things, met many amazing and inspiring people, made big mistakes and learned from them. Every day there was something new happening: there was a new story coming alive on campus about student politics or campaigns or events, there was someone to meet in order to interview them about the new buildings that would be built in the coming years on campus, there were wonderful things to hear about in class, and papers and books to read and digest in order to write the papers assigned to me.

I sure did find myself to be tired at times (and frantically trying to get everything done within a certain period of time) but I wouldn't have wanted this undergraduate experience to be any other way.

There were so many things to get involved with on campus and I wanted to do them all – unfortunately, I could do only a few at a time, but what I did do, I did with my whole heart and was rewarded for it in the experiences I received, friends I made, and lessons learned each day.

The biggest lesson I learned was to balance myself academically and socially – to spend as much time with friends as I did with my books and papers. All work and no play would not be good for anyone's mental and emotional health. So I decided to make strong and lasting friendships with

my peers, with faculty and staff, and I found that I learned so much more about myself in the process.

The second biggest lesson I learned was to manage my time. As a person who procrastinated a lot, it wasn't easy to suddenly have to get everything done NOW rather than LATER. Just getting things done was a hard thing to do, but since it was so important that these things get done, I had no choice but to stop the habit of procrastination.

Being part of things that were bigger than my own academic experience—where I had to meet my own personal academic goals, like get a high grade in a certain course—made it possible for me to fully enjoy the whole UTM experience!

## **Building Relationships**

### **First**

*Farheen Kadwa*

I begin my journey to the Davis Building through the crowd of strangers wrapped in creatively cut orange shirts sprayed with bright colours. The midday sun on Day 1 of Frosh Week beams down on me. My thumbs engage in swift motions of pretend-typing as my eyes search for a text that isn't there.

Stranger #500 who walks two steps ahead of me holds the side door of Davis open. I shuffle until I reach his steps and force a smile. People in Mississauga are more willing to hold doors open than the ones I grew up with in Scarborough, I've noticed.

I wiggle through the narrow corridors behind Stranger #500 and muster a 'thank you' every time he holds the door. We enter the main hall of Davis and he disappears into the chit chat of the wide space. My phone finally squeaks a sound.

'Are you here?' the text reads.

'Yeah, where are u?' I reply.

'In the middle of the huge f-ing line at the TCard office. I'm wearing a yellow dress. Find me lol.'

Ahead of me, I see the traces of what looks like a line-up of frustrated students- some in groups giggling with friends, others as lost as me. I detour to the girls' washroom on my right.

The growing sound of laughter and gossip fill my ears as I enter. Three blonde girls in front of the mirror pause for a second, acknowledge that I have the same orange shirt, and then continue their important conversation about a girl they don't like.

I shuffle to the last sink at the end of the tiny room and blankly eye at my reflection in the mirror. Smudged eyeliner, burnt cheeks and hairs peeking out of a messy hijab look back at me. My phone vibrates again.

‘Are u coming?’

I reply to Sana. My Twitter friend. My Twitter friend who intimidates me because of the words she uses. My Twitter friend who is also the only person I know at UTM. My Twitter friend who I have yet to meet for the first time.

I straighten up my hijab and search her profile on Twitter. I zoom into her face. I memorize her long hair and dark eyes and straight nose and narrow pink lips. Memorize, I tell myself. Don’t walk up to wrong girl in a different yellow dress.

I exit the washroom and slow down when I reach the line. Approximately where the middle of the huge f-ing line would be, I try to search for a yellow dress.

“Farheen,” a high pitched mono-tone voice calls.

My eyes follow the voice and stop at a short girl in a yellow dress. Sana waves. I stroll in her direction.

“Sana! Hi!” I wiggle both my hands.

“Cute outfit.”

“Thanks,” I mumble as I look down at my shirt. “But it’s just an orange Froshie shirt.”

“I know,” she squeaks, “I was being sarcastic!” She jiggles as she places her hand on my arm.

I fake a laugh. “Cute outfit to you.”

“I’m dolled up because I have to take my picture for my TCard,” she grins. Two crooked canines pierce through the edges of her bottom lip. Her perfectly contoured cheek bones rise up as she smiles.

“Wanna go to the spray paint fight after I’m done?” Sana suggests.

“Um, I don’t really wanna. Every one’s a stranger here anyway.”

“It’s okay! I’ll be your first UTM friend.” Her arms extend to my shoulder as she squeezes me into a side hug. The honey vanilla scent of her perfume rings in my nostrils. A smile stretches across my face.

I jerk my head to the right of the line and trace it to the entrance of the little square office. Beside it, posters on the bulletin board scream out in bold letters. Two boys in orange shirts and khaki shorts run through the entrance doors covered in paint. I glare at my white converses and imagine them decorated with green and pink paint splashes.



## **Mythopoetes**

*Daniella Stoewner*

I glanced around the half-full lecture hall and fidgeted in my seat. I checked my phone. No texts, which meant no distractions and no way to look busy. The clock read 10:08. I rethought my whim to enroll in a 200-level Classics course in Ancient Astronomy and Astrology in my first year at UTM.

The door squealed as it opened and my eyes shot up to see who walked inside. An overweight man dressed in a maroon velvet jacket, a green and yellow plaid dress shirt, and shiny grey corduroys waddled inside with a briefcase. He resembled Jack Black but had long, scraggly, straw-yellow hair parted at the side.

I suppressed the grin that crept across my face.

The clock read 10:10 when the lecture began. I expected a loud bark to come from the large man at the front of the room. Instead, a gentle, high voice reverberated without the microphone.

"Good morning all, and welcome to CEE-ELL-AYE-two-thirty-two," he enunciated every syllable. "My name is Daniel James Thornton, and I will be teaching Ancient Astronomy and Astrology this spring semester at UTM, two thousand thirteen."

He turned to the board and his velvet sport jacket stretched in all the wrong places. He wrote CLA232 on the board. He scribbled his office hours and location. He wiggled back to the podium and adjusted the dead microphone.

He began to tell stories. He recited grandiose myths about the Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and the beginnings of Islam. My pencil scribbled without my noticing, as I immersed myself in Daniel James Thornton's words. He spoke with a solemn, precise, and ordered tone. I placed myself in the world of the ancients.

He shuffled out in front of the podium. I looked up.

"There are two words that describe the universe according to the Greeks. Physis describes the natural world, all that is organic, unrefined. It is mother nature. It encompasses the birds, the bees, the flowers, the trees, everything! Even explosive diarrhea."

I snorted. I sensed students' faces turn toward me with eyebrows lost in their hair and hints of smirks. No one else dared to laugh. I glanced down to hide my reddened cheeks.

"Now, nomos," he wrote the word on the board, "is much more difficult to define. In fact, if someone had a gun to my temple, oh but no," he raised his arms above his head and crashed them down, "if someone had a gun to my poor Chihuahua's head," he cradled an imaginary dog, "and they demanded that I explain nomos in one English word, I would be entirely unable to save my poor baby from such a cruel, cruel death." The final words faded into a horrified whisper.

I failed to hide the goofy grin that spread across my face. I looked down and recorded physis and nomos in my notebook. I absorbed into the world of astrology and astronomy as Daniel James Thornton explained nomos as the conventions, laws, and regularities that mankind applies to the natural universe.



I tapped on the door outside of Daniel James Thornton's office in the North Building.

"Hello," a cheerful voice called from inside.

I entered the room and found my professor squeezed into a navy blue blazer with white trim, a pink paisley shirt, green khakis, and a black tie. The lowest button on his dress shirt popped open at some point during the day. My eyes couldn't help but notice his belly poking out.

"Hello, Professor Thornton," I said.

"What can I help you with today?" He motioned toward a chair across from his desk.

I plopped down and dropped my heavy backpack on the tile. I dug through my bag and found my essay outline. I turned the paper so it faced him and handed it to him over the desk.

"I was just wondering if this is a good essay topic. I chose material that you didn't provide on the topic list," I said.

"Archaeoastronomy in Ancient Egypt," he read. "That sounds wonderful. Do you have any background research? Ah, yes, nevermind, I see it here."

As he read, I watched his mouth half-form the words on the page. He squinted when he inhaled, and opened his eyes wide when he let his breath out. A slight whistle emerged from his throat when he exhaled.

"I was a little concerned because I know we don't cover as much in Egypt as we do in Greece and Rome," I said.

"No, I think you have a solid topic here," he answered. I tilted my head to the side as he went back to read my outline. He seemed so normal in this office setting. No eccentricities here.

He glanced up from my paper and showed a lopsided smile. "And your name is?"

"Uhh, Daniella. Daniella Stoewner."

"Ah yes, I remember your first test mark. You did quite well, didn't you?"

"Uh yes," I tried to remain professional but my cheeks flushed and a grin escaped. "I got perfect." I wanted to compliment his lectures, but I didn't know how to phrase it. I hardly studied for that test. His impeccable story telling skills deserved the credit.

"Indeed," he winked.

He handed me back my paper and I put it away in my backpack. "Well thank you very much! I'll see you on Monday," I said.

He turned toward his computer and began to type. I strode out of his office, proud that he liked my topic so much.

I would minor in classics. I would take all his courses. I would do anything to have Daniel James Thornton as my professor again.



The last week of classes arrived with haste. I settled in my regular seat in the fourth row in the centre. Daniel James Thornton toddled inside and threw his briefcase on the table at the front of the room. His grey and yellow plaid jacket clashed tremendously with his grey, silk, polka-dot

dress shirt and dark green corduroys. His hair stuck up in unusual places. He wore a disheveled expression on his face.

"We have arrived at the end, my friends," he proclaimed. "The exam is but two weeks away, and today we will be covering the origins of Islam as it pertains to astronomy and astrology. However, I have an announcement I must make before I begin the lecture today."

The room hushed.

"I am being deported."

Some giggles made their way through the gasps. I shook my head.

"After twelve years of faithful service at the University of Toronto, they have decided to end my contract because I have not yet pursued a PhD. Thus, I have no reason to stay, and thus, the Canadian government is kicking me out. I shall only be less than three hours from Toronto in New York, but alas deportation is a rather serious matter."

My jaw dropped. Daniel James Thornton would be gone. I found it hard to believe that UTM would fire such an amazing professor, armed with a doctorate or not. Every week he captured the attention of the entire room. He filled our minds with beautiful narratives of the facts and myths of the ancient world. I reminded myself to remove my Classics Minor. I refused to take any classics courses without him.

"I am hoping I will still be able to attend the exam. If not, this class will be farewell."

I hung my head.

"But I am an advocate of social media, and I invite you all to follow me on Twitter," he turned with melancholy toward the board and wrote his twitter name. Mythopoetes. Greek for The Story Teller.

~ ~ ~

I stood up in the exam first. I navigated my way through the rows of desks and tip-toed over to Daniel James Thornton. I waited behind him and he smiled when he turned around and saw me. I handed him my papers. He took them and set them down. I didn't move.

"Yes?" He whispered.

"Thank you for a great semester," I replied. I stuck out my hand. He shook it.

I crept out of the room and left behind Daniel James Thornton in his awful band t-shirt and grey dress pants.

## **Tomorrow**

*Arjan Banerjee*

The rain clatters against the ceiling high windows. Outside them, a few huddled figures lurch along the slippery road. The darkness caused by the irate clouds envelopes the scene and belies the fact that 10 am classes are just about to begin. The lofty maples, cedars and oaks lining the North Field bow in response to the wind. The entrance to the Instructional Building, barely a hundred metres away, is nearly invisible through the relentless deluge.

The campus Starbucks buzzes with humanity. The queue weaves intricately through the crammed tables and around the back of the store, ending a few feet from the entrance. I consider braving the downpour to seek my caffeine at Second Cup instead. I decide against it and add myself to the line.

The crowd in the artificially well-lit room grows. I see a few people I know. I avoid eye contact with them, unwilling to spend my limited, pre-caffeinated energy on the requisite head juts and murmured greetings. I turn my attention leisurely to the queue. The tall, hairy, burly man in front of me speaks loudly on his phone, his voice slightly audible over the din of dozens of conversations. I shuffle a few centimeters to my right to peer around him. The pretty girl in front of him fiddles with her expensive-looking purse. She says something to the blonde in front of her who turns around to respond and...

I jump to hide behind Mr. Tall, Hairy, Burly. It's her...Jessica! Jessica from Chem. Lab! Of all the people on campus that should be just ahead of me in line at Starbucks...wow. I try and breathe normally. My heart races and flutters simultaneously. I feel warm and I can sense my ears reddening. I clench my clammy palms and stare pointedly at the ground, willing my rebellious body to revert to normality.

The queue inches forward. Should I talk to her? I smile at the absurd pretense that I could gather that much courage. I'm intimately familiar with the conversation I'm going to have with myself now. It's the same one that I have every frustrating time I spot her somewhere or the other. I know how it plays out: First, I energetically pump my right fist beside my hips and try to inject enough daring into myself to initiate contact with her. Then, I inevitably convince myself to think through how that contact would go even though I've done that a thousand times already. Once I've gone over the usual plan in my head, I pump my fist again. By this time, it's often too late because she's dodged into a class or been enveloped by a gaggle of her friends. If, miraculously, she's still somehow accessible, I begin to approach her. The current record, for this part of the farce, is four nervous steps toward her before I abort- beep! beep! beep! and convince myself that tomorrow, yes tomorrow would be a much better time than today for such shenanigans.

Mr. T, H, B decides that he lacks the commitment required to wait an hour for a cup of coffee and ambles out of the way. I panic and execute a clumsy ducking manoeuvre and pretend to tie my already perfectly tied laces. I pull my hood over my head before I upright myself and steal a glance in her direction. She hasn't noticed anything and plays on her phone. It's probably Candy Crush Saga. She loves that game. According to her Facebook updates, she's on level 65. The queue creeps forward.

Her perfect hair curls to rest on her shoulders. It's a really bright blonde at the roots but darkens to almost brownish when it cascades onto the delicate nape of her neck. Her shapely ears show off her small, circular gold earrings. She wears a faded black dress that extends just below her knees and looks effortlessly elegant. Her chic, flat black shoes are a shade darker than her stockings. They provide a beautiful contrast. And her scarlet fingernails...

We're almost at the counter. Where did the time disappear? Four green-aproned Starbucks employees dart around in the cramped space behind the boards advertising the new Hazelnut Macchiato, working quickly and expertly in unison. One of them adds a shot of caramel to a transparent cup filled with a crimson fluid being whirred and frothed by a machine. Another pours a generous amount of black coffee from a labelled metal jug into a plastic travelers mug before topping it up with Soy milk. The other two team up to refill the dispensers in the corner.

I start to plan. After she orders her coffee, she'll have to walk past me to get to the waiting area. Should I engage her then? No. I won't have enough time. I'll have to order too. But after I order, I'll be heading to the waiting area as well. Then, yes, at that moment, I'll have more time to try and strike a conversation.

She arrives at the counter. The tall, buzz cutted cashier rushes through his words in a deadpan voice, "Welcome to Starbucks. What can I do for you today?" Her beautiful, tinkling voice smiles, "Hey! Could I have a tall Chai Tea Latté please?" Interesting. I had never tried that drink before. The cashier rings up the order, checks off boxes on a cup and shoves it toward the dispensers. Jessica pays with her debit card and walks past me to the waiting area. Her perfume smells like jasmine. The pretty girl in front of me now orders something and the cashier does it all again. I turn toward the waiting area.

The cashier's voice rudely draws my attention. "Welcome to Starbucks. May I have your order please?" I order the same drink as Jessica and pay with cash. The cashier writes my order on a cup, rings it up, hands me my receipt and looks pointedly at the guy in line behind me. I take a deep breath, brace myself and walk towards where she stands. I'm really going to do it this time.

"Hi!" My fingers clench in my pockets as my voice emerges an octave too high.

"Hey." She smiles, her turquoise eyes finding mine as they detach themselves from the screen of her phone. "It's Arjun isn't it?"

"It's actually Arja-"

"TALL CHAI-TEA LATTÉ!" A green-aproned man slams her drink down on the counter in front of her.

"It's actually Arjan," I repeat as she puts her phone in her purse and grabs her drink.

"Oh! I'm sorry."

"Don't worry abou-"

"GRANDE CAFÉ MOCHA!" Another drink is dropped onto the granite counter. The pretty girl between Jessica and me lifts it gingerly as whipped cream drools around the sides. She squeezes the lid on carefully, slips a sleeve on the cup and checks her watch.

"Ok then, see you around!" Jessica smiles at me again as she and the pretty girl rush out the door.

I sigh. The rainwater streams down the windows as the barista sleeves my drink and sprinkles chocolate chips on the whipped cream. Maybe tomorrow?



## **Lynda Lin**

*Ogonna Jideobi*

I stand at my doorway and listen to Anthea. Anthea leans by her door across mine carrying her white water filter pitcher. Lynda walks past. Anthea and I pause as our eyes follow her. Lynda opens her door, slips into her room and shuts it with a thud. Anthea shakes her head. I smile.

Anthea Cheung, Lynda Lin, Vanessa Yuan and I share Putnam Place 92, a 2-storey townhouse residence at University of Toronto, Mississauga. The second floor houses our bedrooms. Vanessa's and mine are first. Lynda and Anthea's bedrooms face ours.

When Lynda comes home, she marches to her room and locks her door.

"Welcome Lynda." I sometimes say. I do not think she hears me.

A few days later, I scan the fridge for my Seal test carton of milk. I spot "Please do not touch, Lynda" on a white sticky note on a transparent bowl of pineapples. I turn to the fridge door and another sticky note catches my eye.

"Who would eat her food without her permission?" I mutter.

Lynda and I go to the same Introduction to Economics class. One Tuesday morning, last year, we were both ready for class at 7:45am. I slow down while she straps her shoelaces. I walk out the door and stand till I hear the door shut behind me. Lynda and I walk for about twenty seconds. She answers my questions with one-word sentences. Then, she leaves me behind. One day, Anthea finds out that Lynda and I attend the same lecture.

"Why don't you and Lynda go together then?" Anthea asks. I pause to think about it. I'm not sure why.

Sometimes, I hear Anthea holler through the wall to Lynda. Anthea lived in Hong Kong. Lynda hails from Taiwan, Vanessa, from China. They all speak Cantonese. Vanessa often has loud friends over. Lynda does not speak to Vanessa a lot.

One weekend, Anthea goes back to Richmond Hill where her family lives. Vanessa goes home too. Lynda and I stay alone at Putnam 92.

I hear the fridge open as I stand by the sink with soapy dishes. “Good morning Lynda” I say with a smile.

“Morning” she mumbles.

I dry my hands and turn to her. “So it’s just the two of us eh?” I beam.

Lynda smiles.

As she leaves the kitchen, I shout “Have you had breakfast?”

“Oh,” she pauses “yes.” I hear her climb the stairs.

I open a cupboard and grab my blue Box of Rice Krispies.

“Why are you always so nice to me Ogonna?” I hear Lynda say. I look down and see Lynda’s legs beside me. I close the cupboard, turn to look at her, open my mouth to speak and pause.

“You are too nice. You call me dear and darling.” Lynda continues, stretching the dear and darling.

The night before, before leaving for Colman Commons Dining Hall, I asked Lynda if she needed something from the dining hall.

“No.” she replies flatly.

“Okay.” I turn to leave.

“Uh, wait, Ogonna!”

“Yes dear.”

“Please could you get me Doritos. The nacho cheese ones.”

“Sure.” I smile.

I return with Lynda’s Doritos in my hand. I slam the door and tap my boots on the floor mat to shake off the snow. I hear Lynda walk downstairs.

“Oh, thank you.” she says.

“It’s okay.”

“No, no thanks a lot because I really like Doritos and I’m watching a movie, and I like to eat Doritos while watching the...”

“While watching the movie” I finish with her.

“Yes, yes. Okay. Bye.” Lynda says too quickly. Like her words can’t wait to come out.

“Thank you again” She beams.

Lynda’s voice draws me back from the previous night.

“Are you the first child?” Lynda blurts.

“No, I’m...”

“The second?”

“No,”

“Okay, okay. What position are you in your family?” Lynda asks as she beckons me with her hands to hurry.

“I’m the last child, the youngest.” I reply.

“Really?” Her smile makes her look like a 3-year old.

“Yes, I am.”

“I thought you are the first child because you are so caring.”

Lynda and I talk for thirty minutes about our families - her Mum, Dad and sister, my two brothers, two sisters, Mum and Dad. Lynda does not let me finish my sentences. I don't mind. At least she's talking. And smiling.

As I enter my room, bowl of Rice Krispies in hand, I hear Lynda's door shut. This time, gently.

“Hmm.” My cheeks crease into a smile.

I have never sat on Lynda's bed. I don't know the colour of Lynda's bed sheets.

I don't know when Lynda is at home.

Lynda still marches to our Introduction to Economics class alone.

But, sometimes, Lynda yells “Bye” before she leaves home.

## Part 2: Getting Organized

### Time Management

#### First Steps

*Anonymous*

I stepped out of the car and took a good look around. Whoa. So this is where I'll be for the next four years. With my best friends at my side, I headed towards one of the older buildings the Davis Building. Still in awe of my surroundings I quickly scanned the signs looking for the TCard office.

Ten minutes, a few papers, and flash later I exit the TCard office with my new student ID card. Well this makes it official.

Fast forward to September. The orientation day. There are so many people here. I wonder if they are as nervous as I am. Or maybe I'm scared. What do I have to be scared of? I made it here didn't I? A short walk from Davis to CCT and we've already made a friend - a cute little deer walking along the side of Davis near the Health Science building. Some oohs, ahs, and pictures later, we continue on our trek to the Instructional Building. After attending a few workshops and actively exploring a few buildings the day is over and I head home. Orientation week looms and many fun activities (and freebies) later I feel more relaxed and acquainted with the university. Maybe it's not as bad as I thought. I psyched myself out for nothing.

The first day of university. I mean the actual first day of class. I sat down and took out my notebook, pencil and eraser. The lecture begins and I find myself scribbling down as much as I can while the professor explains, actively, attempting not to miss anything that could be testable. After all this is university, it's a whole other ball game. An hour later I leave the lecture hall with a smile on my face. I just made it through my first university lecture. A break later I find my way to my next lecture. By the end of it I walked out thinking, I could get used to this.

During my breaks I found the urge to explore the rest of the campus. I mean, there are so many buildings and I'm sure going to need a quiet place to do work in between classes. So I set off with a smile on my face and backpack on my back. Thinking back, I recalled seeing a pathway from Davis to the Health Sciences building. So I headed for the nearest stairwell. Third floor of Davis. I kept walking, to each corner and every dead end. Eventually I found it. A sign on the wall confirmed it. I took a deep breath and opened the door. I walked from one building to the other. Realising I had no business being in the HS building, I walked back to Davis. Wow. This

place is so beautiful, and peaceful. It's like a mini getaway from reality. As for the rest of the university, I can hardly wait to see what else it has.

Weeks passed, and many lectures later I had my first university test. Uh oh this can't be good. I know I've studied hard, scratch that, I crammed hard. I walked into the test, and an hour later walked out, thinking to myself, not too bad.

I get used to my routine, wake up early, go to class, do my homework, sleep, and repeat. Midterms and tests have passed, and now I really feel like a university student. Reflecting on high school, and thinking about the future seem to come natural at this point.

Winter is just around the corner. I can already feel the weather changing as the wind howls and a chill gives me goose bumps. How I wish there was some way to stay inside as I go from building to building, class to class. Walking through the hallway I hear tidbits of conversations amongst the music flowing from my headphones. Tunnel? There's a tunnel here? I head to the Hazel McCallion Academic Learning Centre (aka the library).

The time flies by and before I know it, it's December. The exam schedule is out and the beginning of exams is looming. I start reviewing like crazy not to mention mentally preparing for my first university exam.

That dreaded day comes. First university exam. Ever. Thankfully I've had plenty of time to study and this was actually my favorite class. I find a seat, try to shake off the nerves, and begin the exam. The examiner calls time and I look at the clock. That has been the fastest, most intense two hours I have ever experienced. But hey, it's done and I head home.

I prepare for my next exam, which comes and goes as if I've done it so many times that I am a university exam taking pro. I'm done. Let the winter break begin!

The holidays pass and in what seems like a blink of an eye, it's January and classes begin again. Now I feel like a pro. To and from classes, homework and tests, it all feels routine. The stress and anxiety of tests and multiple important dates seem to be a norm now.

Days and weeks go by, and I've settled back into a routine. Wake up, shower, school, homework, sleep and repeat. I have to admit, it isn't the most exciting life. But I keep going, constantly thinking, "I'll have plenty of time for fun later on". During my breaks I continue to explore the rest of the university, finding new quiet little places to study, or things to do when I truly need a break (Or at least when my brain says it needs a break!). I visit the Student Centre every once in a while, because you never know what exciting things may be happening in there. I even visited some of the library events run by the library ambassadors. Get Crafty is fun, and it

really helps me unwind. I like how there's always something new to do, although I still haven't tried the mini massage thing.

Before I know it, April rolls around the next exam season dawns. This time I have five exams including my three hardest courses. Preparing, studying and a mess of colour coordinated papers takes over my life. I can do it. I can make it through this. I didn't make here, almost the end of first year, on luck or my good looks. You did it, you worked hard and deserve to be here. I try to push myself, because I know I've worked so hard over the past nine months and I can't let it all slip away now. Exams begin. Exams finish. I patiently wait for my results (maybe not so patiently). Finally the results are released, and I can finally breathe a sigh of relief. I did it. I passed all of my exams, not to mention I successfully completed my first year of what turned out to be, an amazing experience.

While I await the news of admissions to my second year program, I search and apply to some part time jobs. Neat and tidy, polished and coiffed, I attend several interviews. My phone rings and I hear the news that I've gotten the job. And just like that four months of employment later, I begin the second year of an adventure of a lifetime, at the University of Toronto Mississauga.

## **Silica Stress**

*Philip Rolo*

Sunday: work at Howden Rec.

Monday: perform the next experiment in CHM371.

Tuesday: volunteer in the Gunning lab and work at the UTM pool.

Wednesday: lead a study group for organic chemistry.

Thursday: volunteer with ECSpeRT – the campus' medical first response team.

Friday: volunteer in the Gunning lab.

Saturday: de-stress with songza and youtube, then finish homework.

I stand at the fume hood on the far side of the lab, my head aches. Covering the pub event with ECSpeRT kept me up late last night. Glassware dries on racks above the sinks. Carolynn isn't here to blast Disney music on her laptop, Miriam isn't retaliating with the Top 40's, but the faucet across from Sina's bench continues to trickle, drops echoing through the lab. Carolynn and I share a fume hood. Her black leather Converse make me forget she's one of the post-docs whenever she walks around, the tail of her navy blue lab coat flapping behind her. I wonder what having a PhD will be like. My gaze drops to the brown and white that cakes the black plastic counter inside the hood. A sandy mess, residues of silica soiled with spilled reactions.

"Great! It's time to flash... flash, flash, flash!" She had told me. I didn't expect it would be like this.

I run a column to isolate the product from a reaction that had just completed. A Pyrex tube stands before me, held to a support column by two clamps. The tube is half full of silica, a fine white powder derived from sand, that acts as a filter. A thin orange band stains the top of the white sand filling the tube, the reaction mixture. An adaptor fastened to the top of the column attaches the air-line. Pressure builds in the column and forces the solvent through the silica, carrying molecules with it. Non-polar molecules come off first, the polar molecules follow only when a polar solvent is applied to the column. The flow exits through a valve at the base of the column and into a 5 milliliter test tube held in my hand – Fraction # 54.

4:21 PM – Fraction # 55. I've been running the polar solvent for a good twenty minutes and nothing has come off yet. Not a damned dot anywhere on the silica chromatography plate, save for the spot produced by the crude sample. The product wasn't coming off. Carolynn's words rang clear in my mind.



“Your silica holds all the polar molecules, so when you run your column with DCM we expect to have all the non-polar molecules run out in the first fractions. So what do you need to do if we want to get our product off the column after getting rid of all the leftover reagents?”

“Hmmm, you could decrease the polarity of the solvent?” I say, not confident in my answer.

“Increase! Remember, those molecules will leave the silica when you up the polarity. Up the polarity, drag out your polar molecules!”

This is the fifth manual column I’ve run. I messed up the third, I added the polar solvent too early. Everything washed out at once. I didn’t want another lecture. I wanted to make her proud.

4:45 PM – Fraction # 70. No spots on the chromatography plates. I curse under my breath.

Carolynn left the lab at four to catch an early shuttle bus downtown. I promised that I’d finish this column and text the results. I also promised Gurveer I would help ECSpeRT tonight. Gurveer was like an older sister to me, full of constructive criticism and helpful advice about graduate studies. She was always punctual and willing to cover for anyone who couldn’t work. She practiced with me and the other members of the team when it was our turn to take the Medical First Responder course, and become full-fledged members of the team.

“We need at least three MFRs on each bus to CCIT Gala. Everyone else is covering Athletic Banquet or can’t do it. Are you with us?” No one wanted to cover a Friday night shift.

“Count me in, Gurveer. I’ve been here for the team since yesterday anyways. Besides, it’s always better to have extra responders in an emergency.”

ECSpeRT was my second family. We trained together, covered events together, and even drank together.

I spot another chromatography plate, develop it, and hope for spots. Nothing.

4:55PM – Fraction # 87. I march passed the benches submerged in journal articles, and bottled reagents, to the other section of the lab.

“Hey Matt, are you terribly busy at the moment?” I say. My brain pounds against my skull. A migraine settles in.

“Not really, what’s up?”

“I’ve really got to meet up with ECSpeRT at 5:30 and it’s nearly time. But. But I promised Carolynn I’d get this column done and nothing has come off yet! Can you please help me?” I stand before him and sweat under my old, stained, white lab coat.

“Yup, I can do that. Just let me know when you need me to take over.”

A grin spreads across my face. I bow from the waist, turn on my heel and jog back to my fume hood. Solvent overflows, streams down the side of the test tube and feeds a growing puddle.

4:58 PM – Fraction # 89. I check my phone to find two texts from Gurveer, both from half an hour ago.

“Shit.” I mutter to myself. I breathe in slowly, filling my lungs as my hands rest in the pockets of my old, grungy lab coat. I close my eyes after darting a glance at the test tube – worried that it might overflow again. My temporal pulse beats strong against my skull. Pink, warm and clammy with shallow, rapid breathing, I think to myself.

5:01 PM – Fraction # 95. I spot two fresh chromatography plates. Pristine white darkens as solvent creeps up the plate. It’s actually neon green to evergreen under the ultraviolet. No. It’s Christmas. Six pink spots make a neat line across the glowing green plate.

“Hooooo-ma G-.. YES!” I exclaim. My heart jumps and I laugh triumphantly, grinning at the column. I will conquer you. Fractions 76 through 93 feature the same beautiful pink spots.

Carolynn will be pleased with me. The unending column will be beaten. Gurveer won’t be disappointed in her team tonight either.

5:05 PM – I bolt back to Matt, sitting at his desk listening to music on his laptop.

“Hey Matt, the product came off! Thanks for offering to help, I mean it! I’ll clean up quick!” Matt smiles and laps me on the shoulder.

I grab a 250 millilitre round-bottom flask on my way back to the fume hood, fill it half-way with fractions 76 through 82 and hook it up to the Rotovap. The round bottom spins in a bath of water, 41oC. I adjust the valve controlling the vacuum, the tube shrieks and squeals the as a complete seal forms. The solution bubbles, droplets form on the cold water pipe that spirals up the condensing tube, then drip down the pipe, sliding like kids on a water slide at Wild Water Kingdom. The bubbling intensifies in the flask as the last of the solvent disappears.

I wash the sullied test tubes while the flask spins, wisps of acetone sting my eyes and nose. I set the tubes to dry on the shelf above Miriam's bench on a brown paper towel.

5:20 PM – A few grams of grey powder cake the inside of the flask. I whip out my purple sharpie, label the flask "CCA-104", and pop a plastic yellow cap in its mouth. I sit the flask in a quark ring beside Carolyn's laptop, pool the chromatography plates in my notebook and jot down the details of the experiment.

I slide a beaker under the column's open mouth, switch on the air-line and fasten the adaptor. Air forces its way down the column, grey and brown patches return to white sand as the silica dries. I flick the light switch, turn off the light and pull down the skirt of the hood.

5:27 PM. "Bye Matt, bye Sunny! Have a great weekend!"

"You too, Phil!" Matt says with a smile on his face "I'll send Carolyn an email telling her how diligent you are."

I laugh a little at the compliment. "Thanks Matt, I'll text her too, just to let her know where to find the details of my work" I end as I close the door to the lab behind me and bolt to the Student Centre. Red shirt and tact pants, here I come.

## **An Opportune Year**

*Bipin ShyamSundar Tiwari*

“In every day, there are 1440 minutes. That means we have 1,440 daily opportunities to make a positive impact”. Les Brown’s quote summarizes how important it is to live in each and every moment and grasp the opportunity every single minute of our life is providing. As a Chemical Engineer working with big multinationals In India I realized, the world isn’t about rainbows and sunshine anymore, we humans have modified the definition as per our needs and wants. Now the world is about pollution, greenhouse gasses, global warming and climate change. It was time to bring the change and September 1st, 2014, I was here in the country filled with opportunities. I am a graduate student taking a Master’s of Science in Sustainability Management at the University of Toronto. A program where an engineer is taught accounting and finance, a management student gets to write research papers on environmental science and the ecosystem, and a student with an English major works on project to improve life of people in different communities. Yes, a place where only one religion is followed i.e. humanity, and we all have one aim i.e. sustainability. One thing was sure; I was at the right place at the right time with the right people around me. However, if things are always good, either you are not learning, or you are too scared to commit to mistakes. I preferred to learn from my mistakes.

I got the cloud nine feeling the first time I communicated in English with people whose native language is already English and still managed to put forward my points with the right expressions on my face. I understood humor was the best expression, and a smile or a gentle handshake conveyed everything irrespective of the culture, language or background we were from. I learned to involve myself in talks, jokes and discussion happening in my program. A picture says thousand words, sometimes drawing a flowchart and presenting my ideas to my group mates overshadowed my communication problem. Making friends is always easy and your culture is the best tool. I realized my friends were very interested in learning my culture, the Bollywood dance, the action sequences used in Bollywood movies and also the curry we make and spices we add to our food. These are the essential ingredients for starting conversations and learning new cultures and are something every student loves. The feeling when you see your friends from different backgrounds and cultures dancing to the tune of Bhangra (Indian cultural dance) is magical. Meanwhile, I learned how to make real pasta, noodles, salads, smoothies and also learned a few Chinese words. The practical learning through the courses being taught and working in groups brushed my integrative thinking skills. Writing reports and research papers, keeping in mind the grammatical mistakes I made, was something I had to struggle with a lot as an international graduate student. But, as I said, I preferred to learn from my mistakes, and this story is a stepping stone towards this learning process. I learned it’s not how sophisticated your writing style is or how complicated the words you use in your report are. It’s about how simple and well organized your paragraphs are; it’s how clear the content is, and how innovative your ideas are. Grammar plays a crucial role, but it doesn’t stop you from putting forward your points in a simple, concise way. Networking is a tool that helped me justify the quote by Les Brown on considering every single minute of the day as an opportunity. Meeting new people, building contacts, and developing relations with them helps to long term success. Attending different

networking events is the staircase to that long-term success in creating a strong network. Many people think of networking as a tool to get internships and jobs. I don't deny the fact, but considering networking as an opportunity to find your idol is getting guided by the one you aspire to be.

Once a man said to Buddha "I want happiness" and Buddha replied "remove the words I and want from your life, all you are left with is happiness." Getting involved with different social clubs on campus is something that will provide that happiness and a home away from home. Volunteering for various causes is like sunshine after heavy snow. When it strikes the snow, the surface glows. Socializing within the community you belong to along with other social clubs on campus will be like that sunshine, providing you a reason to de-stress and create your own identity amongst so many people. After all, there is no difference between rocks and humans who wish to stay in their comfort zone, doing nothing but watching people work. Going out, connecting with your community and with different clubs provides that acceleration needed to grow and learn. My first year was filled with networking, promoting my culture, learning from my mistakes, and meeting new people.

Working in groups with diverse backgrounds of people, stress, emotions, misinterpretation of language, and expression were all common, but when I added all the above-mentioned activities it just summed up to a smile on my face and a feeling that says "you did pretty good." When you go back to bed, close your eyes and think about the things you did, and if your actions brought a smile to your face, trust me that 1440 minutes of the day was utilized in the most efficient manner.

## **Find My Way**

*Samina Sultana*

It is important to know where you're going. For those of you reading this, I'm not talking about a direction in life. I mean the room for your first class on the first day of university. I woke up on time, I took the MiWay transit and I walked into IB scanning the building, wondering who would be in my class and waiting outside what I thought was my Sociology 100 class. Sadly, I was off by a factor of 10.

I walked in, confident, happy, excited to tackle the dynamics of society. Luckily for me, I wasn't sitting in the front row. I wrote my name and the date, then the professor welcomed her third year students to chemistry. The time was 1 pm and I had a few seconds to figure out the actual room for my class before I was late or walked in tardy, interrupting the 150 students. Thankfully, an upper year student reading Shakespeare and enjoying a grande Starbucks coffee saw the look of panic on my face and let me borrow her laptop to find the right room. I saw that instead of IB 120, it was actually 110. IB 120 was the room for my next class.

Now why am I telling you this? It isn't to inform you to read directions more carefully. The moral of this story is to tell you to explore UTM. Not just so you know where you're going, but where you want to go. It's about learning how to navigate your way through UTM. Learn about the campus as much as you can.

The beauty of university is that there is no attendance. Within the first month of school go to classes that interest you. Have a glance at what you'll learn in upper years. If you're sure of your program, then go to upper-year classes and see how the course content changes. Also, at UTM, nearly all programs have their own academic society. Contact them to learn more about the program and about volunteering opportunities.

What I wish I knew in my first year is to take advantage of the opportunities, but instead of waiting to find them, I should have researched the university, learned about my program, not to mention what else is available, and created my own opportunities. In first year, we are bombarded with information about all the aspects of the university, but juggling this with course work, adjusting to schedule changes, understanding a new class structure, figuring out the transportation, and finding your way around is problematic. My advice, ask questions. It's the best way to learn. And don't just restrict this to your program. Take advantage of the resources. Learn about the Student Union, the healthcare benefits, the health and wellness center, the library, the academic skills centre, and the gym. Walk in and talk to them about how they can help you. What events are happening around UTM? Get out there and meet new people. The learning opportunities are endless.

Whatever you do, do it with confidence and you'll realize soon enough how to conquer the campus. Don't forget, if there is something you want to see at UTM, you have the option to make it happen.

## Preparing For Class

### The Panic Room

*Faiza Tariq*

The more and more she stared at the question blankly, the clearer the pounding of the clock ticking became. It was at the wall furthest away from where she sat fidgeting in her chair-her palms drenched in sweat, her feeble legs shaking and her chest closing up with every breath she took. Finally, she surrendered her head on the desk in front of her, breathing in the fumes of the freshly printed paper that had the dreadful essay question on it. She closed her eyes and tried to drain everything that reminded her of that moment. The first exam of her undergraduate career.

She let her thoughts run elsewhere instead - how she had felt a couple of months ago on her first day in university, replaying her conversation with her mom.

"Mom everything is so different here. It puts Pakistani universities to shame I swear I am loving it here." Fareen exclaimed to her mom over Skype.

"Ha-ha, my love I am glad you are liking it – there's nothing left here anyway so I am happy you are finding it to your liking. Please study hard now. Your uncles and aunts are not giving up on their taunts any time soon for sending you to Canada." Her mother was always full of support and optimism.

"Ahh no offence mom, I love them and all but I really don't care what they think." Fareen made no effort to hide her exasperation of her nosy relatives.

Fareen sniffled a little and wiped off the tear from the paper quickly – she did not want the horrid words to erase even if she did want them to disappear. She longed to hear her mother's voice – it never failed to soothe her. But university had caught up with her and she raced her memory to remember the last time she had spoken to her.

Or her dad. Suddenly it hit Fareen. It was as if a light had turned on at the thought of her dad – and she felt a flood of words and memories flowing through her head. Her mind jumped back to high school, when on the day of the exam, her father would drive her to school and make her read a bunch of prayers.



"Fareen recite after me...It is You we worship and it is You we ask for help." The always joyful face of her dad turned sober whenever he supplicated prayers.

Fareen still dreaded the essay in front of her, but she felt calmer in the big Gym C hall now. Her pounding heart rate slowed down with every word she uttered. Finally, things became clearer. Fifteen minutes had passed. She read the essay question.

"Shit." Fareen whispered.

For the first time since she had entered the exam hall, she glanced over at the 8 and a half by 11 inch cheat sheet that she was allowed to bring in as an exam aid. It looked useless. She knew it had no notes on the essay question in front of her. But she read it nonetheless. Then she whispered her dad's prayers. Then read it again.

"Fareen, is everything okay?" Even though he uttered it softly, the teaching assistant's sudden presence had jolted Fareen in her seat.

"Hey Chris, yea I'm fine." She lied. "I am just a little confused about this question. It says to describe and analyze the Golden Periods of Islamic history...umm we covered that topic so briefly towards the end of the semester I don't think I'll be able to write a 5 page essay on this."

Chris always found the puppy dog face students made to get answers stupid. Pretending to be helpless – who falls for that shit anyway, he thought to himself? He brought himself out of his thoughts when he realized Fareen had been searching his face for an answer for a few seconds now.

"Oh you'll be fine...just try to contextualize every little aspect of the Golden Period and focus more on your analysis." Chris bit the inside of his cheeks to stop himself from smirking because he knew he had given completely useless information.

"Oh. okay...thanks." Fareen turned her back to Chris and pretended to write something on the paper.

Finally, she started making a mind map.

**GOLDEN PERIOD.** She wrote in big bold letters in the middle of the page.

And then she wrote every little thing she knew about it. The dates, the people, some points jumped out of the cheat sheet; she started making connections and links. She tried not to think of the fact that this exam was worth 35% or that she needed at least a 70 in the exam to get an A in the course. She tried not to think of the half an hour remaining on the clock. Above all, she struggled not to blame herself for taking a second year course in her first semester at university.

"What was I thinking?" She moaned to herself.

With the pen in her hand and the humming of the clock ticking getting louder in her ears, Fareen's hand flew across the pages to fill them up with crookedly shaped symbols that some may call words.

"The time is now over. Please put your pens and pencils down and stop writing." The head invigilator's voice boomed over the microphone.

Chris noticed Fareen was still writing, her head dug in the paper. He pulled back his shoulders, strutted over to her and with a smirk on his face, told her to stop writing. He then moved on to stop some other students from writing.

Fareen was too engrossed to make sense of what Chris had just said, but the second time when he came back to stop her, Fareen did surrender. The way he demanded her to stop writing seemed as if he was sounding out the words to a one year old. What a snob, Fareen frowned to herself.

She closed the exam booklet and started rubbing the bump she had gotten on her middle finger from holding the pen too hard and writing so fast. She closed her eyes and smiled to herself.

What a poorly written essay, she thought. I think I got everything down; even if it was utter nonsense. Well the prof isn't half as brutal as Chris. Boy do I need a break or what... I think I will go home during the holidays.

She crossed her fingers, whispered one last prayer to herself, one of gratitude, for having gotten through her first ever undergraduate final exam.

## **Focus On What's Important**

*Jessica Gelar*

“I will take good notes, I will study hard and I will get straight As,” I told myself on my first day of university.

Ready for my first class, I unzipped my backpack and pulled out my laptop. As I waited for it to start up, I examined the other students. Most also had their laptops opened in front of them, some sat with paper and pen, and few rested with nothing at all. When the professor entered the room, I opened a new page on Microsoft Word. The professor introduced herself and I typed out everything she said:

Office hours: Every Monday and Wednesday at 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. in the Davis Building.

The professor told us a little about herself. She said she had two kids. I typed it out. The professor said she had a dog whose name was Henry. I typed it out.

“This could be the answer to a bonus question on a test,” I thought, eager to ace the class.

From the first to the last second of the lecture, I rushed to type every word my professor muttered. After, I had six pages of notes, a cramped hand and an empty mind. What had I actually learned during the lecture? I couldn't remember. I was too focused on getting every word down - too focused on writing, instead of listening.

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I decided to take a different approach for the next class. Instead of typing my notes, I brought a sheet of paper and a pen. I focused on listening. This time, I understood the professor as she talked and I followed along without getting lost.

“And that's all for today,” the professor said at the end of the hour. “Next class, we'll be looking at macromolecules. Make sure to do the readings! See you all next week.”

I looked down at my paper; other than the date, title and a few notes on the theory of evolution, I didn't have much else. A little disappointed in my lack of notes, I decided to make up for it by making notes from the textbook.

At home, I looked through the syllabus and found the readings for that lecture: pages 10-45. With a highlighter in hand, I began to read, highlighting whatever I thought was important. Then, I copied down everything I highlighted into my notebook. This is what I had always done in high school, and if it worked for me then, it should have worked for me in university as well. A few pages in, I realized that I had highlighted and wrote down almost every word. Still, I continued. A couple hours and a cramped hand later, I finally finished.

I continued taking notes like this for the rest of the semester. However, reading, highlighting and copying everything down took up a lot of my time. Was it really necessary for me to know Darwin's birthday or where Louis Pasteur was born? I didn't know, but I wrote down every detail anyway. I found myself bringing my textbook to the lecture and finishing my own notes instead of listening to the professor. And when it was time to study for the midterm, I spent most of my time writing my notes instead of actually studying the material. I felt like I was doing something wrong, but I decided to continue with my method. After all, if it worked for me in high school it should work for me in university, right?



My stomach sank when I realized the midterm questions focused on lecture material instead of the textbook. And the questions that did look familiar, I could not remember the answers to because I spent more time writing it instead of actually learning it. My first midterm mark was not pretty and I became frustrated. I didn't know what to do, because what had always worked for me before didn't work anymore. There was just too much content and a lot more readings in university compared to high school. After giving it some thought, I remembered how other students printed the lecture slides and brought them to class. Even though the semester was ending, I decided to give a new method a try.

Before the last few classes, I read the textbook readings assigned for that lecture, but I did not write any notes. Then, I printed the lecture slides and brought them to class. As the professor talked, I felt familiar with the concepts because I had already read them on my own before class. Having the lecture slides in my hands also helped, because I didn't have to rush to write everything down – I already had the information in front of me. Instead, I only wrote down any extra information the professor mentioned. With this method, I realized that I truly understood the material; it helped that I had done the readings beforehand, so the lecture just explained the concepts further. Then, I went home and read the parts of the textbook that I did not understand that well. I focused on what was important. These were the notes I took down, instead of copying everything word for word.

Throughout my process of figuring out which note-taking method worked best for me, I realized that it did not help to just write down everything I heard or read without giving it thought. What worked best was doing my readings beforehand, and bringing lecture slides to class. Then, I

would accompany my lecture slides with extra notes from the textbook. I didn't focus on the little details, unless the professor said it was important to know.

However, throughout my next few years of university, I realized that not one method worked for every class. Each class was a little different, and I always had to figure out which method worked best. I always had to remind myself that many methods do exist, to not be afraid to try something new and to focus on what's important.

## **Idiot**

*Arjan Banerjee*

I walk into the reportedly biggest classroom on campus for the first time and my breath catches in my throat. This is the biggest room I've ever been in. The plaque on the wall in front of me proclaims, "Classroom IB 110. Seating Capacity: 560." My eyes struggle to span the expanse of the room. Evenly spaced, comfortable looking, swiveling chairs are attached to long blue-gray writing benches. Wide aisles and luxuriously broad stairways make the room look open, spacious and sparsely populated though it was nearly at full capacity.

I quietly find myself a place close to one of the doors. The people around me seem to all know each other. They laugh and joke and sounds of friendship fill the air. I gently extract my brand new Fundamental Principles textbook and UofT notebook from my well-travelled black 'Gear' backpack and wait for the professor. The guy on my left glances at me as if he wants to strike up a conversation. He wears a Maple Leafs jersey and a Blue Jays hat. I avoid eye contact and stare pointedly at the massive blackboards at the front of the room. When I left my on-campus townhouse this morning, I walked toward class with a neighbour who cheerfully informed me that my accent was "very exotic and interesting." At the bookstore when I bought my blue and white UofT Calendar, the cashier had added her opinion on the subject, saying "It's fun to listen to you talking! You know, with your accent I mean." I didn't want to be reminded I was different again.

A woman walks into the room through the door immediately beside me and glides down to the front. Her tweed blazer and grey, smooth trousers are impeccably clean and pressed. Her eyebrows are scrunched together and not all the deep lines on her forehead are from age. I check the time: 11:07. We're seven minutes late already. The professor doesn't look to be in any sort of a hurry. Is punctuality not an important value in this country?

She arrives at the podium down at the front right of the room now. She presses a few buttons and a whirring noise blares from above me as two projectors magically descend through the ceiling. As they flicker on, the gigantic white wall above the blackboards comes to life. The UofT logo screams at us before the wall slowly transitions to show a plain blue PC home screen.

11:09 now. Students still stream into the room. I swivel in my chair to take in the sight of the ocean of people who now fill all the seats. The room really is like a theatre. The ground slopes up sharply. Each row of seats rises significantly higher than the one in front of it. I look back down at the professor who looks unfazed at the size of the class. I wouldn't want to be in her place.

Finally, she starts talking. "Hello first years and welcome to your first chemistry class in university. My name is Jacqueline Jones and the most important thing you need to know about me is that I'm a Bears fan. Any Saints fans are now free to get up and leave the room."

The auditorium erupts in laughter and I join in without knowing what I'm laughing at. Professor Jones sounds warmer and less intimidating than she looks. Smiling slightly, she flips to the first slide. Symbols and formulae crowd it. I squint at the screen and feel glad that I recognize all of them and know what they mean. She dives straight into chemistry and I take notes furiously, trying to keep up.

The next slide appears: 'Concentrations'. It lists six equations. I recognize the first five: simple normality-molarity equations. I can't place the last one, at the bottom-left of the screen. It seems to define a symbol I don't recognize. It looks like a stylized capital X. Professor Jones rattles on. "You're going to have to know all of these equations really well. If you aren't absolutely comfortable with using them already, go home and practice them thoroughly tonight. This is basic stuff and forms the foundation for this course. I can guarantee that they will feature in the first test."

Vexed, my eyes flit around the room. Everyone else is writing and seems to know what she's talking about. I need to ask her what the X means. But how do I put my hand up in a room full of six hundred people? Still, I have to do it. This is important.

As I force myself to put my hand up high into the air, another hand pops up in the front row. I recognize the face the hand belongs to. I had met that girl during the international students' orientation. I quickly put my hand down as Professor Jones points at her. The girl's high-pitched voice quivers, "What's the last symbol professor? The one like the X?"

For the second time in five minutes, the room erupts in laughter. Professor Jones looks slightly amused as she says, "That's mole-fraction. You should have learnt this in high school." The poor girl stares stone-faced at her binder. I can see her blush from where I'm sitting. Everybody stares at her.

The guys around me shake with laughter. "How does one not know mole-fraction? What an idiot!" The Maple-Leafed guy turns to me and laughs. "What an idiot! How do these people find their way into university?"

I can think of nothing else to do but nod and emit a hollow laugh as Professor Jones flicks to a new slide.

## **Listening in Class**

### **Introduction to Economics**

*Ogonna Jideobi*

I sit in the middle of the last row, right of the University of Toronto, Mississauga Kaneff Centre's lecture hall 137. My eyes scan the room and I spot two light-skinned girls in the front of the first row talking. Black wavy hair swooshes as one of them turns to respond. She waves a white A4 paper with graphs of curves in her right hand as she gestures. I think they talk about Monopoly, the reading for the week. I did not study.

I follow the sound of laughter and spy three boys in the middle of the second row. They look South-American. The three boys tug at each other's sweaters, chatter, snicker, and after a while, guffaw.

I glance at the big round clock behind me on the wall - 8:05am.

Professor Bailey, our Introduction to Economics lecturer gestures in front of the second row. He has dark-brown hair, a dark-brown beard, dark-brown pants and a bright red sweater. The limp in his walk reduces his figure to 5 feet 10 inches. He grins to greet a boy sitting in front. The five yellow ceiling lights above make Professor Bailey look like a 'star on a stage'. After all, he is the star here.

Professor Bailey nods to the tune of music. He plays country music at the beginning of every class. I think, he thinks it helps students relax.

I feel nervous.

Introduction to Economics is another class where I barely understand anything taught. I hate not understanding, being left behind.

I wince as the hall's back lights come on.

"Okay guys, now remember from last week..." Professor Bailey starts.



Here we go again.

Professor Bailey talks, and then writes on the large blackboard. The blackboard runs across the wall in front of the hall.

He's too fast. I want to understand. I focus on listening and following the lecture.

"A monopolist is a Price-maker" Professor Bailey continues. "He must drop his price to sell more."

After about twenty minutes of scribbles, I miss something.

"Wait," I murmur. I don't understand the last thing he said. My cheeks colour. I panic. I skim through my notes. I glance at the notes beside mine. I see white spaces of 4-5 lines between black ink sentences. It has more spaces than mine.

I hear Professor Bailey ask a question. I stop to listen. Maybe it's important. Maybe I can understand the rest.

"So if Revenue is Price times Quantity and Price is  $12-Q$ , Revenue is...  $12Q-Q$  squared?" He says. This part is a bit easy, it's algebra.

"Okay, let's try some I-clickers" Professor Bailey beams.

The knots in my stomach tighten. I understand only patches of the lecture - here and there. I reach into my red purse on my lap.

Click. Green light shines on my white I-clicker. Just like Professor Bailey's grin, it makes things worse. I manage to swallow the saliva in my mouth.

I think I got the first two questions right.

"Let's try number three" Professor Bailey urges.

“If the price is 4 dollars and the monopolist sold 8 units, what happened to the other 2 units? Why does he only receive 10 dollars?” I glare at the screen.

I shake my head to pull myself out of despair. I skim the blackboard. White chalk marks are running everywhere. I bend to see the higher board. The screen still covers most of the top.

The huge timer on the screen blinks in blue. 00:12, 00:11, 00:10.

I scribble numbers lightly by the side of the page. I will clean them later.

“Is it 250?” I blurt. I look up to see which option has ‘250’. A graph appears on the screen. C has the tallest bar. Too late.

“The answer is C” Professor Bailey whispers. “Next question!”

There’s no point in trying.

Well, maybe I can do this one. I hurry to solve it. Behind me, two girls chatter. I turn and stare at them. One of them is round and the other slender. They have light-brown skin. They look South American too. Our eyes meet, I squeeze my face, they stare at me and I snap my head forward.

“Okay and the answer is D...” I hear Professor Bailey shout. I frown at the girls.

“Ok guys, see you Thursday.” Professor Bailey says. Oh, and he smiles.

I shove my purse and blue 360 page notebook into my red school bag. I push the hall’s door, pause outside and sigh.

Students walk past me as I stroll to the door of the Kaneff Centre. They must wonder if I am still on this planet.

Davis Building looms over Kaneff Centre on the left.

“I could go somewhere and study.” I mumble. I spot Putnam Place, my residence, in between trees further down right. I want to bury my head under a pillow.

I look left, right, sigh again and walk right.

## **Nerves and Anxiety**

*Alexandria Hoy*

“Okay guys, who has questions?”

The classroom stills with quiet. Professor Turner takes turns staring down each of us around the long wooden rectangle table. I meet her gaze and violently shake my head.

“No one?”

A red head boy inches his hand up, glancing around the room, exchanging looks with his buddies. Professor Turner points at the boy.

“Yes? What’s your name?”

“Trevor.”

“Okay Trevor. What’s your question?” Professor Turner nods her head towards the blackboard.

“Um... so when you were talking about drawing this molecule... How do we draw this?” He clasps a black ruled notebook and lifts it up. Tiny tremors in his hands cause the book to quiver in the air. I swallow down a hard lump in my throat and watch. All eyes in the room slide over to the boy. His friends beside him stifle giggles.

“Can you draw it on the board?”

“Um... okay.” Trevor scoots out of the rolling chair and shuffles over to the chalk board. Chalk scrapes the dark green board in long arcs.

“Yeah, so anyone who has a question go up and draw it on the board. I don’t want to waste time here.”

I fidget in my seat and wrap my arms around myself. My palms grip my bony elbows.

“C’mon guys. We only have an hour here.”

I didn’t have any questions to ask. I just wanted to introduce myself to the professor. My eyes avert away from Professor Turner’s gaze and I pick my cuticles as I ponder how to get her to remember my name and ask her for a volunteer position.

“Okay guys let me tell you a story. A few years back, a student in my class started off in low 60s from the first test. She came to me and took the initiative to ask how she can study better. This student attended these sessions and was quiet and shy and did not ask any questions. She didn’t benefit from this. Once she began becoming active in these sessions her second test score was much improved and she ended up with a 90. So those of you who are shy and don’t want to ask any questions need to speak up. Or else you won’t benefit from these office hours.”

I widen my eyes in the direction of Joshua, lounging in the seat beside me. He smiles wryly and speaks in low tones.

“Better start asking questions then.”

A bunch of the other students jump up and grab at the chalk in a great swoop. They begin frantically drawing figures. Joshua wiggles his eyebrows at me. I chuckle.

After the study session, Joshua and I walk out of the enclosed room. I lift my hand and wave goodbye to Professor Turner.

“Bye Professor.”

“Bye.”

We walk down the steep IB stairs from the third floor to the first in silence.

“How am I supposed to introduce myself to her? She’s so intimidating I don’t know how to talk to her...”

“You’ll get it,” Joshua says. He nudges my ribs.

The walk outside in the September winds turn my shoulders inwards. The breeze flutters through my spine and rattles the leaves on the small trees. The pure white clouds ride the sun, masking the rays in the sky. We step into the CCT building, sheltered by the glass doors.

“I like how she’s blunt though. I just want to get to know her man. But I have no questions to ask... I’m too shy.”

“You’ll be fine, okay? We’ll think up of something. Or try doing some extra work. Show initiative ya know. I’m going to the library so I’ll catch up with you later.”

“Okay I’ll see ya later.” I continue walking down the concrete halls as Joshua scurries in through the library doors.

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I enter the small meeting room and charge for the board. I wheeze to take my next breath, leg muscles aching from sprinting up the stairs. The clock reads: 11:50. I’m ten minutes early.

A few other classmates hover over the chalkboard, wrestling to occupy space. I throw myself into the huddle and scratch a question on the board.

Professor Turner arrives on time. She sits in the chair at the head of the table closest to me.

“Okay guys let’s start. You. What’s your name?”

Standing in front of the board, I widen my eyes and stutter out two syllables.

“Alex.”

“Okay Alex what is your question?”

“Um... I –uh- was doing some practice questions and didn’t know how to solve this one.”

I point with chalk gripped in my hand to my drawing. My knuckles turn white.

“Okay well tell me what’s wrong with it.”

“Um....”

My body shifts into different positions from side to side and I rest my head on my right arm, my left supporting the weight. My eyes seek out Joshua, who arrived late, sitting in the back of the class. I look everywhere but into Professor Turner’s eyes.

“Can anyone help her out?”

Quiet envelopes the room. I hear gulps from the students beside me. I blink rapidly in an effort to block out the prickling feeling from behind my eyes.

“So you need to flip the molecule in order to solve this question.”

I meet Professor Turner’s eyes. Her soft brown eyes peer out from under softened eyebrows that rest atop them. Professor Turner gives me a small smile and raises her eyebrows, urging me to understand. The tension in my shoulders relaxes and I begin to think clearly.

“Oh okay I see it.” I scribble down the changes and beam back at Professor Turner.

“Yes very good. Alex, was it? Okay next.”

I look up at Joshua. He gives me a thumbs up and grins coyly.

I made it through my first encounter.

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Next class I sit in the front row of IB110, fighting for my spot with my friends. I push my way through as the prior class pours out of the door. I win my seat.

Professor Turner strides in donning a bright red, orange and white dress and a long pearl necklace. I fiddle with my thumbs and glance up into her direction as she crosses by the desks. I build my courage and inhale deep.

“Hi Professor Turner.” I plaster a smile on my face, teeth clenching together.

“Hey Alex.” She waves in my direction and I hear her call my name.

“Did you hear that? She knows me.” I giggle like a fool as if a celebrity called out my name. My friends laugh at my excitement as I bask in the feeling of contentment.

My nerves dissolve throughout the class. Professor Turner would call me up in the middle of class to solve problems on the board as I got more and more involved in her office hours. Finally, I worked up to asking her for a volunteer position in her laboratory. She said yes.

This story came from my experience in my second year at the University of Toronto Mississauga. I was very shy and did not know how to approach professors in order to get to know them better or build a rapport. In my first year I had always looked for an opportunity to do research under a professor but did not know how to go about asking. It was not until second year that I realized, with help from a friend, that the best way to approach professors is to participate in class and show initiative. After I braved my anxiety and created a relationship between myself and Professor Turner, I discovered she wasn't so scary after all and she really wanted to help me accomplish my goals. After volunteering in her laboratory during the remainder of second year, I was given the opportunity to do a Research Opportunity Project (ROP) in the summer, a work study during third year, and now plan to do a fourth year biology thesis in Professor Turner's laboratory. My message to others would be to get past those nerves and anxiety and try to talk upfront to their professors.



## What To Do When Things Don't Go Quite Right

### Offences

*Shealyn Ivany*

“Don’t worry, you’ll be fine. Just breathe.” Maya rubs my back. My heartbeat quickens. The door that leads into Professor Graham White’s office is slightly open, letting out a little crack of sunlight. I glance at my phone. 11:57. My appointment is at 12:00. I let out a shaky breath.

“Should I go in now?” I ask, never taking my eyes off the dull wood of the door.

Maya checks the time on her own phone. “Nah, just wait a couple more minutes,” she whispers. “Catch your breath. Don’t freak out. Everything is going to be fine.”

I look at Maya and my mouth curves into a half smile. “Thanks again for coming with me today,” my voice wobbles. “I don’t know if I could’ve done this alone.”

She pats my shoulder and widens her green eyes knowingly. “Anytime. I’m here for you.”

I look back at the door. I look back at my phone. 11:58. My face feels hot and my clothes too tight.

There were some significant citation problems with your last essay that need to be addressed. Please come and see me during my office hours on Tuesday, or book an appointment with me at a different time.

These words have haunted me since Sunday, and they’re the reason why I’m now standing in the political science wing of the Davis building, shaking. As I read the email, my mind swam with all the possible things I could have done wrong. But I was never able to come up with a solid answer. I have been living in a state of anxiety ever since.

The email was sent by my POL112 professor, Graham White. He bears a stark resemblance to Santa Claus, with his white hair and beard and protruding belly. He seems no-nonsense in lecture, but I’ve never talked to him in person. Right now, I hope his personality is more like the jolly man in the red suit.

“I should probably go in now,” I say. I clutch my notebook in my clammy hands. I have all of my essay rough work with me, and a speech prepared in my head. I just want to get this over with.

“Just leave your jacket and bag with me,” Maya says. “I’ll wait out here for you.”

“Thanks,” I say.

She pulls me in for a hug. “Good luck,” she whispers. “Go in there with your head held high. Don’t be nervous. Everything will be fine.”

I smile. “Okay.” I pull away from her and walk three steps towards the door. Let me just start by saying I would never plagiarize, and I am always very careful when applying my research to my essays, and I brought all of my rough notes with me to prove that to you...Fragments of my prepared speech tumble through my mind. I take a deep breath. I knock on the door.

“Come in,” Professor White’s voice says.

I push the door open and step inside. Professor White’s office is like any other professor’s office; small and stuffy, big enough for a desk, a bookshelf, and a few chairs. The sunlight streaming in through his floor to ceiling window makes my skin burn.

“Hi, I’m Shealyn,” I say in what I hope sounds like a confident voice. “You wanted to see me about my essay?”

“Ah, yes,” Professor White says. “Please, take a seat.” His voice is loud and gravelly, but shows no trace of anger. His hair and beard look even whiter up close.

I close the door behind me and sit down in one of the two chairs facing him at his desk. The cushion is hard beneath me. I sit straight and stiff, my palms clammy and my cheeks flushed. Professor White scratches the skin under his white beard. Sitting this close to him, I can see specks of green in his blue eyes, a few hopeful strands of brown in his snowfall of white hair. His left hand boasts a gold wedding band, slightly tarnished with age.

I’m about to launch into my speech when Professor White looks me straight in the eye. “First of all, you’re not in trouble.” I never knew his voice could sound so soft.

My body deflates a little. “Really? I brought all the rough work I did before writing my essay in case you wanted to see it.” My words spill out of my mouth as I gesture at my notebook.

He smiles and shakes his head. “No need,” he says. “I didn’t call you in here because you committed an academic offense. But the problems with your essay could be seen as suspect later down the road, so I just wanted to warn you of what you did wrong.”

I can hear my heartbeat in my ears. I let out a long sigh. “Okay.”

He chuckles. “You can breathe a sigh of relief now.”

I laugh politely, an embarrassed grin plastered on my face.

“I have the Turnitin version of your essay, so I can show you what went wrong,” he says. He turns to his computer and waves his hand at me. I get up out of my chair and stand behind him so I can see the computer screen.

Parts of my essay are highlighted and full of colour. “You have a significant percentage of material that was flagged as being word for word from the sources you used. Even though you used in-text citations for everything, you did not paraphrase, and did not use quotation marks, which is considered plagiarism. Always make sure to use quotation marks if you are using a direct quote from the author. If you paraphrase, you don’t need quotation marks.”

“Oh, okay,” I say, my heart clenching. I remember learning this rule in tutorial, but it must have slipped my mind while I was writing my essay.

“I know you didn’t plagiarize because your citations are correct, but next time, make sure to use quotation marks when you use direct quotes, or paraphrase.” He turns around in his chair to look at me. “Like I said, this is just a warning, but if you do this in the future, there might be consequences.”

“Of course,” I say, nodding my head. “I totally understand.”

“Good,” he says. He throws his hands up. “That’s it.”

“That’s it?” I ask. It feels like less than two minutes has passed.

He nods. “Yup, you’re free to go.”

“Oh, okay,” I say. I gather my things. “Thanks for explaining. I promise I’ll pay more attention next time.”

He nods once and smiles. “Good. Have a good day.”

“Thanks, you too,” I say with a grin and my head held high. I open the door and step into the cool hallway. Maya looks up from her phone as I close the door behind me.

“How’d it go?” she whispers.

My whole body suddenly feels weak. I cross the hall and put my back against the wall. I slide down to the floor, collapsing in a relieved heap. “I worried for nothing. Absolutely nothing,” I say.

Maya sits on the floor beside me. “Everything’s cool?”

I nod. “Everything’s cool.”

She nudges my shoulder. “See? I told you it would work out.”

I nod. “Yeah, I’m glad he called me in actually. At least now I’ll never make the same mistake.” I lean my head against the cool wall and close my eyes. I let all my worries about citations and references and writing six page research essays float out of my head. “I never want to go through that again.”

## **Invitation to the Journey**

*Shuyu Yuki Wang*

Never do I hesitate to challenge the unexpected coming hours, although I cannot predict the unforeseeable future. When days unveil their significant beauty, they await the final exams' bells ringing. I, as a freshman, soon will no longer be one of the newly admitted first-years.

My friend from Vancouver called me again in the morning. We greeted each other as usual, and the distance between us seems minimized with our words. She mentions the temperature, the school work and her social life, melancholy. She does not like winter.

“Shuyu, it's so cold here in Vancouver! It feels like frozen.”

I listen without any distribution. She would never know that I just swiped out my phone notification suggesting, Minus fifteen degrees Celsius, Toronto.

My friend turned on her anxious high-school graduate mode, debating which university path to follow and the possible study opportunities. Her thoughts fluctuate up and down, as the candle lights dwindle in the wind. She thinks some alternatives have or have not been mistreated. She did worry, she was anxious, ambitious and sometimes pushing boundaries. She was stressed, obviously, she was over-stressed. Fortunately, she believed in studying and she would find the path that she would be devoted to, because we felt the same once, and I could see the similarity in many people as her age. Oh, I mean the stage of life, since I am actually younger than her, that in fact I graduated early. In terms of education, there would not be young or old, as only experience and knowledge speak aloud.

However, I have had the moment when I doubted the wide and sometimes, boundless journey of education. Yet, I have already seen the directions and ways pointed out and have had them merge with a silent resistance. What is university, or in other words, what is education? What is education for me? As a sudden hint, I remember a thesis from the short story I read in high school; it suggested taking the bus was an education. For the protagonist, on the bus he observed the interactions between different passengers, thus learned their behaviors and personalities.

For me education could be something small, something I could divide into pieces of my daily routine. Have you ever walked into the back alley where people's back yards are? My old neighbors used to attend the same high school as me, but we rarely met on the way to school. While they were walking on the same monotonous road to school, I altered my options and chose various routes walking to school. I knew something they had not yet found out, that I discovered

eighteen different paths, requiring a similar amount of time to get to school. In this way, I never felt bored on my way. This encouraged me to view education as exploring new wonders and different solutions, which spurred me to realize the possibility behind traveling. I was capable of exploring more than one solution. Nevertheless, how far would I travel? How capable am I to achieve my goal? What do I think I know but not really know? What have I seen that I never really see? Where is the limit?"

One thing that proved certain was change. The change was constant. Like the majority of international students, after arriving in Canada I lived a life and studied alone. Alone, and I might be lonely or I might not. However, unlike some of my colleagues and my dear friends, I was quite fond of switching the places that I lived, taking the courses I was not good at, or volunteering in a large community when I was still that shy and embarrassed girl. I was seeking adaption or external education for change.

"Shuyu, I feel a sense of urgency, and I might be too impatient to wait. I cannot wait to make a difference in my life." My friend says on the telephone.

I understood, my friend, what it meant to structure out a detailed future, to plan what specific career path to go on, and to obtain the life one would want to enjoy. However, the endless plan-making and organizing process would not guide me, or her, to anywhere. Will I study in science? Should I study what I am good at or what I am passionate about? Should I transfer to another university? What other skills could I acquire? Should I participate in exchange abroad or should I take an internship? Popular questions appeared and were reinforced from one year to the next, and to another. With infinite choices unfolding and only a finite amount of time allowed, what was coming next?

Certainly, life can be mysterious, one with no integral or approximate limit. I have truly hoped that I could draw a tangent line, and find the 'Ah-ha' moment when an epiphany would come. Therefore, if one could talk to others that were senior, who have already climbed the Mount Everest of knowledge, they could outline the overview and the blueprint. Then one might realize how unrealistic it is to measure one's judgment using others' rulers.

"Shuyu, what is freshman year like?"

Being a freshman was not an embarrassing thing, like other things, it was normal. People have been a freshman once for everything. Why not view everything as restarting, reconstructing and possible?

A teacher and close friend once told me, “Why are you so rushed about planning out the rest of your life at this point? What I see is a young vibrant, intelligent and passionate woman in front of me. Shuyu, you have so much potential. In you, I see much of the potential.”

Similarly, I talked back to my friend on the phone, with the same content. Suddenly, I felt the epiphany, I could visualize the lights that dragged her out of the abyss of confusion. Maybe she does not need to predetermine her future, which she has forgotten the process of growing up is worth the same as creating its meaning. I would define this progress as the meaning of maturity, not just life itself. This would be the one of the answers of education, because solutions vary.

I have warned her and myself, “Be patient and work hard. How many times have you questioned yourself of how carefully you read a book? By reading, I mean to dig into the concepts, to view the wonder of its applications, and to develop the structure to connect it to the practical world. I learned to study anxiously as a greedy learner, a very passionate scholar, not just to scan, summarize or jump directly to the conclusion. Also, maybe sometimes we were just trying to search line by line, page by page, or cover to cover, but ignore the voice of our inner selves.”

I learned people should follow their hearts, but more importantly, take responsibility for choices made. This would signal the best time, and this would suggest the exact time to start to question and challenge oneself. Let the future self shine its internal lights, because we are the future.

“Good luck, my friend.” I hung up the phone.

## **Her**

*Alexey Anton Naumov*

In high school I figured myself a scientist. I passed with little studying in sciences and maths. But when I tried, my marks barely matched up to others. An 88 to a 95, an 87 to a 94, and so on. My friends told me I had nothing to complain about. But the more I thought about it, the more I felt my potential sink.

Then I failed my physics course and lost my engineering prospects. I felt confused, perpetually losing hope. I played more music and ate more food and smoked more and occasionally broke down crying on my bathroom floor late at night.

As I desperately grabbed onto fleeting joy, I hastily enveloped myself in a relationship. She was empathetic enough. I cried to her sometimes. But the emotions felt forced. I hesitated to be myself around her. She was manipulative, every second text laden with bitter aggression and passive sarcasm. We broke up 8 times in total. I felt myself becoming like her.

I ended the 5-month relationship a few weeks after the start of university. I felt relieved, proud, anxious, and a little bit broken.

The first few weeks were exceptional. I was starting university and a new job. I was ambitious and eager. I excelled at my classes, and willingly bit into the professionalism and intellectuality of my professors and peers.

I celebrated my marks and my friendships alike. I read homework patiently, wrote assignments concisely, and listened to my lecturers attentively.

Then it stopped.

Readings piled on, my assignments fell through until the last minute. Every brief moment between school and work filled with uncontrollable sadness. My aloneness, more than my lack of scope, became apparent to me. Every weekend became a contest between drugs and alcohol. Not for the purpose of drowning out my sorrow, but to accent whatever brief moments I shared with others. The substances loosened every minute, giving the impression of “time well-spent”.

And of course after every night of inebriation, I escaped early in the morning from a foreign bed to return home and shower and eat and cry myself to an afternoon nap.



Then I woke up, ate, and played video games until the dagger of procrastination dangled comfortably at the tip of my nose. At which point I did whatever assignment I had to do and fell back into the peace of sleep at around 2 in the morning.

Apart from those activities, I was alone.

I thought myself a failure. I thought of every time I failed and lamented on every failing situation. I considered failure to be my future.

I thought about suicide a few times.

In the midst of this process, I found myself thinking more and more about Her. Her, with the blonde hair and the misty skin and the watery eyes. My first real romantic endeavour. Between summertime kisses on grassy hills and tearful arguments about our feelings, we were left with bouts of silence on all airs of communication. After another emotional affair this past summer, I was convinced that she hated me.

I expected it.

But I texted her anyways.

The text read “It’s okay if you don’t want to talk to me, but I just want you to know that what I said wasn’t true. None of it was true. I’m sorry for being manipulated into telling you all of those things. I’m sorry.”

We met that weekend at a busy shopping mall, only barely escaping the late autumn cold. We talked about life, work, family, school, and feelings.

Everything felt right again.

Before I let her go, we agreed to get involved after exams.

But of course that wasn’t true.

“This is stupid. Can I just call you my girlfriend?” I asked her on our 4th late-night phone call of the week. “Sure,” she whispered, giggling softly.

And from then on, things were different.

Whether or not it was a change of focus or something else, I’m not too sure. I found comfort after exploring my most uncomfortable feelings.

I still break down sometimes, but I always tell her about it.

I’m more ambitious, more focused, more hopeful, and more determined for the future. Because I know my feelings and my actions affect other people now. They affect Her.

## **Doctor**

*Omar Khattab*

“This is going to suck.” Mom sighs as she turns off the lights in the kitchen and approaches the stairs. She asks me to grab a club soda, a straw, and her laptop and place them on the desk in her room.

“You are going to bed now?” I ask as I jump from the couch. “But it’s only 10 p.m.”

“Work starts at 7 a.m. I need to wake up at 5 a.m. so I can get ready and make it on time.” Mom slowly climbs the stairs to get to bed.

Mom just recently got a job in Brampton at a factory called Quest. We live in Mississauga and the factory is an hour away. She got the job through an employment agency. The guy at the agency explained to her that the job is nothing but labour. She will not sit on a desk or organize files or meet customers or try to sell a product. She will only pick up boxes from place to place from seven to four every day.

Mom used to be a doctor before we came to Canada. She worked in a well-known hospital in Egypt. But she had to resign when we decided to move to Canada. Dad could not resign because he maintained a high and hard to reach position in his glass company called Sphinx. Mom hoped to find a better position in a better hospital here in Toronto. But it turns out; Mom could not be a doctor in Canada. Or at least not right away. She had to study again and take a placement test. Then study some more for a couple of years and take another two or three tests. Mom couldn’t do that again. She did it once and passed and worked in several hospitals. She shouldn’t do it again.

I wake up the next morning to the sound of Mom rushing down the stairs. She fumbles for her car keys on the shelf in the main hall of the house. I hear her bursting out words every minute or so.

“Shit!” Mom yells. “Where did I put those damn keys?”

“Hey Mom, what is wrong?” I rub my eyes and scratch my neck.

Mom wears a grey Canada shirt, blue jeans, a black jacket and fat safety shoes.

“It is already 6:30 a.m. and work starts in thirty minutes.” Mom hops in her shoes.

“I think the keys are on the kitchen counter.” I said while yawning hoping to sleep some more.

Mom dashes to the kitchen, snatches the keys and runs back to the door. “I gotta go. I am running late. Don’t let Hatem miss class again.”

I zombied my way back to bed and set the alarm to 11 a.m. for my writing class. I hear the garage door creaking and watch Mom as she speeds out of our driveway. I rest my back on the side of the wall and stare at my wallet. Someday I will have to wake up at 6 a.m. for work just like Mom. Someday very soon. I slide down my bed and plant my face under the pillow. I open the window slightly to get a soft breeze to make myself feel better. I slowly drift back to sleep with the sound of the garage door closing.

I come back home from school at 4 p.m. Silence rules the house. My brother is in class and Mom should be here soon. I toss my bag next to the stairs and march to the kitchen for a snack. I open the fridge, but nothing grabs my attention. I hear the garage door squeak.

Mom barges in the side door.

“Hey, I am home,” Mom says as she enters with a couple of plastic bags. “I got some stuff from Walmart on my way back.

“Oh cool. How was your first day at work?”

“As I expected,” Mom smirks slightly. “It sucked. I had to go to Walmart and buy myself some chocolate. I couldn’t find Galaxy chocolate though. Got Cadbury Dairy Milk instead.”

Mom loved Galaxy chocolate. She used to eat it almost every day back in Egypt. We couldn’t find it here in Toronto.

“Was it tiring?” I ask as I take the Walmart bags and put everything in place.

“It was exhausting.” Mom takes off her safety shoes.

“Won’t you miss being a doctor?” I raise my eyebrows and scratch the back of my neck. “I mean it is a huge jump from doctor to labour in a factory.”

“I’ll get over it.” Mom snatches a club soda and surrenders to the couch while resting her feet on the footrest.

I grab some of Mom’s Cadbury bars and run upstairs to do my homework. Hatem comes in an hour later and whines about food. Mom worked all day so she didn’t cook any food.

“Oh crap, I forgot about food.” Mom scratches her lower lip. “Just get a pizza or something. I’ll make some food tomorrow after work.”

I order two large pizzas from Pizza Hut and they arrive an hour later. Mom eats three slices and runs to bed at 9 p.m. I stay up a little longer playing *The Last of Us* and watching *The Walking Dead*. I got to bed at 12 a.m.

I wake up the next morning at 6 a.m. to the squeaky sound of the garage door. I look out the window and I see Mom’s white Honda taking a right into Burnhamthorpe road.

## **New Beginnings**

*Dylan Prior*

The first year of university. Shedding the title from a past life as a high school student, or at least for me, a college student. I finally did it. After a two year program at Humber College, I was accepted into the arms of the University of Toronto. It was at Humber where I figuratively regained my first love, literature. After years of not knowing what I wanted to be when I grew up I finally found it. I excelled at Humber and won three awards before being granted my transfer: and that's when it started.

A new beginning is what I hoped for - and a new beginning is what I received. It all started out so well, a phrase I now use annually as if it were a "Merry Christmas" or a "Happy New Year".

When you start a new beginning, you are given many options in how you can fill this blank page. Some use colourful crayons to smudge their opinions; others tend to delicately grace a page with delicate pencil crayons; others use the basic black, blue, and red - articulating the organized lecture, while those sketching in pencil are comforted by the eraser ready to delete a mistake from the otherwise perfect page.

In university you are going to meet people. Some want to befriend you. Some want nothing to do with you. Some want to screw you. Some want to screw your girlfriend. Some will succeed.

In university you are going to encounter things you've never seen before. These things may be things you told yourself you would never cross paths with and always associated them with that of the plague. There are lots of drugs at university. You'll find them. They'll find you. You used to believe in "just say no" but now it's a bit different. How do you say no to what all are saying "yes" to? After all, you're in university. It's a new beginning. It's time to try new things.

Club nights, pub nights, and parties in the dorm are just ways of life here. Sex, drugs, and alcohol are your holy trinity. The funny thing is, I stayed away from all of that during my first year at university. I bought all my books, I was going to classes, I enjoyed my tutorials. Then I found out that sex, drugs, and alcohol got the best of the girl I was practically engaged to. "Never give up" is what I told myself. "Never give up" is what I used as my mantra. "Never give up" on love. "Never give up" on the love of your life. "Never give up" on the love who doesn't love you back. Now you're just being stupid: not giving up on the love that gave up on you.

In September, I was studying outside the new IB building - reading Shakespeare on the campus patio. I was thinking of different things to bring up during tutorial as deer were passing by. By

October, I was put on happy pills and incapable of writing an essay. I kept telling myself “I’ll go tomorrow” and never went back again.

But then there was hope. I got a doctor’s note and my professors granted me extensions and tips for the final exam. “I think I can, I think I can” became “I know I can, I know I can” and I vowed to stay focused and earn those credits that I thought were lost. Even though you are not letting distractions get the better of you, you are asked to watch your aunt’s dog for the weekend. It was perfect: I would have a quiet house to myself where I could get all of my studying completed. And all was going according to plan until the dog (who had a history of aggression problems) decided to attack me while I was sleeping and in doing so ripped a tendon in the hand I wrote with - causing me to forfeit the exams.

In the summer, I was looking to regain confidence through redemption. I took as many courses as I was allowed to so I could make up for the lost year. Suddenly, the GTA was flooded by a huge rain storm. My house was just another victim. While working on my house, I made a promise to myself saying “I will go tomorrow,” but I never returned to school.

After trying to get over my home being destroyed as well as the trauma of my dog dying while driving her to the vet, I went to a friend’s cottage for the weekend. While finally enjoying myself and celebrating the end of a horrible summer, the anticipation of a new beginning for the coming September was put on hold as my foot gave out on me while running. The tearing of one ligament and the crushing another, left me with a severely damaged foot, unable to bear weight.

And after resigning from those courses, I looked for a new beginning in the new year. It was great to be back at school. The material was inspiring, the professors were engaging. Then, some jerk broke my windshield, which injured my mother and I spent the rest of the semester pleading with myself not to induce the pleasurable violence I would love these uncharged criminals to endure.

It’s now my third first year at UTM. Still waiting for that comeback. I’m hopeful because at least I’m making changes. Will I succeed? I don’t know yet. I’m trying though. I am writing this in the library at school, and I plan on attending every class and tutorial while studying and making my way to a masters and a PhD. Will that happen? With these marks, nope. “Never give up”.

Here is my advice. For your first year - go by that mantra: please, never give up ... on yourself. You will encounter problems, you will learn life lessons; you will make mistakes. Your blank page will be filled with wrong answers, grammatical errors, plagiarism, sweat stains, blood stains, and even burn marks if you didn’t succeed in throwing your once blank paper into a fire. I say this: Make your mistakes. Try new things. Meet new people. I’m not going to say go ahead and party and have sex - I’m still not over that yet. But this is what I want you to do: stay in school. Go to class. Go to tutorial. Be healthy. Go out every once in a while. Have some time

dedicated to you. But dedicate yourself to your classes. Dedicate yourself to your work. These are your words that you write. You are allowed to be inspired by others, just don't let them write your papers. And just because there is no eraser that can remove the stains on your once perfect blank page - don't give up on the page. We all have battle wounds - let them heal and scar a reminder ... just make sure there's a pretty picture you paint when you're done.



## **Steps to Feeling Better**

*Larissa Fleurette Ho*

We always hope that things go according to plan. However, they often do not.

What do you do when things aren't going quite right? What do you do when some things seem to be overwhelming, or everything is? What do you do when however much you try, you're not making things work the way you wanted them to?

My five-year undergraduate career was made up of challenges, problems, failures and risks as much as it was made up of insights, triumphs, successes and joys. I often didn't know what I was doing. I often couldn't see what I'd already achieved because so much of my focus was on meeting the next challenge. Negative self-talk didn't help either, especially when I'd tell myself repeatedly, "I can't do this" rather than: "I can."

I was often tired during my years at UTM because so much of what I'd taken on to do with my days had timelines, deadlines, and consequences that would have to be dealt with if things did not get done on time. I often felt that I was not going to get through the next test, assignment or deadline at work. I found myself joking around and talking less. Sometimes I would be so overwhelmed by the things I had to do that I didn't know where to begin (a feeling that I know many, many people experience while in university).

I found myself worrying more, getting too little sleep, and filled with anxiety. Sometimes it was like this every day for long periods of time.

As I lay on the couch in the campus newspaper's office where I worked as the News Editor for the last year and a half one January morning in 2014, I was overcome with the doubt, uncertainty, depression, and strong feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that had been nagging at me for months.

I decided that I needed to start taking care of myself better because things weren't going right: Things aren't going right when you don't feel like doing anything anymore, or when you're too tired to go to class, or when you want to disappear for days or you even feel like hurting yourself. These are signs that things aren't going well.

The first thing I did that was right was to be self-aware. I was aware I had little energy. I was also depressed, anxious, tired and confused. I noticed these things and realized the second thing I needed to do: Get help.

I called my friend and told him I was feeling awful. I also decided to make an appointment to see a counselor at the Health and Counselling Centre located in the basement of the Davis/South Building.

It's scary to ask for help, I've found. Sometimes, it seems better to not ask at all because it may feel like an embarrassing thing to do. Although it may seem like a weakness to ask for help from someone who can help, like a professional, or a professor, or a friend, it is not the sign of weakness that most people think it is. It's a sign of strength to get help when you need it. It means you are on your way to getting better, healthier, and stronger, both mentally and emotionally.

The third thing I did was to think carefully about my life and make changes. Some of these changes were hard to make. For example, I decided to quit my job at the campus newspaper as the News Editor. I did it in consultation with my friends and family and co-workers. Sometimes, you just have to do what you have to do to take care of yourself, even if it means letting go of something. The position was getting too stressful for me. It's a sign of strength to know when to start something and it's an even greater sign of strength to know when to stop, and let go.

When things aren't going quite right these days, I do the same things I did then: I take myself seriously and become more self-aware of what I need and what I can let go of. I get help. I take action to make changes in my life. And then I have faith, because things aren't going to go the way you want them to go, most of the time.

I think the greatest lesson I've learned is to understand that some things aren't meant to be and not to force them to happen. Also, to build trust in the process of life and, as "Desiderata" goes, to realize that "the universe is unfolding as it should."

And be at peace with that knowledge.

## Conclusion

The students who have written stories for this book, and the faculty/staff that have supported it all want you to succeed. They want you to know that your university life may be full of challenges and struggles that could be difficult to overcome – but you can overcome them. University is a time of new identities, new friends and new beginnings. It is a time where you mature in both your way of learning and generally as a human being. You will develop strategies that will help you to excel. You will learn habits (some good and some bad) which will determine how successful you are.

We are closing this book with a story from Dr Mairi Cowan, a faculty member in the Department of Historical Studies. Through this story you will see that perseverance certainly helps with success and that you can succeed in first year university.

### Learning How to Prepare

*Dr Mairi Cowan, Senior Lecturer, Department of Historical Studies*

When I first arrived at the University of Toronto as an undergraduate student, I knew that I wanted to study something medieval. The calendar told me that Latin was an essential part of medieval studies, and so, being a student who took things like academic calendars seriously, I dutifully signed up for a first-year Latin course.

The semester began. Textbook, paper, and pen in hand, I found our room and took a seat, feeling ready to embark on the study of this language that was at once ancient (to the world) and new (to me). I was enthusiastic, I was confident, and I was in possession of all the required readings. I was, I thought rather smugly, well prepared and sure to succeed.

Well, I was mistaken. I barely passed the first quiz. A week later, I failed the second. Deciding to cut my losses, I dropped the course.

I told myself that I could take it again later, and I also told myself, probably out of some combination of humility and humiliation, that I hadn't done well in Latin because I just didn't have an aptitude for languages. In retrospect, I think I was wrong about that last part. It's not that I am any kind of prodigy with languages, but I realize now that the main problem I was having was one of preparation, not one of aptitude. Yes, I had come basically prepared to the first meeting. (Supplies? Check. In the right room at the right time? Check.) I was even prepared to do some superficial review between classes (Completed homework? Yep. Wrong

answers on that homework? Yeah, but they'll give the correct ones in class.) What I was not prepared to do, was to review the material in a meaningful way. I had a fixed mindset, believing that my Latin intelligence was basically inborn and inflexible, instead of a growth mindset, believing that my intelligence could be developed. A language is a difficult thing to learn, and a very difficult thing to learn well. To succeed, the learner must be ready to make mistakes, and willing to move past these mistakes by practising over and over again. Looking back at my attitude in that Latin course, I see that I didn't lack some inflexible and inborn skill for language; I lacked a commitment to devote sufficient time and energy to prepare for learning.

My lack of commitment may have been due in part to habits that I had picked up in earlier years. Most of my work in high school had seemed fairly easy. Even when the work got hard, I could still produce a mediocre result if I applied at least some effort. In general, I had been able to glide through the majority of my high school courses without feeling much pedagogical pain, and so I had never developed good strategies for learning genuinely challenging material. In my first attempt at a university language course, faced with unfamiliar concepts that required time to learn, I fell into habits of studying that were no longer good enough, and I quite simply did not master the material.

Later on, I did learn Latin. It was at some point in my third year, a year that I spent at a medieval university in Europe as part of the Study Abroad program, when I became determined to improve as a student so that I could do a good job with medieval studies. I signed up to take first-year Latin again, this time as a fourth-year student. I had a more humble attitude and much different study habits: I performed an ongoing and honest assessment for myself of what I did and did not understand so that I could focus my efforts where they were most needed, and I deliberately practised the application of newly-acquired skills until I had internalized the processes being taught. In short, I spent a lot of time preparing to learn.

I continued to take Latin courses for three more years in graduate school, and it never became easy: I had to spend many, many hours on tasks that were not always fun in order to develop sufficient mastery of the language. I am still not a Latin scholar, but my level of understanding is good enough to pursue historical research in Latin texts at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at U of T, the National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh, the Archives des Augustines de Monastère de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Québec in Quebec City, and online from libraries and archives around the world. I could not have done this research had I not buckled down and prepared to learn.

Now that I have the privilege of teaching at university, I often find myself considering what my own students can do to improve their learning. I wonder if some of them, especially those who did well in high school, are hindered by the same delusions as I was – that their achievement is chiefly dependent on aptitude, and that they don't need to do a lot of work in order to learn well. The most successful among them commit to preparation, and they develop their resilience by keeping in mind their decision to make real learning more important than the appearance of being smart. They accept that they probably won't enjoy all the challenges along the way, but

they know that with perseverance, they will be better prepared to learn whatever it is that sparks their curiosity.

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