“As graduation approaches, the specter of reality does, too”

OPINION

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For 40 years, my parents lived in Cincinnati. So after moving to Dallas in August, Texas seemed like a whole different country (which is something the natives might boast).

Upon their arrival, they received a booklet in the mail entitled "You've Got 30 Days to Apply to be a Texan." It had four ordered steps to obtain a vehicle inspection, registration, license plate and driver license. The eight-page guide outlined precisely how long new residents have to complete each task, where to begin and fees you should expect to pay at each step.

(If you happen to be moving to Texas as well, you can get your own booklet at www.registeredtexan.com. Also, would you like to split a U-Haul from Cincinnati in May?)

I was feeling excited and prepared to become a Texan after reading the booklet until I realized that driving was just one small aspect of what I would need to do in order to successfully live on my own.

In fact, the booklet didn’t even cover the whole scope of driving — I’ll still have to switch over my car title to my own name, decode insurance plans and begin to receive the car payment bills that my parents currently pay. From there the list snowballed in my mind, thanks to my type A personality. Instead of relaxing on my winter break, I began worrying…

I’ll need a place to live. Do I get a realtor to show me around, or do I just show up at a leasing office? Will I need a loan? Does that mean someone will check my credit score?

Speaking of credit, I’ll need another credit card to start paying off newly inherited bills: student loans, utilities, health insurance (hopefully, at least), and cable and Internet (just as much of a necessity).

In a matter of minutes I had brainstormed lists and sub-lists, but I really didn’t know how to tackle any of the items.

Each major at Xavier outlines a list of required classes. Career Services provides a four-year career development checklist to prepare for the job search. I can run a degree evaluation on the Portal just to make sure I’ll have everything completed by May. But that’s where I stop checking off the checklists.

At this time exactly four years ago when high school was coming to a close, I felt fully prepared to begin the college chapter of my life. Now I can't say the same. The faster May approaches, the more worried I am about taking over all of these responsibilities.  If my abovementioned lists tell me I’m on the right track to graduate, why do I still feel so unprepared?

A course entitled “Being an Adult 401” might solve all of these problems; however, introducing another core class at Xavier is never a popular idea. Living off campus might have also been beneficial, but then I couldn’t have taken all of those extra naps with the time I’ve saved from a four-minute walk to class.

My list-making abilities are undoubtedly adept, but I would be naïve to believe that I could think of every obstacle before it arises. I would also be naïve to ignore the caveats of those who passed previously before it’s too late. For example, is the upfront savings worth the risk of foregoing renters insurance?

After my mini-meltdown during break, I called a few friends from the class of 2010. They unanimously confessed to the same anxious feelings last spring and offered helpful hints. For starters, my list should be prioritized and completed beginning with the largest cost.

I know that generations of college graduates figured out how to function in the real world so I have faith in the class of 2011 to do the same, but we can be even more efficient with the help of those who recently endured the same change.

Perhaps more importantly, we should remember to pay it forward when May 2012 rolls around. Even though I might not have enough money to earn a residence hall donning my name, I can know that I helped a senior through a more significant contribution.