

# Getting the Most Out of Your College Years

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, college, passions, class, jason, growth mindset, students, teachers, assignments, guess, interest, professors, relationships, feel, question, imposter syndrome, clubs, conversations, important, campus

## SPEAKERS

Jay, John, Jason and Dannie

### [Intro]

**Jay** 00:00

Hi, everyone. Welcome to the Speak On It podcast. My name is Jay. Today we are talking about getting the most out of your college years with distance learning. Together with me here are Jason, Dannie and John. And we'll go ahead and do our little introductions. My name is Jay Wang. My rose for this week would be that I got to get on a call with a really good college friend. For about like two three hours after like a couple months of being awol with each other due to quarantine and everything. A bud for this week would be that I'm almost about to take an important graduate school exam and that's going to be over with and I can enjoy the rest of my summer afterwards. And then a thorn was unfortunately, a bit of a micro aggressive interaction today from a certain lady when I was taking my dad to the dentist, so that was fun kind of talking to her about that. But yeah, those are my rose, bud thorns. Dannie, would you like to go next?

**Dannie** 01:13

Yeah, I'll go next. My name is Dannie. I'm also a co-host on this podcast. And I think everyone knows me by this point, because it's like episode eight. Okay, so my rose from this week was taking a music production class online. It's hosted by Carnegie Hall. And I've already met like a ton of really nice and talented people through the class. So we started a collaboration project today. So we got our groups, and we're talking about what genre we want our song to be. And then a bud that I have, looking towards... Okay, so we'll be heading to Hilton Head in a few weeks. And then we'll be seeing Jason and his family. I think we'll be hanging out with you guys for a few days. So I'm super excited about that. And then a thorn was yesterday, we had a podcast pre-chat, and unfortunately my mom and I were like, we're going to just make a quick run to the store. And we're going to be back before two o'clock. And we did not end up making it back at all. So I had to do the free chat from like a little corner in the store and then in the car. I just felt like I was a little bit disappointed but um, yeah, I definitely want to manage my time more going forward.

**Jason** 02:17

Yeah, sure. Um, Hi everybody. I'm Jason. My rose for the week was.... if the weather's-- I'm in Savannah, Georgia, and the weather has been incredible. Every every, like every day has been kind of like, I wake up and there's like sun streaming in. It's like low, low 80s. High 70s. So it's not too hot. It's

not even humid. So, that's been really good. My bud is my big cousin Brent is driving down to Savannah tomorrow from North Carolina to hang out with me for a week. From his, he's been quarantining and so, it will be the first person my age, I've interacted with since leaving college, and then my thorn would definitely be just sort of, the the gradual, disinterest increasing in sort of the, like, the Black Lives Matter but mostly like the feminist aspect of that movement. I feel like it hasn't gotten enough attention and, and so I've been having a lot of tough conversations like with my guy friends about why it needs to be dealt with. Like based in the reality of the issue being that like black men are suppressing their own movement. I'm just having sort of hard conversations about that.

**John** 03:52

Hey ya'll! My name is John Mirador and I'm a third year at VCU. I would say one big rose is being able to see my little cousin graduate. And having the time to spend with family because like, sounds like these don't really come that often. So that's why I'm like, really leaning into them. I'm really excited about it. Also, I think another rose would kind of be like, I finished a summer class this week, and the bud is actually starting another design class next week. So I'm really excited about that one. And I would say, a really big thorn would probably be I kind of found some news about like, my mom and her medical conditions as of this week, so I'm gonna have to tackle that one again. But with anything like we gotta just, I just gotta keep an open mind about it. Yeah, that's that.

**Jay** 04:53

To start off our conversation today, our first question would be, how did you make sure, for those of us who either graduated or are currently in school, how did you make sure that you had strong relationships with professors and other faculty?

**Jason** 05:27

Yeah. So I think that one of the most important things in college is definitely having strong relationships with professors. And so like, I'm really happy you asked that. For me, I think that some of the ways that I've found to be most effective over my time in college, are trying to really just have organic relationships with faculty members, meeting them and interacting with them outside of the classroom, when you don't need anything. It's like just creating relationships based off of shared interest. I found is like-- then through clubs that they advise, and through events that they speak at. It's just a really, really good way, I think, a really effective way of showing real interest in them and maybe getting the same kind of interest back.

**Jay** 06:21

Yeah, I kind of want to piggyback on what Jason was saying. Like for me, I think the deepest relationships and ongoing relationships that I've had with my professors and faculty members are those that were organic and those didn't really start off on surface-level things where like, I went over there to ask for help on an assignment which, if you do that, that isn't a bad thing. Like if you need help, please go ask for help. But in terms of actually forming deep relationships, like Jason was saying, coming up with different interests, like really knowing them on a personal level if the professor faculty members is open to do that, because there are some that are like very like, listen my wall do not come over here. Let's keep this professional. So yeah. John, do you have anything else to add to that?

**John** 07:13

Oh yeah, I was like literally just thinking of one of one of my mentors who kind of leaned on me and had like that genuine connection because she was asking me a favor. And she was like, "Hey, can you do this video for us to show for the next cohort of like summer scholars?" And I was like, "Yeah, of course." But the reason why I was like, leaning into that genuine connection is because like, as time goes on, if you do have a genuine connection with at least one faculty, they will definitely be kind of like looking to you for certain things. And then you could potentially ask them for favors back. And even like, ask around on how they can help you build your network by saying like, "Hey, is there anyone that I know or at least your mentor would know in another field?" So asking them if they know anyone in like the financial aid department to see like if they could have a better connection that way, instead of being a stranger, I would say, in the very beginning like that usually always helps. I would also say, be careful for like the first-day impressions with teachers, because usually everyone's trying to go for it. So kind of waiting a little bit, and then really asking the questions about like, what they've done in the past like, really, like, as was said in the past, like that builds that genuine connection.

**Dannie** 08:36

And I start college in the fall, so I can't speak from college experience, but I do want to add on. Although I haven't had any like ongoing relationships with my high school teachers, I had a lot of great teachers in elementary school that I can still reach out to to this day who like respond, and we sent them like cards and stuff. So I definitely-- I think they made more of a lasting impact on me, but as far as my high school teachers went, I think we all had really solid relationships, or at least just like a high regard for each other just because I guess they appreciated my participation in class, which I think helped.

**John** 10:09

I think it's also pretty nice to reach back out to like older teachers, or not even like older teachers like age-wise. So like, older teachers who have seen you literally grow up and be able to connect with them, like later on, because they have either been with you and if you had a really good like solid relationship with them, they would also kind of invest in your growth later on in the future, too. So like, I really enjoy that, that piece. So thank you for that.

**Dannie** 10:39

Yeah, and that's true. And then I had a lot of great teachers that you can reach out to for like recommendations, and they can write on your behalf for a scholarship or something like that. And then when you go back and visit the school, it's nice to have all these friendly familiar faces. So there are definitely a lot of people like that, too, from my high school.

**Jay** 10:56

Oh, no, definitely. I think that's really important to like, build those like long lasting connections. Because, um, just from my personal experience for me and also like some people in my life circle right now where we're applying to like graduate school, it's been a journey looking for professors to write really strong letters of recommendation for you sometimes if you haven't been able to foster those

relationships, and I think we've all kind of like touched upon it, but having a professor like faculty member in your corner really opens up opportunities. So if you're able to be like a teaching assistant or a research assistant for someone, those open up more potentials for your network and growth. But with that said, it kind of leads into our next question on how did you take initiative in college, like how did you take charge of your own education but also your own experiences on campus?

**Jason** 12:03

I think that in terms of taking initiative in college and sort of taking charge of my own education, my general philosophy has been like, a lot of people that want to do a lot of different things, but few people really want to start things. And I find that like, generally when you start something like I say, if you build the house, they'll come, people will come. I think that if you if you start something and you do it really intentionally, and you're very thought and thought out, like when you're very methodical in how you do it, and you consider what people might, how people might engage with it and make it easy to engage with, then typically individuals will support you and at least show interest in getting sort of the baseline or like initial engagement is in interest from people of all levels either like faculty who want to support you or students who want to be a part of it is actually pretty straightforward after you said it then. Get it, get it done. And then like one of the benefits of that, I think is that like, people like credit you like being a self-starter and a leader in these initiatives. And if you ever want to do another venture, ever want to take up another project, people will support you that much more when you want to.

**John** 13:35

I kind of wanted to echo that with one sentence that a teacher told me it was kind of like **if you have a good heart, and if you have a really good work ethic, then you'll eventually get to wherever you want, because people will see that and people will recognize it.** I would also say, if you do put in a lot of hard work, and all of, the I would say like processes are already done for someone else to kind of like opt n on, then it also helps with that startup burden, kind of like propelling yourself like later on with your career, even, but I'll pass it on to you Jay.

**Jay** 14:14

I think like for me, how I kind of like took charge of my own education, was I approached it in two-fold. One, in terms of the actual like academic education, but then like two, the actual the experience that I can gain from being in college and volunteering and interning and etc., and also the vast majority of clubs on campus. And I kind of took that as an initiative to build a foundation and be a little more quote unquote, "well-rounded" to ensure that like my career paths and general education are more sufficient for whatever goals and areas that I wanted to achieve. And so yeah, I ended up like reaching out to like various like nonprofits, volunteering and like various clubs on campus. And then like, if something didn't work for me, like one semester, I ended up like leaving that club and joining another club the next semester. And I kind of took a buffet-style approach on organizations, just to be able to find what clicked and what didn't. And then for the ones that did click, I stayed in those organizations a lot longer to build more connections and network. Yeah.

**John** 15:35

Can I also echo that, please. Yeah, that's kind of exactly what happened. Or like, how I kind of established some of that experience, by asking what I could do for some potential faculty and staff around me. So I did like this Leadership Camp in freshman year. And then the people who were running it I was like, so how can I help like later on and then it kind of turned into a job opening position the next year, and being able to work with-- like the connections that we were talking about earlier about, like, establishing the relationships with other faculties, like it kind of just manifested into more and more than I could do for the career. I feel that. I really like the buffet-- like how you called it a buffet style that kind of makes me happy.

**Dannie** 16:39

I think that's a very good piece of advice that a lot of people should take because I think college is the time to try new things. And it doesn't necessarily have to be something that you think could go straight to your resume and increase your chances of getting a certain job, like it's just a time to explore what you really enjoy and what you're interested in and I think opportunities will come from there.

**Jay** 17:00

Definitely, and so moving, I guess towards actual assignments. What are some tips for students that may be going through tricky assignments or having difficulty juggling various projects and extracurriculars and other responsibilities, and how to like succeed from those?

**Dannie** 17:32

I think one of the things that we said before was "Don't be afraid to ask for help," or to reach out or to go to office hours, or to join a study group, because all those resources are there and they're waiting to welcome you. I think that's a good way to think about it. Because then you'll be more open to those opportunities, and the idea of having to do everything by yourself I think a lot of people get really good at that in high school, and that's what they think it should be to their success, but I think it's actually being really smart and then also knowing how to use all your different resources. And the whole point is it's just like a melting pot of different people and different ideas and you grow so much more from engaging in that.

**Jason** 18:15

Yeah. Yeah, I definitely agree. I don't have much to add on that. I would just say that like, a lot of times like things that are uncomfortable like or seem to seem sort of like hard to deal with typically present the greatest opportunities for growth in search to lean into those.

**John** 18:53

Um, I think one thing that kind of struck me with that question is just being able to have like, a good... or establishing like a value system even before you go into college. And really knowing what you want to do because those passions will more or less like drive you forward, and really help you with kind of like prioritizing your values. And prioritizing what you want when juggling everything, like that also helps a ton.

**Dannie** 19:19

What kinds of values?

**John 19:26**

I think of values as like, what has sustained you in the past? And what do you think can sustain you like later on in the future? So one of my key values I would say would be like helping the community and being able to, like, spread that level of empathy and like, basically empathy-based leadership and everything that I was doing. Like that was one of my core values. So moving from mechanical engineering over to user experience and user interface kind of helped me understand "This is gonna be what I would want to do even after graduating college." Right. I would still want to be helping the community and doing things that way. So that's kind of how I feel like, it's like, what, what are your passions? And how have your actions reflected on to what would essentially become your values? I don't know if that answered your question, but hopefully.

**Jay 20:26**

No, it definitely does. And I kind of want to piggyback on what you said, John, and also like Dannie has mentioned. So Dannie, you mentioned about both Dannie and Jason mentioned about like, being able to, like reach out and ask for help. And I think Dannie highlighted the aspect of like in high school, you're usually more solo on your assignments and in a way-- not to generalize-- but for me personally, I think like because of that I developed an ego. When I went into like college where I was like, I don't need to ask for help, like I know how to do X, Y and Z and blah blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. But then when I started getting assignments and getting those flood of tasks to do, I was like, "Oh, like, I don't know how to do this at all." And so I waited a tad too long before asking for help. And I think that's like a thing to highlight because sometimes, professors are willing to work with you to help out with situations, if it's like, too much. But then also to piggyback on what John said in terms of finding your passions, and I don't know how people would feel about this. And I just recently discovered that this is apparently like a tactic for some students that go into graduate school, where they don't necessarily take all their classes for grades. They purposely like pass/fail certain classes just because they just want to take it to get the credit for what other general studies that they need, or they're taking it because of their general interest. They decide to pass/fail those classes and then only focus really hard to get, like maintain the grade for like other courses that are more relevant to their careers, if that makes sense. And I thought that was really curious. And I thought that would definitely have been helpful like when I was in undergrad, if I knew that was like a strategy that some people like used. That way, for example, if it's like, a liberal arts like class or someone with like, a huge writing assignment or project, not that you like, don't put 100% of your effort into it. But maybe you can put a little more energy into like the assignments that you need like an A in that class for school, like for, like graduate school or something.

**Jason 22:45**

And to piggyback off what I was saying earlier, like, when I was saying that, the hardest like loads are typically the ones that present growth. I think that what you guys are saying, that I am trying to be supportive but I sort of overlooked the importance of working smart. Like you were saying Jay, and and I think that if you have like a workload that is kind, of kind of hefty and you have a diverse array of assignments, and you have a diverse array of passions and interests, it really is important to figure out and prioritize what you want to do because as you were saying, Jay, like it's sometimes you have a lot

and some things are more important than others, and like maybe it is just taking a class for pass/fail instead of a grade if it's not like integral to your interests and stuff like that.

**Dannie** 23:41

I want to add something, another thing from the psychology course that I took online, The Science of Well-Being. Having a growth mindset. And just like, so that's I guess, growth mindset versus fixed mindset. So a fixed mindset is when you think, I guess you believe that certain people are just smart and they can do it. And other people are just not smart and they can't do it. And then a growth mindset is seeing challenge as a positive thing. And if you can't get it right away, like you don't get discouraged, like, you just know that if you keep trying, or you work smart, or you try different things, or you just can't keep coming back to it and working on it, then you will improve. And so a growth mindset is just kind of foreseeing that possibility. And I think they actually did some studies where students with good growth mindsets actually did better in school. Yeah, and the unfortunate thing is that a lot of the stuff that happens in the education system actually kind of serves to foster a fixed mindset. Because like, you take the unit tests and you're on to the next unit, and whatever your grades were, like, that's kind of final, even though like learning is a lifelong process and journey. And I think if you approach it that way, you'll be more open to these challenges, like these heavy workloads that can feel so challenging and overwhelming in the moment. But someone with a growth mindset will kind of see that as a positive thing.

**John** 25:07

Even with the growth mindset, I think it's also really helpful like, especially when prioritizing, **there's a level of support with the different things that you're also prioritizing as well. And just being able to lean on others who are within that circle kind of like helps you out.** Because like, if, for example, I would think that I would fail on a test and then people would hate me for it, kind of is that fixed mindset and won't really give you that own like personal support that you would give yourself, as well as like the external. I think a lot of it could also fall on the people that you might surround yourself with.

**Jay** 26:08

But I think that also ties into like, like social connections and building a social network. Dannie and I just got off a call yesterday to do another episode, which is "Blood vs. Chosen Family." And one of the highlights from discussion was social groups and how those are able to nurture who you are, and be able to nurture your passions and ambitions, which I think ties into what you were just mentioning. So yeah, thank you for bringing that up. But I guess, like, to move on to the next question: It's how did you cope or deal with the overwhelming amount of choices in college? What are your best strategies for decision making?

**Dannie** 27:04

I think everyone brought up a lot of good points about this already. I was taking notes like, I guess ways that people went about sifting through all of the different options and courses and majors to choose from in college. I remember John said coming back to your values, like the things that sustain you and the things that will probably continue to sustain you. Like those things that you always end up coming back to you. I think you have a really like things you have a strong affinity for. So that'd be one thing

and then strategies. Yeah, prioritizing, working smart. Like Jason said, just realizing you don't have to do everything but you should definitely work really hard on the important things and you will not be I guess, like, drawn in like a few different directions, like your kind of heading in one direction. So those were some things that I picked up so far.

**Jay** 27:51

I think this kind of makes me think of when we were doing our pre-chat with this. Jason brought up I don't know this is what you can officially call it, but I kind of made the analogy of it, where it's like the spiderweb concept, right? Would you mind kind of like going into that, please?

**Jason** 28:11

So essentially, I think that the main thing that is really important is sort of creating sort of buckets and bundles of priorities and things that are of primary interest to you. And then if I was going to college, like I remember when I was going to college, like, I was really interested in a few key things, like one was business. The other was a law. And the other one was sociology. And the last one was sort of understanding sort of my role as like a black man and like my experience more. And so like when you have sort of those broad bucket interests and like those central interests, you're able to sort of explore them in more depth. For example, with my interest of the black man experience, I was able to expand that to the black experience as a whole. And also, like the black experience, depending on your class. And so you're sort of able to explore things as they become more interesting to you. I found out that I wasn't really interested in law because I don't like to read a lot. And I found out that I was really interested in business and I was able to explore through various different business clubs what areas of business were the most interesting to me and sort of get whittled down, and find sort of that I really like technology. And even within that, explore other areas of technology. **So having sort of those broad buckets, instead of just being like, "Oh, like there's a lot of things that I like," is something that really helps you sort of at least get a little bit of baseline direction.**

**Jay** 30:04

Thank you for that Jason and so like I really wanted you to mention that during this conversation because like I think it kind of like ties into, I guess my analogy of like the buffet thing with like, if you have like key buckets, priorities or values that you come into college with, or you're kind of like, "These are the things that I like, want to for sure kind of like fulfill or just experience," you can kind of branch off into those, and look at the intersections that exist. And I think that when I went into college, for example, sociology was definitely not something I was interested in because I wasn't really exposed to it in high school and in my personal life. But then through my experiences with public health, health, health education, and just like health professions, it kind of came together as like, "Oh my gosh, sociology is very important." And it's the core underlying thing that like, encompasses everything. And so like because of that, it kind of drove my passions to learn more about like racial disparities, like systematic oppression, environmental issues, and environmental justice and etc. And I find that like, it's one of the leading things that I'm very passionate about nowadays.

**John** 31:33



I like the fact that you actually talked or started talking about the element of like, intersectionality, because that was the only thing that was like in my head when you were talking about the spiderweb, Jason. It was like, it's kind of similar for me with the way that you did it, Jason. It was like, your experience as a black man had actually helped shape who you are moving forward. And kind of the same thing happened with me, with the way that I was looking at the first-gen, low-income perspective, because understanding the way that that worked within my own experience and also like, open the interest for me kind of wanting to dip into even the higher education space now, and just the public education space in the past. Like it's definitely nice to have like that level of web be pushed by like a central passage. Thank you for that.

**Dannie** 32:35

I guess that brings us to our next question. How did you find your passion? So what were your passions going into college and what did they morph into while you were there?

**Jason** 33:02

Passions are liable to change a great deal. And that while the strategies for pursuing your passions are important because they help you move intentionally throughout college, I think that beyond having like, sort of like a way of pursuing passions, like your initial passions, when you go into college typically change a great deal. I can't count the amount of times that I've seen, someone go in and say, "I'm going to be a doctor," and then they come out and they're like, "I'm going to be an activist." Or they go in saying, "I'm going to be an activist," and then they come out and say, "I'm going to be an architect." It's just like, I would pursue passions really, like really thoroughly and really, really fearlessly. But I wouldn't bind yourself to what you think you like at the beginning of college.

**Jay** 34:15

I really love that you mentioned that Jason because like, I think for some of our younger listeners, if we have some, that are in high school, because like Kaelyn, who's another co-host of ours has mentioned that there are like conversations and he kind of like sparked and reminded me of my interests when I went into college. Because I had a very fixed mindset and mentality where I'm like, "This is what I want to do. Like, I don't want to do anything else. And if I do, that's distracting me from my passion and my ambition," and whatever, whatever. And I think what you're talking about, it was kind of more like what Dannie was discussing, with like a growth mindset, where you're being cautious about it. Like, yes, like you're 100% going for your careers or your ambitions, but you're also being aware that you may like swerve and curve into like other areas. And like maybe if you go into something like a little too far. That's also okay because that may end up being your new passion. And that's not saying, like all your efforts, pursuing your original one is all going to waste because without pursuing that original intention, you wouldn't have gotten to this current passion if that makes sense.

**Jason** 35:35

It does make sense.

**John** 35:41

Can I also say like, another way that has actually changed the way that I've looked at my passions is in like, a paradigm shift in something. And it kind of changed the way that I saw my original passions in the first place. So for example, I think the biggest paradigm shift, which was that pass and that is that I talked about earlier with being first-gen like that being able to go to a conference and then the paradigm shift happening there to really see this was like, the story and the experience that I had had ultimately driven me into what I wanted to do afterwards. And just being able to learn and unlearn the different things of one, the paradigm shift and of the passions that went in and of itself has kind of opened me up to just the different possibilities going forward. That was something that I was thinking about.

**Dannie** 36:46

That's really cool. What is a paradigm?

**John** 36:56

So for me like the way that I kind of interpreted like the paradigm shift was something that kind of just did, your-- not your entire worldview and like change your entire world and like, flip you upside down-- but it's kind of what it is. **It is basically a pivot of mindset, or a direct pivot of what you had thought something else was that kind of, I wouldn't say changes you but changes you, either in a positive or negative way.** It really depends on like, the mindset that you have. So aka growth mindset.

**Jay** 38:23

And then I think we also need to talk potentially address real-quick about the lens of like distance learning right now, with everything just because there are still conversations and I think, Dannie, you mentioned this too, for your school, right? Like your campus hasn't officially stated whether or not y'all are coming on to campus physically or if you are continuing distance learning in the fall, right?

**Dannie** 38:53

Yeah, I think we got the official decision in July. So there's definitely a lot of uncertainty. I think a lot of schools have this right now or some schools have a vague idea of what they'll be doing. But I'm su/re some parents and students are a little bit apprehensive because I've heard some schools, say that we're definitely gonna be on campus, but we're going to have a lot of testing and it's going to be like social distance learning, which is kind of, I guess, putting a lot of trust in all the different people that will be coming onto campus and making sure everyone's doing the right thing. Yeah, so there are a lot of different situations, but in my situation, yeah, we hear in July like will we be learning virtually/online Or will we be going on to campus? Or will we be doing like, I heard another school is doing like trimesters, so they're gonna have like trimesters, A, B, and C, for example. And so you can choose like A and B or B, and C, and they just like tiny take down the number of people they have on campus at one time.

**Jay** 39:43

So I wanted to thank you for adding on to that. I just wanted to add in the distance learning aspect. Because I know that for me personally, like if I had to do distance learning, I'm not exactly sure if I would have been able to join and like do these like various clubs organizations because I don't know how that's working. Dannie, how do you happen to have any idea?

**Dannie 40:11**

I don't. I haven't heard anything about that specifically. Um, yes. I'm not sure but I definitely thought about that a good deal. Like what if they decided to do sports? Like everyone from home, like just take videos of themselves or like time themselves doing things and then they put it all together. One of the things I want to do in college is a capella, which I think is very possible to do digitally because we just can all make videos and use music software and like put out together but for other clubs, it might be a little bit harder. So I guess yeah, we'll see.

**Jay 40:43**

Yeah, so I guess like my like, question I'm leading into is like for the students that may not be able to, go to campus like physically like how, like what are some advice that y'all have for them to be able to connect or take advantage of potential resources and opportunities, they just have to, pivot a little in terms of like the traditional methods that we discussed, I guess.

**Dannie 41:18**

Well, I have kind of an answer because I think it's, I think the question was, what advice do you have for people like to kind of, I guess, get the most out of their college years, which is like the title of this episode, but just like, virtually or like distance learning-style, like, and I guess one thing that I've learned so far is that it's not really all that different, like what you have to do is not all that different, because you still have to take the initiative and reach out to people individually. Like you might be in a big seminar with like a bunch of people in one big video chat, but you still need to go out of your way to get to know your classmates, get to know your professor. And just kind of do more outside of class and ways that you think you might not have to because you're just stuck at home anyway. Like, it's good to still try to be proactive about things.

**John 42:05**

I think with this distance learning going it's definitely harder to socialize with other students because like, so the way for direct contact in classroom would literally be Zoom and then asking so what's the email? Like, what's your number? And then it's harder to really get that connection. Whereas with the teacher, I think it's easier now with distance learning to actually get to understanding with the teacher is because like, if you schedule a meeting is you want to talk to them or be like, "Hey, can we can you stay online after like class is over like", it really opens up a better connection for you to foster with a teacher. But for students, it might be a little bit harder, at least from my experience this summer. I don't know. Maybe things could change.

**Jay 42:56**

I'm wondering if students are able to take an initiative, like what Jason has mentioned towards the beginning of our chat, either like building a house or building an organization to create an easier, like, inner connection like virtually or if they can just like go ahead and reach out to like, whoever's name is listed on the schools website like, oh, like Dannie Bell, is the President of the running club and just like emailing Dannie and be like, hey, like, I noticed that you're the President, I was wondering if you are coming up with some kind of like virtual session so that students are able to connect with each other during the fall semester. And then if we're able to come back during the spring, just being able to

already have those like, communications and relationships together. But I don't know if that would be appealing or easy. I don't know. thoughts?

**Dannie** 43:55

I don't think anything is easy at first, like it's just so and one thing I've heard a lot is like social media is such a surface-level, I guess, kind of communication. So just like going beyond that, it's just so important. Nothing is really going to be able to replace being in person with people. But since this is something you have to do now for our own safety, I think we just have to make the most out of it. And yeah, I don't really have any, like perfect answers for this one at all, because it's just so different. And I'm not sure how long it would even last if we did start off virtually, so hopefully not that long.

**Jay** 44:35

All right. So with that said, our final question before we have to start wrapping up is how did you experience imposter syndrome, if you did? What did it feel like, and how did you react to it?

**Jason** 44:55

Yeah, I mean, for me, like at Harvard is just like one of the things that I think all of us dealt with was that there's always someone better than you at something. And so like, a lot of times, like, it feels like everyone's better than you at everything. And then if you feel like everyone's better than you at everything, sometimes you might question why you even belong there at all. And I think that the main thing that really helped me get over that was just thinking about like... asking myself the question like, "What does it mean that this person is better than me at like, playing the piano or better than me at math?" Like it doesn't really affect me very much. I think the preponderance of colleges don't do grades deflation meaning like, I'm pretty sure most of them aren't like only 10 people can get an A in this class. So I think that like, instead of sort of competing viciously, I think what one of the more productive things to do is think about and be comfortable with sort of your own weaknesses and actually lean on others to grow and to benchmark your success based on how much you've improved from where you were before, not where you fit in the middle of the pack, because there's like billions of people. Someone's always going to be better than you at something. And so really the only sort of satisfaction, your self esteem should be rooted in like, what your own goals are and how you achieve your own goals.

**Dannie** 46:40

I think this question has a lot to do with mental health because imposter syndrome can feel very stressful and can induce all kinds of symptoms, I guess. So this one's a really important one. I guess in the pursuit of excellence along the way, you can definitely run into stressful points. But at the end of the day, it's just I think bringing it back to the whole reason-- like your priorities, your values, the whole reason why you're there is to just become an even better version of yourself. And comparison and competition can actually be pretty productive. Like we mentioned this before surrounding yourself with positive people and true friends, because they're going to want to see you succeed. And sometimes having fake friends around can drain you without even knowing it. So, and if you just go in and just think everyone's your friend, then you're just like, I don't know. And you're going to be expecting people to be supporting you. But in reality, some people want to see you fail. So just like being aware of who you're

around and, and what their intentions are and what your intentions are, because you just have to move through college intentionally. I think that's something Jason said earlier.

**John 47:46**

I really feel that because like, similar to what Jason said, like there will always be someone better than you. Like I find myself kind of guilty of putting people on pedestals. But I'm not actually worshipping them. And I think that there's a big distinction between the two because being able to see the good and other people. And I'm also kind of guilty of that view of like, seeing the good in too many people and not kind of acknowledging when other people are like bad for me around me. But it kind of helps me along the way with that level of competition because it's like I see the good in people, and I do want to see good for them and like, see them be better. But also at the same time, that is also an inward thing of wanting to see myself be better without having that level of comparison. But kind of similar to what I said last time, it is ultimately about understanding and being aware of yourself. With the analogy of the crystal like, there will always be other people and like the light that you have, because like if you imagine everyone as a crystal like the light that actually goes through is very unique to who you are. If you're busy looking at someone else's crystal and the light that they shine, then a lot of that just becomes distracting. And everyone's always going to be different. Everyone's-- like, no one is ever going to really do the same thing, ever gonna be the same person. And if that was then that would be a little, little crazy, but things have changed. It's all about like, what, and how you kind of like perceive yourself, now and like moving on to the future.

**Dannie 49:29**

And I love the whole crystal idea because it's not necessarily... So the crystal is made out of whatever matter the crystal is made out of but then the light shining through it and the patterns that it makes it's kind of like, some sort of like divine intervention. Because the crystal didn't produce the light, it didn't make the light. It's kind of shining the light that's shining on it. And it's kind of like a cool thing to watch, and it can definitely be distracting. But that's like not all that there is to the crystal and it's also like everyone has some version of that but some might be shinier than others in certain ways, or under certain lights or when like, I guess, depending on like when the sun is overhead. So like if the sun's over here, like at this time of day, some crystals might be like shining. And then by the time the sun's over here, other crystals might be shining. So like, sometimes it's just not like comparing yourself to others. You might be at different parts of your journeys. So sometimes it's not always a fair comparison that we're making. And I guess there's so many different ways you can explore this metaphor, but I like this metaphor a lot because, it's kind of like a shiny thing, it can be distracting. It's not really like the essence of the crystal itself either. So like you can see/watch people from afar and be like, it looks like they have everything together. And they're just like shining but you don't really know what's going on, like in their lives and their personal lives either.

**Jay 50:47**

So I guess kind of to extend on this metaphor with the crystal: What about those students who may be part of an extremely underrepresented population on campus and they're marginalized and they may potentially be like gaslit by their peers and you know constantly felt like they don't belong there, or they got there due to like extenuating circumstances, etc, etc. I guess like how, like, what are some advices

or things that we can kind of help in terms of reframing that mentality to help with imposter syndrome if that occurs?

**Jay** 51:47

Yeah, so I think I'm like, I'm alluding to certain conversations that I heard like through third parties or like some people are like, "Oh, like you only got in due to for example, like affirmative action," or "you only got in, cuz you're an athlete" and etc, etc, like you're not really that smart or you don't really belong here and other things. So I guess like for those situations like how, how would we help those students or kind of like, give advice for that?

**Dannie** 52:24

Sometimes just looking at history, because a lot of these colleges are historically white all-male colleges. So when you think about it when they... This is something that I think about sometimes, like the fact that they didn't have women or people of color means that they obviously were not taking in all the talent that they could have from the very start, and most people didn't get the chances that they deserved. So nowadays, now, that means colleges are becoming more inclusive, whether that's due to external pressure or their own values shifting, I think it's, it's a great time to be alive. Like there are a lot of things that are really troublesome, and things that need to be fixed and things that are extremely flawed, but then there also things that we need to just take advantage of right now, so I think everyone who got in, I think they should just feel like they got in and like, the board decided the administration board, or they decided they wanted them in the college that year. So I think they should just embrace that opportunity. And if they didn't get it, then don't take it too, personally, because it's not really that much of a personal process. It's also they're kind of building the class. So if they have a few people who have like this type of application, maybe they didn't want like five of them like that, so they reject someone else, and then they get some different people because they're always looking for diversity and to build the personality of the class. So this is something my college counselor told me about. So there are a lot of different factors that go into it. So whether you get in or don't get in, I don't think it should really define who you are as a person.

**Jason** 53:48

Yeah, I think so too, I think it can be pretty impersonal, like, especially the admissions process and like I think that there are so many people who are so qualified that essentially, like... Obviously you get in because you're qualified. But there is in all these processes just like a little bit of luck, too. So I think just sort of having an attitude where, like, you just want to make the most of the opportunity you've been given and not really, like go too much into the weeds of like, why was I like, why was that? Why am I here? I think just being grateful is really helpful. And like, a little personal anecdote I'll share on this point is like at Harvard, they have-- you're allowed to go to the admissions office and request to review your admissions file. And I personally have a lot of friends who went and did that. And I think none of them were happy when they did that because like, it was just a bunch of scribbles and like point marks on their applications and like underscores and circles. Like, it's something that nobody really has a perfect eye into, but you just sort of have to trust that you're there for a reason.

**John** 55:14

I kind of want to echo that because a lot of like looking at that would kind of be judging your basement off there like getting your own self-perception on like someone else's judgment. And ultimately, it should kind of just be how you feel and like how comfortable you are with being in your own spot, like and with the way that I kind of like tackle imposter syndrome is usually of like, reaffirming myself and finding ways to understand that, like, yes, I do belong here. And even though like I might be not the one who should be like representated, like if I ever feel like that I remember you can always spearhead something for other people who are just like us to be able to take on that mantle later on in the future, like, not only just realizing what you could do now, but realizing like the next generation moving forward as well. Like that usually helps me with my level of imposter syndrome. And I would like to see if anyone else feels that as well, just curious.

**Dannie 56:19**

because things aren't always going to be comfortable at first. And when things are uncomfortable, it's often an opportunity for growth, but also you need to pay attention to your own well-being because sometimes, things that you think might be all in your head aren't necessarily all in your head, like it could have been like this sum of a bunch of microaggressions that you've had over the past week from other people and classmates, and maybe even teachers, and I've heard about this at various different conferences where students share their experiences. So I think it's just important to pay attention to your own well-being and like, speak up and like create change because like Jon said that future generations might have they might feel like they belong even more because people of color spoke up now and changed. And changed the way that things were now. So it's like, yeah, I think we've made a lot of progress over the past few years. And I think there's a lot more progress to be made. But I think it's foundations like the Steve Fund that can really make a difference. And a lot of students on these campuses who are really passionate about this, and just like making themselves seen because sometimes, and there's this podcast called Undoing of Our Erasure, so like black people specifically have felt, I think, like they've just been not seen in different parts of culture, or they've just been raised or their culture has been put up on a pedestal, but then as people have been, like, kind of diminished, so I think it's important to realize that that has happened and then also to like, fight against that. Yeah, because future generations will benefit from that. From fighting against that.

**[Outro]**