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Modeling the Environment

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Broaden Our Horizons

Sarah Bakewell’s “How To Live: Or A Life of Montaigne” is an interesting novel in which the author combines her thoughts along with translated and paraphrased anecdotes from Montaigne in order to teach the readers what the author perceived to be Montaigne’s beliefs. Each chapter brings new ideas which lead up to multiple life guiding messages. Some include: breaking habit in order to learn something new or questioning everything in life. All in all, the book features pertinent knowledge that would help in any young person’s life; however, having to read such a book as a student just about to be immersed into the college experience is a nuisance and ineffective.

Throughout the first days leading up to college and the first days on campus, the college student experiences a new stage in life. They leave behind the comfort of their homes to meet new people and start learning about their interests inside and outside the classroom. Much like they have been told before, they realize the excess amount of time they have on their hands. By living such a free lifestyle many students realize they have to manage their time effectively through their experiences with trial and error. The things the student experiences teaches them useful information about how to deal with certain situations—not a book. A book doesn’t effectively teach anybody a lesson well enough they remember it for the rest of their life. The only effective way to live one’s life is to be constantly learning from what one has done, not what someone has convinced them to do. Not only is the novel ineffective in guiding and changing the way a college student thinks, but the timing is off as well.

The incoming college student has been fed with a barrage of information throughout his or her high school career. The Greeks said it well with the statement, “Everything with moderation.” Academic years are filled with constant reading, conceptualizing, as well as solving problems. What these hard working students need is not an assignment which brings stress upon an already stressful situation. One would say three months is too long for any person’s brain to take a break from learning; however, how can they argue six months of long eight hour days with minimal breaks for four years is acceptable. The constant learning and stress upon the brain isn’t healthy. The brain and psyche need rest so that they are fresh to take in everything the student is going to experience the next four years of their life. Academically inclined students don’t need more assignments; they need to take a breather.

Every student longs for an unrestricted summer where they aren’t tied by obligations such as summer reading. They finally get to take a look around and smell the roses. Not only does summer reading make a student tired of learning, but it also ties them down from exploration. One would argue summer reading is very minimal to ask from a student within a two month span, but my experience dictates otherwise. In order for one to be fully engaged and immersed into any interest, field of study, or whatever it may be, they must give their full time and effort. For example, many people who have gone through college give the advice, “Try everything.” Many people also suggest living on campus in order to get the “full college experience.” They say these things because they understand that by being fully immersed into a situation they gain everything there is to gain—summer reading hinders the full experience.

Reading has always been a hobby of mine. The therapeutic sensation of sitting down and going on an adventure in a world of imagination or reality is something everyone should experience. But, I’ve always had trouble sitting down reading novels or texts people made me read. The minute something becomes required, I shy away from it. I was never forced to volunteer my time at a homeless shelter or help out younger students with their musical difficulties because it was never required. The notion of requiring students to read and regurgitate the information in an articulate way makes reading a chore—no one likes chores. Reading should be viewed as something enjoyable because it is. Let us rid of summer reading because its use as a learning tool for not only college students but all students is ineffective to say the least.