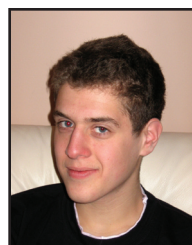
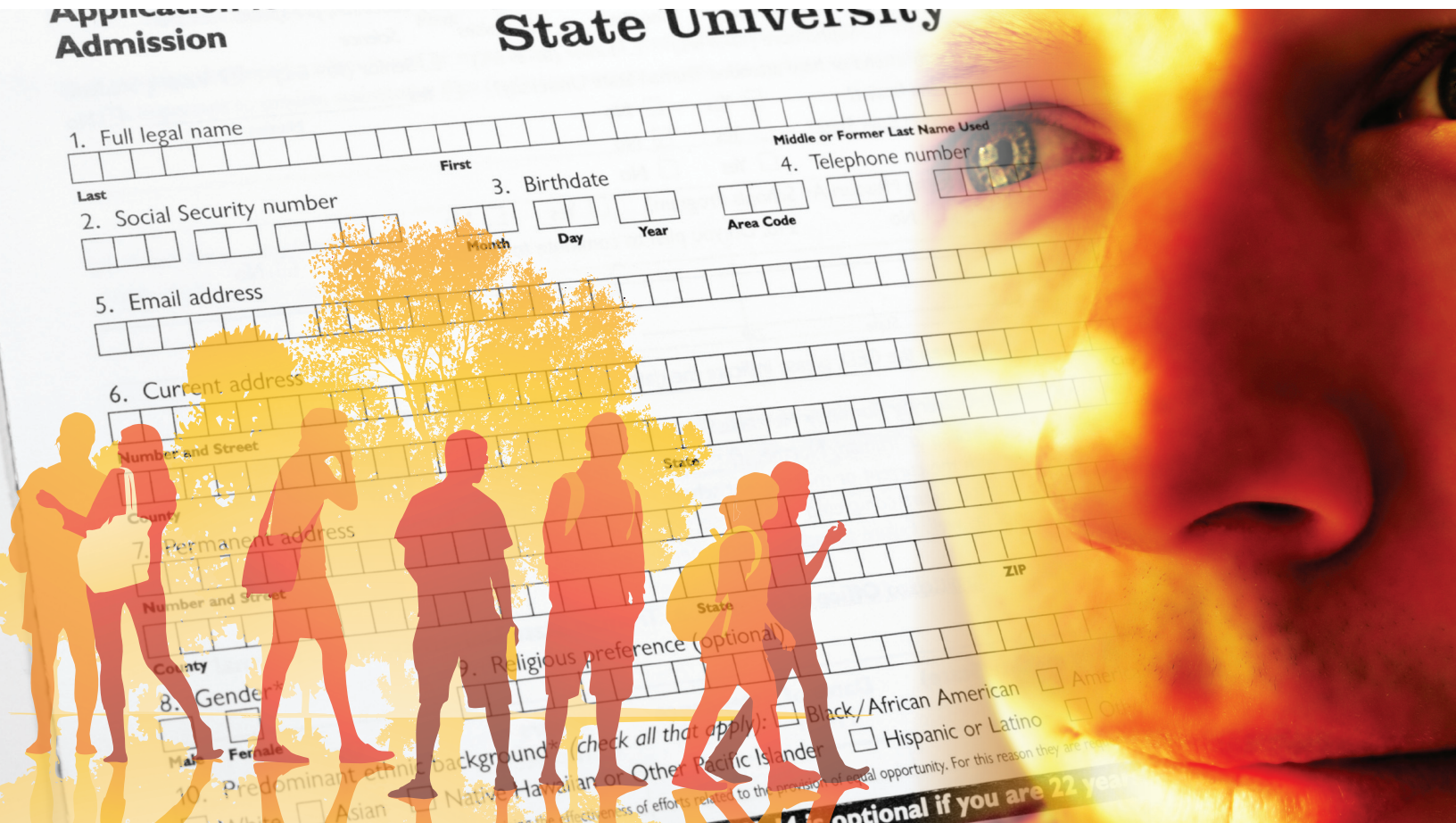


Winner: David Entin, Freshman at Bentley University (MA)



DAVID ENTIN is an overwhelmed but quite happy freshman at Bentley University (MA). David is currently working on several personal writing projects and two theatrical performances with the Bentley Theater Society. He is working diligently (and tell his parents that) and loves the work he's doing. He wishes the best to everyone who's applying to colleges, and reminds them to go where they want, not where they think they should go.

On Realizing It's Worse Than I Thought

It didn't end with an acceptance letter in the mail. That was the highlight of the high school to college transition, but it wasn't the finish line, far from it. The race began, and I say race because it is a race, during the summer before my senior year. Some acted faster, some were printing their essays and sending in forms while I was still typing up the list of schools I was interested in. I wasn't too concerned at the time. Although, I think that they may regret such dedicated speed. We were still in school after all. We should have been thinking about the opposite sex, going out, spending time with friends, and I'm glad I did. I missed these moments during the application frenzy, when I was still dizzy from the mad search.

On Searching

I started looking. Friends, family, teachers, employers, whoever might have known a thing or two, told me a thing or two. I already had my ideas. I knew what I wanted, not what I wanted to be, mind you, but I understood what I wanted out of college. That's the crux of all this, finding somewhere you're willing to let shape you. That's it! It's not a vocational school to learn how to do what you'll do; that information will come later, if ever. You might be good enough to make a career of learning. Some have.

So I found the schools that fit the mold, roughly perhaps, but they fit when pressed. Web sites don't do much, visits and interviews are the big informers. And without shame I'll admit that I jumped around to some assorted Web sites and textbooks. You know the type; the books that gloat about listing the top 100 schools in the country, the Web sites, and magazines that dangle information above us hungry, poor, disillusioned college wanabees.

I interviewed, tempted them and then I was ready. I was ready to apply.

On Applying

It was almost the worst part. Every moment spent on the applications brought out doubts. There were needs for rewrites. Suddenly my essay was no good. Maybe my SAT scores were too low. Everything suddenly came undone, and no matter what document I was working on, I knew that the others, even the finished ones, were rough. At some point, and this was a forced moment because of deadlines, I had to accept that it won't be perfect. It can't be. I'm too scared, too worked up about this, because everyone and anyone has been telling me, "This is your life."

So it's my life that I have to sum up and glamorize to sell for acceptance into my new life. The process was unnerving, disorienting and just a bit sordid. I dealt with it, even did early action to half my schools. That made my days miserable. I had less time than everyone.

When I hit *Submit* on my last document and curled up in my chair, I prepared to wait.

On Waiting

Here is where the application process suddenly becomes straightforward. My life, or the greater whole of what I intended to show to the colleges, was no longer in my hands. I couldn't reword anything, nor consider taking a test again. It was out of my hands. It was waiting time.

I waited through my winter ski trip. I waited in the hot tub. I waited on the slopes. I waited like any other neurotic wreck, knowing that those horrible judgment letters could be there when I got home.

I was accepted. Well, for the most part. I got into my top choice. I was happy. No, no I wasn't. I was ecstatic. I was lying in my driveway drooling, letter on my chest, and I think I may have screamed a bit.

A rejection came that day too.

On Rejection

Rejection can be, and often is, a fantastic part of the application process. Because it's such a solid, conclusive moment. The school you wanted to go to suddenly said no. You're done! You can hate them now. You can hoist them up to the rafters and throw stones or burn effigies. There aren't worries about sending response letters, solving financial aid, taking loans, finding jobs, or picking classes. Not for this school, because they suck and you never liked them anyway.

This realization is magical.

On Realization

Then, in my driveway, still on my back, I realize that the change isn't just financial, it's physical. I'm leaving for this place, I'm living there, and now I'm scared. The people that I grew up with, who shaped my personality, are splitting up.

Painful?

Oh yes.

Disorienting?

Believe it.

Unnerving?

Mhmm.

Necessary?

Sadly.

The people I laugh and talk with on those pleasant occasions. Yep, nice knowing them, maybe we'll meet again with some odd coincidence. We can hug, tell each other about everything we've done. It'll be fun, but I won't miss them. The mind is a wonderful thing, it loves to accept replacements.

The pain is all there in that last goodbye, when you know it'll be months, longer in many cases, until you see them again. The good friends aren't gone for good though, they never are.

Casual friends though? The people I laugh and talk with on those pleasant occasions. Yep, nice knowing them, maybe we'll meet again with some odd coincidence. We can hug, tell each other about everything we've done. It'll be fun, but I won't miss them. The mind is a wonderful thing, it loves to accept replacements.

On Replacements

There were people from the incoming class who I met online, at meetings, at orientation, that were like me. People like me, people like me, people like me. There are people outside my school who are like me.

Yes, I actually have been mass produced. These pre-packaged people are familiar. I wasn't the only crazy one

I finally see that the process is worse than I thought. Because it's not another step in my life, it's a new life. It's a start without people who are going to say no, without parents who are going to cook and clothe us, without most of the friends we see so often, and that's the hardest thing to accept, but a fresh feeling of freedom when the discomfort settles.

who went through this for our specific school. I'm meeting my brothers and sisters. I would like to think that when we shake hands, it is like a bond two veterans must share. We both made it.

Here they were. My new friends. The embodiment of my new life. I met them, befriended them, saw them over the summer. Introduced them to my high school friends. Lines started to blur again, and differences became hazy, momentarily.

On Differences

Orientation was the big blow. That was the moment I slept in a dorm room, walked the campus, ate the food, slipped around, wondered about an exercise regiment at the gym, thought about recreation, and I thought about how I, as an only child, would handle living with another human being.

Then I stopped thinking about the weird fishes I'd like to have as pets. For now I had to be afraid. I had to stop thinking about how my life was going to change, and start considering how *I was going to change*. Would I still be me? To clarify, I would still be me in the existential sense, but mentally? Or, hold on... I could change physically too! Would I gain weight? Lose weight? Regain weight!? I would speak differently, dress differently, spend time differently, and feel differently, because I'd be different. Maybe I'd be called Dave for the first time in my life.

Dave: The college version of David.

These were the unimaginable differences, like being a freshman in high school. Back then, I knew that I knew everything. Now, a senior looking back understands how wrong he was. And after college, I may look back, and not think I was wrong, or naïve, or foolish, but I will see that my life has changed again, changed before I could plan it out or consider it. There would be vivid differences, leading to clarity.

On Clarity

I bought my dorm supplies. I kissed my parents. I kissed my girlfriend. I hugged my best friend and all the close friends I hope to see soon. I emailed my favorite teachers. And then I moved in. There were new bonds and relationships now, new hands to shake, new people to miss and respect. That's clarity after all. I can look back, at the process that was so bad, and realize I didn't know a thing about it.

I finally see that the process is worse than I thought. Because it's not another step in my life, it's a new life. It's a start without people who are going to say no, without parents who are going to cook and clothe us, without most of the friends we see so often, and that's the hardest thing to accept, but a fresh feeling of freedom when the discomfort settles.

When I and so many others like me restart our lives, we are not foregoing our old lives, our very important old lives that we built over 18 years. These lives are never to be forgotten, but they are to be changed, as they have been so many times before.