



PAULA LAVIGNE is a senior news-editorial major and Daily Nebraskan editor-in-chief.

Grab your books. Get your schedule. Put gas in the car. Drive around for 20 minutes until you see that just-right parking spot. Yeah, there you go, squeeze in between the Buick and the pink van. Plug the meter. You have five minutes, GO!

Stop running, you look like a freshman. But walk fast, because you can't be late on the first day, even if you are a freshman. The traffic doesn't stop, but risk it anyway. Go, go, go. You bought the wrong book. You have six exams, starting with a quiz tomorrow. It's 3.0 or no money to go. Coke for breakfast. Ramen for lunch. No time for dinner. Must study. Must study. Must buy toilet paper. You have two minutes, GO!

Your car payment is late. The check is in the mail. No financial aid. Call mom. No answer. Late for work. Work, work, work. Save money. Buy the computer. The computer broke. Your friend called at noon. Too late to call back. Read 30 pages. Sleep on a book. Up at 7 a.m. You have 30 seconds, GO!

Your friend's birthday was yesterday. Your mom called, again. There's that guy. He smiled at you yesterday. Can't take off work, though. The road trip left without you. You lost your novel. It's sunny outside. You have a lifetime.

Wait.

Welcome to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Along with your degree, you will receive a complimentary ulcer or two, a few headaches, cold shoulders, blank stares, broken hearts, worrywarts and twisted arms.

Unless, I let you in on a secret.

When you walk out of this university, you shouldn't think that all you've learned is academic knowledge. Never think that this university has only given you the skills with which to practice your trade or offer your services.

You shouldn't think that all is well and good because you sacrificed everything to keep a 4.0 or that you're a member of every honorary on campus. Not everything in your degree should come from a textbook or a classroom, because you probably will never go on to live in a textbook or a classroom.

True, the information you consume here is extremely valuable, but it won't do you any good by itself.

Think of it in computer terms. That information you've earned is the memory; blocks of knowledge you can easily access. But it just sits there unless the system works.

And the system is what turns you on. It's what pushes your buttons. It's what makes the light come on inside of you. It's that continual humming noise to let the users know you're alive. And if it's running on overdrive, it's going to blow a fuse.

I speak from experience.

Sophomore year. My 4.0 hanging in the balance. The thought of a 3.9. Horrors! I spilled cranberry juice on my skirt. The day was over. Test Friday. Thursday, midnight, eating coffee and reading word by word. Someone criticized my story? I won't accept it. Party on Sunday? No, gotta work, gotta read. The message light on the answering machine grew still. Even my mom gave up.

And I have all this great stuff to put on my resume.

But I didn't have any good stories. I didn't take any risks. I can't tell my friends about "that one time."

Senior year (the second one). Good job. Good GPA. Less coffee.

And I have stories. I made time to enjoy my youth, my life and other people's lives. I took advantage of my experiences and sharing the experiences of others, because you never know how much someone has to offer. And I took risks, calculated risks, because excitement lies in the chance something might go wrong. I didn't slack off or give up, I just took some time to breathe and put my life into a better context.

Today, I had to write this column. At 5 p.m., I made time to run 3 miles. At 8 p.m., I'm not done with the column, but I feel much better.

There are still times when there's no way anyone could pull me from this office or yank a notebook out of my hand. That's when I love my job, and it's not a sacrifice.

From that, I've learned valuable lessons of honesty, integrity, leadership, willingness and acceptance.

There's no Values 101 class where you can learn all that. That's what you learn through experience. And what better environment is there than college to have those experiences? It's too bad that the opportunity also falls during a time where you're under extreme pressure to succeed. But that is a lesson unto itself.

Let me sweeten the pot a bit. What you'll learn here are values. Master leadership. Hold on to integrity. Balance compassion. Execute fairness. Live with it and live through it. Get involved.

You're stuck outside in your bathrobe at 3 a.m. during a fire drill. You write a term paper in three hours. You make dinner with Ramen noodles and condiments from BK. You go on the road to crash an away game, get lost in Oklahoma and sleep in the car.

Take advantage of the people you meet. Don't be afraid to fall in love, because a broken heart will learn how to discriminate. Allow people to intrigue you, and allow people to be intrigued.

I promise you failure. It's fun. I wish you good luck. It's better. Have faith in success.

The course work for Life 101 is to step back and take those calculated risks. Go out on a limb and challenge yourself. In the end, it's not what you have, but what you have done.

You have all day.

Go.

Hurry up and wait

Between classes, take time to stop and smell life

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