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Graduation is not all smiles

Megan Troutman May 10, 2018



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Four years ago, I didn't know what to do with myself when my parents dropped me off in my freshman dorm room in a town I knew little to nothing about. I sat on my bed, overwhelmed with the freedom of life on my own.

Then I walked across the hall and sat on my cousin's bed and we talked about how weird it was that we had nothing — and everything — to do all at once.

Now, I'm about to walk across the stage in a cap and gown and collect paperwork that proves I learned some things in four years of higher education. I suppose at some point my cousin and I got off our beds, unpacked our belongings and started our adult lives.

As of recently, I have found myself thinking about how weird it is that I have nothing — and everything — to do all at once.

I have two days.

Here's the thing I have come to realize about pre-graduation: It's stressful.

It's not actually a blissful time with your family, snapping pictures in your oddly square gown and hard-to-keep-on-your-head cap. No, graduation has a lot of underlying factors that are stressful.

For starters, you have to pay around \$80 for your cap and gown. Universities already scrape every penny from your wallet, and in one last feeble attempt to grab some more, you're forced to pay for your cap and gown in order to even be acknowledged for your hard work.

The golden NAU stoles are an additional \$50, so I didn't even want to buy one even though I have an eligible, high GPA. (Shout out to my mom who told me I was being ridiculous and sent me money to buy one so now I'll look intelligent at graduation.)

I have 48 hours.

But it's not just the money that's stressful. It's the "now what?" factor. Almost every extended relative and their mother will probably ask, "So what are your plans after graduation?" and if that doesn't give you a heart attack, I don't know what will.

It's funny. I had four years to think about this, but up until a month ago, that question struck fear to my very core. It was an overwhelming burden I didn't want to look at.

But then, a simple email from Wisconsin changed my world. It was an interview request, which I completed over the phone the following day. And then another interview. And another. And then I was offered a job in Wisconsin, and accepted.

I have 2,880 minutes.

But hey, I'm not off the hook. Don't get me wrong, I'm so incredibly excited for my new job, but now I have additional stresses. Now the stress comes from finding an apartment and moving to the other side of the country to the land of cold winters and cheese, where I know little to nothing about (except for the cold and the cheese).

I'm stressed about leaving behind my people on the West Coast, moving my entire life to a place I may or may not like and starting a real-person job less than a month after graduating college.

Graduation is not all smiles and tossing caps. It's a heavy time full of big life decisions and road trips through farm land across the country. And to sum up, I'm a *little* stressed.

I have 172,800 seconds until I receive my undergraduate degree.

Just remember: Unless you want to possibly open up four years' worth of stress accumulated into one monumental decision, don't ask your fellow graduates what they're doing after college. They will probably feel sad and attacked.

Instead, just smile and snap those pictures in oddly square gowns.

Megan Troutman is the editor-in-chief of The Lumberjack, Northern Arizona University's student newspaper. College Chronicles aims to connect FlagLive! readers to various aspects of campus life.

