

What would you like us to know about your undergraduate academic experience?

“Are you in, or are you out?” Seven of my best friends and I sat in a circle. The date had come when we finally had to make decisions. We’d all discussed quitting school for a year to see what we could learn free of the educational framework we’d been immersed in for so long.

I opened my mouth, still unsure of what words were going to emerge, and I was shocked at the sound of my own voice saying “I’m in.” I’d never taken such a big risk before- every step of my academic career had been planned through wonderful schools and rigorous courses. I’d never gone without all of those benchmarks to see what learning was about in the real world.

With those two words, the most formative portion of my undergraduate education became the part during which I was not an undergraduate student, but an unemployed drop out.

I reached a new level of fluidity. Rather than being forced to learn a set of objective metrics, I could explore and figure out what I wanted to know on my own. I could struggle through entrepreneurship that was designed for the long-term, rather than for the scope of the class. I could work on research at a graduate level, seeing what it would be like to attend two of the great universities. I could travel to a new conference every week, meet a new set of people, and find new fields to break into.

A year ago, I wasn’t aware of how my passions could be applied. I learned a series of facts, that might or might not fit into a later career, but didn’t know why I learned them. I often felt that the structure of how I was taught was more relevant than the actual facts. My undergraduate experience was plagued with a variety of interests- electrical and computer engineering, software, medicine, biology, business, and education.

Only taking a step back from the educational system allowed me to see the value within. By taking time away, I learned what specific skills I needed to develop to tackle the projects I was looking at pursuing. The value of the 2+2 program is it leaves this buffer, allowing for a student to learn what they need to learn, and then the environment to learn it in. If only undergraduate institutions did the same.