

Melbourne Central Station
11.34am
Status: Yesss!!!! Got a seat!

Having just completed my first official month of university, I felt compelled to record my thoughts on this unique experience, before the tugs and pulls of experience would undoubtedly distort my memories. As I sit here on the slightly over-packed train and ponder the past four or so weeks, the word 'transitional' comes irresistibly to mind. Everything about my life has been in a constant state of flux. While it was always expected that changes would occur, I had never foreseen change of this degree.

With that being said, in such times, one tends to notice constants and life cornerstones more so than at any given point in time. Something we can hold onto, to reassure us, when times get disorienting, tough or downright confusing.

I can still vividly remember my first ever orientation lecture... The speaker, a balding, forty year old man with black square frame glasses, was forewarning us of the massive differences between life in high school and life in university. Ironically, using PowerPoint to illustrate his not-so-powerful point, he pulled up a comparison table of the main differences between university and high school. At first glance, it all seemed very reasonable, the phrases, 'self-directed', 'student initiative', and 'independent learning' flashing up on screen. However, it was only when I realized that I was reading the 'University' column did I begin to marvel at the shrewd ingenuity of that sly minx- ELTHAM College.

Sidebar- I am *not* a poster boy, in no way whatsoever do I seek to be viewed as a biased advocate for ELTHAM College. This prose is written solely out of my own accord. Just as many of us like to keep track of where we used to live, what houses we used to reside in, so too do I find it fascinating to ponder on past schools that I've attended, what impact it's left on my life and how it's shaped me as a human being. Furthermore, I do not claim to represent the entire population of new university students, our experiences could not be any more varied than they already are, but instead I am speaking as a single Commerce undergraduate currently attending The University of Melbourne. Take anything said here, as you will. For those into statistical inference, do what you want ;)

To those readers from within ELTHAM, I believe we often overlook the culture that runs deep within our school. Having been in a position of leadership in ELTHAM, I've seen both sides of the coin. Senior members of the board are convinced that the students are eating up their new age philosophy faster than the Middle East goes through conflicts, while on the flipside, students just shrug off these buzzwords and just get on with the lives they're living. However, the truth, as it always does, lies somewhere in between.

The beliefs and values present in ELTHAM College are both unbelievably subtle and incredibly pervasive. While students often scoff at the promotional fluff exuded by our school, it is, in truth, the staff who scoff at the students who are blissfully unaware of the fact that they are, undeniably, becoming leaders in the 21st century and self-directed learners. It is a bizarre system, where those directly affected are fully unaware or in denial of this effect. Only in the stark contrast of early university life do the ramifications of such a well-developed and comprehensive culture become evident.

I do not throw the word 'pervasive' around lightly. The ingrained policies of ELTHAM are present in many levels and facets of university life, so subtle that they can hardly be said to even be there.

Take for example, the big stuff. The learning style in university is without a doubt completely different from that of high schools. Sorry, *most* high schools. To quote that balding, forty-year old, black square frame glasses lecturer, 'This isn't high school. We don't take you by your hand and show you the way. You've just got to do things yourself'. It is a fact that the current secondary schooling education system is not perfect. While an entire essay could be devoted to highlighting the many shortcomings of our current system, I would merely like to point out for now, that under the current system many teachers and schools around the state are reliant on what I like to dub, 'spoon-fed learning'. While this is all well and good for excelling in VCE exams, it proves almost useless when one is thrown into the deep end of university life.

Most ELTHAM readers will already know where I am going with this, but simply put, in ELTHAM College this concept of 'self-directed learning' is so inherent in our education that we do not question its meaning or purpose at the time. We take it in our stride to go out into the cloud of knowledge and absorb that which is relevant to us. In the first few weeks of university then, it is an almost seamless transition from high school, where our 'self-directed learning' is just taken to a soaring new level. On the flip side, students from, shall we say, more 'traditional' schools, seemingly starve of knowledge due to the lack of 'spoon feeding' going on and are simply confused and boggled by this crazy new idea of 'self-directed learning'.

Perhaps the best analogy I can give is that instead of being carefully taken by the hand, and spoon-fed information, the student and teacher are questing together down that elusive and knowledge-rich academic path. The transition to university for many becomes confusing, as there is no one standing over their shoulders, metaphorically 'taking their hand' and showing them the way, while for ELTHAM students it is more as if we've just happened to separate from our questing partner- but it's fine because we already know, and always have known, what we're doing.

Moreover, the relationship between teacher and student is also noticeably different in university. Gone are classes, teachers and know-it-all high school students, replaced instead, with tutorials, tutors, and totally handsome (especially yours truly) undergraduates. The perceived hierarchal model of teacher and student present in traditionalist schools is broken down, as our tutors are either 3rd or 4th year honour students, with the age difference rarely exceeding four or so years. Do not get me wrong, the tutors are still teaching us, the tutors are still smarter than us- it's just different. Maybe because it's the age difference, maybe it's because of the way we interact, but somehow it feels a lot more like we're engaging in peer-to-peer collaboration rather than the 'mentor-student' system present in most other high schools.

Once again, ELTHAM does quite well in setting itself apart from other high schools in this respect. Upon first commencing at ELTHAM I was convinced that the student-teacher relationship was not only special, but quite possibly unique. The 'mentor-student' relationship is somewhat diluted, as teachers and students in ELTHAM work together to fully maximize the student's academic potential. In fact, I kind of like how I put it in a speech I gave sometime last year where I stated how at ELTHAM it's more about the student learning from the teacher, and the teacher from the student. It is more and more about *working together* and less and less about *working under*. It is this distinction, which is unsettlingly close to that in university tutorials. I like it. It works. Keep it.

But in all honesty, it's the little things that really count. The somewhat novel practices here and there that truly make all the difference in the world when you're making that massive jump from secondary to tertiary schooling. Maybe it's the lack of school bells in ELTHAM as well as university, an ex-Genazzano student just last week pointed out to me how bizarre it was not having a shrill siren to remind you when to go to class. Or perhaps it's the integration of international and local students. ELTHAM's global community is nothing more than a smaller scale model of what Commerce at

Melbourne Univeristy is like. The train rides in? Nothing too new- anyone ever heard of city campus? Or maybe it's just the culture as a whole. In university there are opportunities available to us everywhere we look- from the Ultimate Frisbee team to the Chocolate Lovers Society. Paradoxically, it's just not right in front of our eyes. Similarly in ELTHAM, there are opportunities at every corner, so long as one is willing enough to scratch away at the surface.

It is these little things, the minor constants of life that truly make the biggest difference when transitioning from high school to university. It's the 'f' word- whose concept from which many adults nowadays appear to have become quite alienated. That is, familiarity. In such trying times it's nice to just have this underlying sense of familiarity that permeates its way through everyday life. In my own experience, I can truly say that my years at ELTHAM have benefited me in a great way, not just in terms of personal development but in making the transition into university as smooth as practically possible. Your world is not turned upside down- it's just taken to a whole new level. The transition is not revolutionary, per se, but more evolutionary.

No one talks about this part of ELTHAM. Not enough has been said (and there is a great deal to be said) on the subject of transitioning from high school to university. I feel that neither the staff, marketing officers, nor student representatives have truly highlighted the overwhelming importance of this wholly critical notion. The fact of the matter is, is that the culture, beliefs and systems in ELTHAM not only create fully fledged students, but make the leap from high school to university just that much smaller. Just that bit easier.

It is a wholly difficult and intricate experience to describe in words, ineffable in nature. I can't really say anything else except that it's just really one of those things you have to experience to understand. However, my train is pulling into ELTHAM station now, and I have heard from a friend that the homemade pies at Degani's Café are actually something to die for. And while I have a buttload of assignments to get through, a stack of homework sheets I haven't even looked at, I can at least go home tonight knowing that tomorrow will bring yet another, outstanding and weirdly familiar day.

Montmorency Station/ELTHAM Station

12.14pm

Status: hungerin' for pie