

Everything I Learned at Vanderbilt

Four years of study boil down to one truth: The more interesting the subject, the less likely it is to provide employable skills. By CLAIRE SUDDATH, BA'04

THIS IS IT. THE END. MY time here is over. I've learned everything there is to know. Vanderbilt is of no use to me anymore. A little less than four years ago, I stepped onto campus a bright-eyed kid ready to learn. Now I will leave this University full of knowledge—knowledge with absolutely no useful purpose. For instance, I know that the Roman Emperor Tiberius once ordered that a man's face be mangled by a lobster. Somehow, I doubt this information will serve me well when it comes time to find a job.

After graduation I will toss my cap into the air and think to myself, "Well, that was expensive." I wish there had been a cheaper way for me to acquire this education. Therefore, in my last *Hustler* column I will outline everything I learned at Vanderbilt in the hopes that, upon reading it, you will become as knowledgeable as I, thereby eradicating any need to pay for another Vanderbilt semester. Listen up, kids. This is what you need to know.

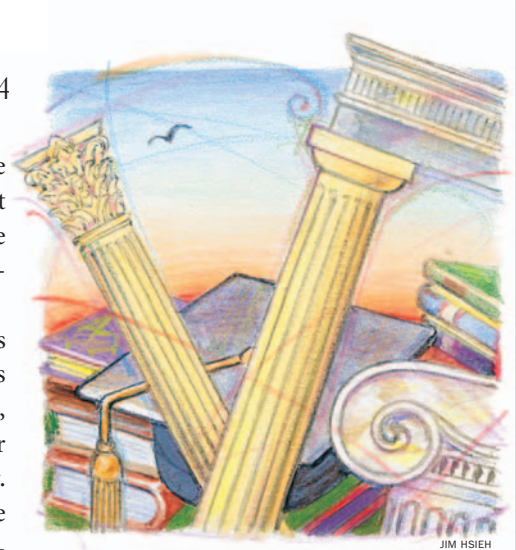
I am an English and economics major. My English literature classes taught me to appreciate the written word. They also taught me that if you are a famous author, you can write poorly and still be considered a literary genius. In *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer accidentally refers to a male character as "she." A female character was originally in the scene, but when Chaucer changed his mind and wrote in a male instead, he forgot to change the pronouns. If I made that mistake in a cre-

ative writing class, Tony Earley would have beaten me to death with my own paper. But Chaucer gets special treatment just because he was alive before the invention of the printing press. Right, as if that's an excuse.

English is my passion, but economics is my practical side. Lower-level economics classes gave me tools to use in everyday life, such as how OPEC keeps gas prices high or why Donald Trump has such horrible hair. They taught me that econ is a logical science and that markets behave rationally. Upper-level economics, however, taught me that everything I previously had learned was wrong. Everything is theoretical, and nothing I learn is applicable to the real world. In fact, the more I learn about business and economics, the less qualified I become.

Thanks to CPLE, I took many more courses than just English and economics at Vanderbilt. Anthropology and art history taught me that the more interesting the subject, the less likely it is to provide me with any sort of employable skills. Perhaps one day my boss will come up to me and say, "Claire, I want to give you this high-profile assignment that will make or break your career. But I will do so only if you can tell me which art movement succeeded Baroque style in Europe." If that happens I will gleefully exclaim, "Rococo!" But until then, I still believe art history is pointless. It's very fun, but it has absolutely no career potential. Like an affair with a pool boy.

My favorite courses at Vanderbilt were in the classics department, otherwise known as the study of dead languages and broken sculp-



tures. Classics was even more interesting than art history and anthropology, which of course means that it's the most useless major at Vanderbilt. It's a shame because I really liked classics. I fell in love with the Romans when I learned about their freaky emperors. I already mentioned Tiberius and the lobster. Nero refused to address the Roman army for fear of ruining his singing voice. However, my favorite emperor was the bald Caligula, who shaved the heads of people whose hair he envied. Once, Caligula drew up his battle lines as if preparing for war. He made his army line up near the ocean and then, instead of giving the order to fight, he suddenly ordered his military to collect seashells. Caligula was an excellent prankster. Oh yeah, and he killed a lot of people.

Sociology taught me that I am oppressed. I thought I had a pretty good life, but apparently white men are out to get me. Unfortunately, I never learned how to fix this problem, just to complain about it. Psychology taught me to blame everything on my parents.

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I took calculus in high school, so I only took one math class at Vanderbilt. I find math to be very useful in life. For example, I ate a banana with lunch. Before I ate it, though, I found the slope of the line tangent to its curve.

Astronomy taught me that the universe is a vast and mysterious place, but with geology I learned that even mysterious things can be boring. Philosophy taught me to add “-ism” to the ends of words if I want to sound intelligent. Also, the longer the word, the more important it is. History classes taught me that people have been behaving badly for thousands of years.

The Blair School of Music proved that if something is far away, I will never go there.

Peabody reemphasized that point and also showed me that taunting HOD majors never gets old. Engineering falls on the other end of the useful/interesting spectrum in that it is one of the most employable fields at Vanderbilt but also stab-me-in-the-eye boring. My good friend Erin is a BME student who likes to tell me exciting stories about her major. Unfortunately, these stories usually end with phrases like, “Then my project partner and I got really crazy and reconfigured the model! And we graphed the results!” Poor Erin. She may get a better job than I will, but she will never learn the art of lobster mangling.

And that’s about it. That’s everything I learned at Vanderbilt. College was fun, but it went far too quickly. My freshman year was

spent in the lobby of Branscomb. My sophomore and junior years revolved around the McGill picnic table, and my senior year has been a series of failed attempts at putting clothing on top of the Cornelius Vanderbilt statue. But that is over now. There’s nothing left for me to do except get a job and a mortgage and wait for the wrinkles to arrive. Well, that and learn how to guide cocktail-party conversations to the topic of lobsters.

Claire Suddath started writing for the Vanderbilt Hustler as a freshman and has had a weekly humor column for the past two years. This essay was adapted from her Hustler column.

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to be in control.

Today I find I am now the person I was meant to be, not consumed by the eating-disordered mentality. I have healthy relationships with my supportive parents and a group of friends, no longer isolating myself. I don’t compare my body with those around me. I don’t get anxious around food, constantly dwell on it, or find it necessary to make food journals. I don’t calculate calories, measure food or obsessively exercise. I don’t try on six outfits every morning, attempting to find one that “conceals my fat.” I know and believe that I am not fat.

I share my story not for my own healing but to show that complete recovery—physical and emotional—is possible. I’m not going to lie: treatment and recovery are not easy. It’s actually quite difficult, but I promise you that it’s worth it. To those who face the same struggle, I challenge you to believe for something better—you are worth it.

Shannon Thomas, a violin performance major in the Blair School of Music, graduated in May.

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Song to Grits

By ROY BLOUNT JR., BA’63

When my mind’s unsettled,
When I don’t feel spruce,
When my nerves get frazzled,
When my flesh gets loose—

What knits
Me back together’s grits.

Grits with gravy,
Grits with cheese.
Grits with bacon,
Grits with peas.
Grits with a minimum
Of two over-medium eggs
mixed in ’em: um!

Grits, grits, it’s
grits I sing—
Grits fits
In with anything.

Rich and poor, black and white,
Lutheran and Campbellite,
Jews and Southern Jesuits,
All acknowledge buttered grits.

Give me two hands, give me my wits,
Give me forty pounds of grits.

Grits at taps, grits at reveille.
I am into grits real heavily.

True grits,
more grits,
Fish, grits and collards.
Life is good where grits are swallowed.

Grits
Sits
Right.