

中山外文的學弟妹：

My name is Ya-Ning Hsu, 許雅寧. Many years ago, I was where you are today—attending a quiet and isolated college in a remote city in southern Taiwan . Many years later, I am in New York the city that never sleeps, that is full of possibilities, life and beautiful stories. I now teach at Columbia University’s Bilingual and Bicultural Education program and train the American graduate students, the future teachers, in the Masters and Doctor’s programs in language teaching. I am starting my column in our program’s monthly publication . There are many things I would like to share with you, such as the experience of living and working in New York City, the development of the language education field in the U.S., and my career, among many other topics. But, I want to be straightforward and very personal in my first appearance to you, to the point where I might come off as confrontational and you may be ask, “Who are you to talk to me like this?”

I have met some of you in my very first visit and speech to our program. In my speech, I briefly introduced myself and encouraged you to follow your passion and be faithful to who you are. The day I visited you, January 9, 2013, was cloudy and somewhat chilly. I knew that it was the end of the semester and you were all preparing for your final exams at that time. I was not sure if you were stressed out because of the looming tests or the weather was simply depressing, but you looked deflated to me. Seeing that, I was worried. Later, I had a nice conversation with your department chair, 陳福仁老師. He confirmed my intuition that many of you are at a loss and uncertain about your future.

Let’s face it--studying “Foreign Language and Literature” can be risky, even if you love it. After all, what can we do with a degree like this? Exercise better English skills? Maybe, but you can definitely be good at English without going through this route. Studying literature? It’s nice, if you like it. Yet, even if you like it, what does it have to do with your future and the job market? This is not even to mention if you do not enjoy it. Then, what else is left for us? You look at your peers from other programs--business, computer, law, medicine, technology, etc.--and start wondering how you will ever compete with them in the job market and in life. Life seems to have no hopes.

I would like to help you with this question: DO I HATE BEING HERE?

If your answer is yes, finish reading this article; if it’s no, you can skip it and read my column for next month. However, I think you should read everything I write because I am a nice person and a fairly good writer.

**If you do not like being where you are...**

If you simply hate our department, congratulations!!! At least you know WHAT YOU DO NOT LIKE. Many people never understand what they do not like and they put up with their particular situation perpetually. It is such a common phenomenon,

especially in a more traditional society like Taiwan's. After all, aren't we supposed to follow the societal norms and parental expectations? So, now, let's use the process of elimination. Do you hate literature? Language? Maybe both? Good for you! You have again discovered what you do not like. Now, my question to you is: what do you like? What do you want to do? What kind of person do you want to be ten years from now? I know, these are huge questions, and I do not expect you to have the answers,. But, I want you to start thinking about these questions and keep interrogating yourselves and your interests at every turn of your life.

How do you find the answers to these questions? College is the best time for you to tackle them. When I was in college, I was anxious about my future and was eager to find out what other people were doing. I took many courses from other departments to explore potential directions I could take. I want you to do the same. Try as many as different things as possible. I want you to step out your comfort zone to challenge yourself. I want you to make a total mess and fool of yourself (of course, under the condition that you are not physically hurting yourself or others). I want to you push yourself so far that you scream and snap. In other words, I want to see you take actions toward finding out about who you are and what you want. Don't stop questioning about yourself and your experiences. So, you do not like to study literature. Are you taking other classes outside of our department? Okay, you do not like any academic course offered in the curriculum. Are you trying out the various non-academic clubs on campus? Clubs afford you opportunities to learn valuable social skills and discover your inner voice. Are you meeting people? You might know your classmates and roommates well, but how about people from other programs? It is important to know people from diverse fields, since diversity challenges one's ways of thinking. In conclusion, college is the time that you have every right to explore and to make mistakes. Challenge yourself, challenge your roommates, challenge your professor, challenge your school, challenge your society, your country and the world. Never ever find any excuse to quit challenging or questioning yourself.

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