

THE VISION

“The Hustle”

Our Story

Introduction

“The Hustle” is Project Passion’s foundational essay whose rejection of hustle and advocacy of passion forms the website’s philosophy, where learning, thinking, and planning become intrinsic processes. In its five sections, from “The Hustle” to “Our Plan,” we argue for a passion-based approach to learning, discuss the website’s structure and purpose, and present a proposal for a “Maker Course.”

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THE VISION
ESSAY 1: “A Silent But Deadly Culture”
A Short Story

When you read the words on this line, I surmise you have a world of thoughts swimming across your stream of consciousness. You have a million tabs open—buzzing, going off, keeping you on high alert. You’re subconsciously navigating your to-do’s, when’s, and where’s. You’re not exactly focused on my words, distracted by more rewarding tasks. There’s no incentive for you to continue reading; you must get back to the hustle, the grind, and not think twice about this essay. Switch tabs and move on if you haven’t already. You know what I’m implying here. You know that it’s not good for you, but I can hear you already: it’d cost too much to undo what’s done.

Lock in, lock in. There’s no time to waste. Get on your laptop and type away at your essays, emails, and futures. Ping! There it goes again. Well, what are you waiting for? You check the notifications: *Final project due in two days, Five new emails in inbox, Zoom meeting at lunch, three supplemental essays due by 3:30*. Deep in your subconscious, you feel the guilt eat away at you for not staying on task. “Focus on your paper!” you tell yourself, juggling fifty tasks with two left feet. You feel frustrated with yourself. You’re lost in a sea of words, overwhelmed with the next move.

5 seconds later, you reach for your cell phone. After 10 minutes of scrolling, you hear the voice in your head again, but this time it hates you. You let the guilt eat at you inside, but you can’t go back to your task—you reach for something, anything. You need to scroll, touch, escape. Damn it. You just want to feel something. Your day’s ruined, broken beyond repair. Now you must spend the rest of it scrolling because your problems can wait, yet it seems they cut deeper than that English assignment due at midnight. It’s 11:38 p.m., you were supposed to be asleep 38 minutes ago.

Better yet, you were supposed to be productive. You’re a failure. You didn’t do enough—you *weren’t* enough. How could you? How could you distract yourself again? Now how will you get into a prestigious school, become a lawyer, make millions, live in a plateau in the Hamptons, and show your high school peers how much more successful you are than them. Yet it’s midnight, and your eyes are glued to a bright screen. As you’re doomscrolling, you stumble across TikToks telling you to “f*** your tired body,” that while you’re out resting, you’re being outworked. And somewhere out there, someone’s getting ahead—your worth diminishing by the second.

Suddenly, you’ve had enough. You shut off your phone, close your eyes, and sit

with your thoughts. You wish it wasn't just you—that you didn't feel like an imposter everywhere you go. Yet, it's the next day, and millions are sitting at their desks, suffering in silence—switching between catastrophizing long papers and existential doom scrolling.

THE VISION
ESSAY 2: “The Dangers of Performance”
The Case Against the Hustle

A Silent But Deadly Culture

We are suffering in silence, and it’s time we speak up about how hustle culture is being imposed on the youth by modern education, where students are often conditioned to believe that mistakes are signs of failure, that sleep is for the weak, and that rest will make you fall behind. It is training kids to be 24/7 nonstop machines—that when they inevitably malfunction, their road to success, security, and acceptance will veer off. It champions a culture that makes perfection seem attainable: an El Dorado of wealth and happiness that can only be achieved by being a flawless, highly intelligent master of all crafts.

Worst of all, devices are fueling toxic motivation and the need for external validation by propagating these cultural beliefs into the hands of any teenager with social media. It is creating a Darwinist workplace that values competition, independence, and multitasking. We feel both threatened and inspired by the sight of success montages of gym runs, study sessions, and big-city apartment life, telling you to never stop hustling. We scroll for hours, subconsciously rotting our brains with faulty belief systems.

Our brains are fried, with shortening attention spans, amygdalas on high alert, and catastrophizing the worst possible outcomes. We are in a rat race, and it’s time to get out. We look for an instant dopamine hit every few seconds to the point that we become desensitized to scrolling, fast food, and sex. In an age of rampant consumerism, hustle culture, and instant gratification, how do we escape the system? The first step is to look past it.

The Allure of External Validation

Hustle culture is by all means a mindset taking over the lives of American workers alike, whose values are grounded in productivity, multitasking, and competition. It is marked by long hours, relentless working, and a tipped over work-life balance, residing in the belief that working hard equates to personal success and self-worth. It’s not widely acknowledged at the local scale, but it’s a culture that has leaked from the workplace to education and is especially evident in high school students. Students feel pressured to overload themselves with APs, grab any job or internship opportunity at their feet, and decorate their resume with a life’s work of accomplishments. While this sounds like a road to wealth and prosperity, it leaves students with the belief that they must be nonstop grinding to “make it.”

The whole appeal of it is the idea that we are worth our work. We learned that the world values work, so we grew obsessed with hustling. The world rewards us with money, power, and possessions—which make us feel secure. We want to be wanted, so we became conditioned to replace this need with external validation. In the education system, this looks like a 4.0 GPA, perfect standardized test scores, and admission into prestigious colleges. It is an ideal that high school students incessantly work towards—a number from which they receive external validation. For the sake of clarity, this concept of academic recognition will be called the

“external reward system.” The idea is that students will gain motivation from an external reward that either boosts or tanks their self-concept—it is as toxic as it is addicting. This is not to say that the system is inherently bad but the way in which it is culturally understood can lead to unhealthy behavior.

The Birthplace

External rewards don't only exist in an academic context but essentially everywhere. In any psychology textbook, you'd see that rewards operate as tools for motivation. They didn't exactly start in the classroom but in the workplace, specifically during the Industrial Revolution where technology streamlined manufacturing processes. Productivity and efficiency became the cornerstones of American work culture, implanting the notion that working hard yields prosperity. This system laid the groundwork for rampant consumerism, materialism, and individual self-appraisal that is reflected in hustle culture's ultimate end goal: consumption as a reward for hard work.

Likewise, the hustle culture mindset can also be attributed to Silicon Valley's rise as a tech hub, especially during the dot-com bubble, when many young tech startups received major investments. As the 2000s came to a close, social media apps such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter grew rapidly in popularity, and the prospect of “tech bros” founding massively successful startups created a huge margin for entrepreneurship and 24/7 workaholism.

This is not to say the grading system is inherently bad nor that standardized testing isn't necessary, but that the culture behind it is the greater issue. Since industrialization, schools aimed to prepare students for the workforce, training them for efficiency, standards, and rote processes. It was intended as a measure of performance but quickly became a harbinger for competition and stress. The original intent was not to be a measure of personal worth but objective data intended for growth. The pressure to make straight As was put on students by parents and teachers because they were determined to raise a generation of productive workers. Unsurprisingly, the scale quickly extrapolated to intelligence and value. That being said, it's not the grade itself that's harmful but how it is distortedly viewed.

A Universal Addiction

Along with this tech boom also came addiction and imbalance. It has enabled us to become incredibly productive but at the same time, deeply distracted. What's ironic is that while we are inventing groundbreaking technology, the devices themselves are arguably rotting our brains. They are quick, they get things done, and because of that, we are dependent on their functions. The most harmful of these is the cell phone, which goes without saying. It's at the dining table, on the way to work, and before going to bed. They are our toxic best friends. Long periods of flow seem foreign to us, as we're wired for scrolling—a few seconds of attention until we're drawn to the next instant dopamine hit. It's the reason why you feel uncomfortable sitting down for deep work, craving the food in the pantry, your furbaby, or the phone right next to you.

When we're scrolling, we feel guilty for not working, but when we're finally at work, we are pressured to "do it perfectly" and return to our digital comfort zone, continuing the loop. Every time we give in to our impulses, the harder it is to detach. As a result, we feel our addictions are broken beyond repair—that detoxing is too long and exacting of a process to carry out.

What's worse is that the content itself isn't always mind-nourishing. Notwithstanding the takeover of 'brainrot' and generative AI, some content messages are inadvertently harmful. To name a specific case, students often consume themes of academic validation and toxic motivation on their feeds. As a result, they are subconsciously feeding their minds with the idea that self-worth is earned through external validation, which creates a never-ending loop of comparison and self-criticism.

Hustle Over Health

Fast forward two centuries, and we are still sacrificing our physical health and well-being for the "hustle." We give up sleep, skip meals, and deny basic hygiene for hours of busywork. We are like machines operating on autopilot with a 24/7 clockwork routine, completing tasks to complete them. Sleep-deprived and irritable, we shut people out, project, and consider our work the only thing that understands us. Still, we are drowning in open tabs, stacked to-do lists, and shifting priorities: a lifestyle that ultimately drains the passion out of work.

We succumb to this state because we are often not taught to discern working from hustling, absorbing the notion that working is limitless and that the more we perform, the more we reap its rewards. Working is not inherently bad; it is the practice by which one makes efforts to accomplish a particular goal. It is connected to a well-rooted purpose, and by careful evaluation, deliberate rest, and efficient sessions of trial & error, work reaps the fruits of its labor.

On the flip side, hustling pushes without bounds; it works relentlessly, juggles one too many tasks, and prioritizes completion over the process. It doesn't quite know what it's looking for: money, awards, power—anything that can make them feel seen or secure. A good rule of thumb is if the work is chronically costing your physical and mental health, you have subscribed to the hustle.

The Cultural Mindset

Although hustle culture's physical effects speak for themselves, it's necessary to examine the cause rather than the effect to root out a solution, which is undoubtedly the work of a toxic mindset. Hustle culture is, by definition, a "mentality," an established set of negative thought patterns that manifest as self-sabotaging behavior.

The following description of the mindset will likely resonate with today's working class. Pay close attention to whether these thoughts align with your own:

You feel you're not doing enough, so you overwork yourself to make up for the perceived inadequacy, relentlessly learning, practicing, and applying. Despite the effort, however, you still cannot quite give yourself credit. You expect perfection from yourself and take it personally when your work doesn't meet that standard. You avoid situations that foreshadow failure, keeping yourself in a box where you're entirely in control. You shut people out, refuse help, and believe you can do it alone. Criticism shakes you up, tanking your ego and perpetuating the drive to work harder and "prove society wrong." Even when you get what you want, you still feel inadequate. It's a never-ending loop that only stops when you realize you will never be your ideal.

This mindset is not created overnight but developed over a lifetime. It is deeply rooted. By childhood, more specifically, our authority figures. It's important to note that no person or group is directly at fault. It's the environment. It is a culture that perpetuates this worldview, evolving generation by generation.

The Feedback Loop

1. Stimulus

It likely starts with a child receiving praise for earning As, being "smart," and "better than others." They liked the attention—it felt validating. The "good feelings" that resulted from an action strengthen the desire to receive more praise. "Praise" isn't inherently bad, but children may pick up the reverse notion that a lack thereof is a sign of inadequacy.

2. Cognitive Appraisal

As a result, they attach their worth to work. The praise fulfills a human need to be wanted, enough, and secure. However, needs are protected by fear, ensuring one continues to meet them. Psychologically, the fear mechanism makes a lack of "praise" a loss of worth, keeping an individual under constant pressure to keep it up.

3. Response

As one reinforces the loop, they increasingly work for validation from the EVS, viewing work as performance. Relentless work becomes a survival mechanism that readily engages the amygdala. Although the ideal is constantly changing: grades, romantic partner, college acceptances, promotion, relationships, the need to be wanted remains the same, and so does the behavior.

Yet, the external conditions, outside of their control, are always changing, making validation an unpredictable cycle. It becomes increasingly difficult to disengage as the loop repeats. The first step to detachment is to acknowledge that the "ideal" does not need to happen—you will survive regardless. Consequently, the most validating reward a person can give themselves is passion.

THE VISION
ESSAY 3: “Our Passion”
The Case for the 3P Mentality

Passion is the force that enables one to let go of relying on external validation and never stop loving what they do, even in the face of failure. It is understanding why one works, connecting it to a well-rooted philosophy of unwavering commitment and devising an execution plan developed from objective data to accomplish their goals.

Passion is an ambiguous term and is often regarded as an emotion or desire. In the context of this essay, however, it will be used to describe a mindset, an antithesis to the anti-hustle culture mindset: Passion. Think of passion not as a term but as a philosophy divided into three pillars: Passion, Purpose, and a Plan.

The key to unlocking all the three starts with letting go of performing. Hustling is motivated by a need to feel secure. They secretly hate the hustle, but they can't stop because it would mean letting go of their source of 'survival'. The show must go on, and by breaking character, the production, audience, and yourself would fall apart. But the truth is, no one's watching. It's a one-man performance, but the stage lights are blocking you from seeing that.

You must recognize that if you are working for the approval of others, you are relying on an outcome you can influence but not control—you are performing. This mindset is human, but at the same time, distortive. At a certain point, however, performing causes you to realize you are not doing the things you truly love.

The hustle around you continues—buzzing, typing, pinging—but you block it out. The thoughts that used to trigger your amygdala manifest as white noise. You let feelings pass, the circumstances around you exist, and your peers' progress takes no jab at your worth. You think only of the world around you—shells, constellations, moon phases—a newfound passion for learning bubbles up. You mirror the passionate thinkers that lived before you, actively learning and trying new things. Gradually, you realize that learning about the world is more fulfilling than any merit you could receive. It's a feeling of internal validation from having your own process, something that can only be described as passion.

Having passion requires you to play the role of an observer—simply passing through the universe, its laws, structures, and theories. You inquire, listen, apply, and improve, and with time, you'll learn the human condition. You'll touch down on the fundamentals of reality and you perceive your former thoughts as mere distortions. You will lift the filter off the systems that once controlled you and view them solely as the product of their environments. You will learn that no one is your enemy and people need only to be understood—that we are capable of empathy and genuine connection.

Passion is universal—you've seen and heard it in multiple forms, but we never put

one unifying name to it. It's grit, resilience, virtue all in one. It is an energy and a force. Most of all, it is something schools need. Students should be encouraged to create, innovate, explore, discover, plan, speak up, and express themselves. We must learn not to suppress but help students, staff, and the nation understand why creation is essential—why even when we have the grades, money, and power, what matters is the intrinsic value we give our learning and work.

THE VISION
ESSAY 4: “Our Purpose”
What is Project Passion?

Introduction

A digital showcase of essays, frameworks, and immersive visuals that envision a passion-based approach to learning. From the 3P Mentality to the Gallery of Thoughts to a Future Lens, Project Passion uses creative works to uphold a future educational framework that cultivates initiative and creativity. The Vision, PP’s home page, features a Site Map and foundational essay “The Hustle” to discuss our vision in detail.

1. **The Vision:** Landing page that introduces website's purpose, displays site map, and houses foundational essay “The Hustle”
2. **Gallery of Thoughts:** A digital portfolio of poems, mini-essays, and artwork that explore the human condition
3. **3P Mentality:** Series of 3 essays—“Passion,” “Purpose,” and “Plan”—that define a “P” in the 3P Mentality, a mindset for effective learning, thinking, and planning
4. **Future Lens:** Lineup of EdTech frameworks and “Metastrats”—diagrams, procedures, and descriptions—offering a lens into future technology and procedural strategies

To learn more, please read the project’s **story** and **site map** below!

Our Plan

THE VISION
ESSAY 5: “Our Plan”
Legislation Proposal

**The Case for Project-Based
and Self-Regulated Learning
in the Standard Curriculum**

The Intersection of Hustle Culture & Traditional Instruction and Its Effects

- **The Fixed Nature of Traditional Instruction**
 - (Teachers.Institute)
 - “Often led by a teacher and structured around a **fixed curriculum.**”
 - “Traditional education systems often rely on a **standardized curriculum** that follows a **one-size-fits-all approach.**”
 - “Students have **diverse** learning styles, interests, and abilities, but the **rigid nature** of traditional education fails to cater to these differences.”
 - “Students are assessed based on exams that emphasize **memorization** rather than **critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving.**”
 - “This emphasis on **rote learning**—where students are required to **memorize facts and figures** without necessarily understanding the underlying concepts—**limits** the depth of learning.”
 - (Studies in Social Science Research)
 - “The teaching style of **emphasizing knowledge** over **ability** makes schools, parents, and even individual students score-oriented, resulting in a **serious mismatch** between students’ **knowledge and ability**, with most students **following the rules, not daring to break out of the framework, not daring to make new innovations...**”
 - “Traditional **exam-oriented education** focuses on **test scores and rankings**, and tends to treat students as **passive recipients** of knowledge rather than **active thinkers and problem-solving participants.**”
 - “Because innovation often involves risk and uncertainty, some students fear that it will be more difficult to find a job in an innovative field and therefore **prefer to pursue traditional and stable career paths.**”
 - “College students believe that the difficulty of innovation is too high... they are **unable to consider the importance of innovation** in the long run, and only take into account its utilitarian nature, **believing that it can increase credits and enrich their resumes, without noticing the importance of innovation to their personal growth.**”
- **Schoolwork as a Source of Pressure and Stress**

- (Stanford GSE)
 - “**56 percent** of the students considered homework a **primary source of stress**, according to the survey data.”
 - “**Forty-three percent** viewed tests as a **primary stressor**”
 - “**Less than 1 percent** of the students said homework **was not a stressor**.”
- (NLM)
 - “Medical students are under constant **pressure** and experience several types of **stress and sleep problems**.”
- (Teachers.Institute)
 - “Furthermore, the intense **pressure** to perform well in exams often leads to **stress and anxiety**, creating an unhealthy learning environment.”
- **Decline in Holistic Health**
 - (Stanford GSE)
 - “In their open-ended answers, many students said their homework load led to **sleep deprivation and other health problems**.”
 - “Both the survey data and student responses indicate that spending too much time on homework meant that students were “**not meeting their developmental needs or cultivating other critical life skills**”
 - “Young people are **spending more time alone**,” they wrote, “which means **less time for family and fewer opportunities to engage in their communities**.”
 - (NLM)
 - “**Daily stress and sleep-related problems** negatively affect the cognitive abilities of the students and may result in poor academic performance.”
- **The Role of Learning Environments in Holistic Development**
 - (NLM)
 - “Universities implementing international programs should consider **service providers** to facilitate the **adaptation of the foreign students to the unknown environment**.”
 - “The learning environment affects **student health and well-being**.”
 - (Teacher.Institute)
 - **Mass media** can serve as a powerful tool to supplement and even **enhance traditional education systems**, making education more accessible, engaging, and **adaptable to modern needs**.
 - “This focus on grades and test scores undermines the broader goal of education: **fostering a lifelong love of learning and the development of skills that can be applied beyond the classroom**.”

Proposal to Integrate PBL and SRL into the High School Curriculum to Shift Educational Values

Maker Course

Description:

This project-based curriculum uses self-regulation practices to help students manage their workload. It engages students in projects ranging from inquiry-based passion exploration, to solving real-world problems, to community or outreach initiatives—both collaboratively and individually. Students will have the opportunity to design their own strategies, using iterative evaluation and improvement, to manage multiple projects effectively. This course is designed to teach the logistics of starting real-world projects while learning to regulate workflow for meaningful endeavors.

Unit 1: Self-Regulation Fundamentals

Learn the concept of self-regulation and explore examples of effective practices. Students independently design techniques, schedules, and environments to support their workflow cycles.

All projects will integrate the self-regulation fundamentals from this unit, with end-of-unit reflections to adjust processes for subsequent units.

Unit 2: Inquiry-Based Project

Students explore a topic of interest through a research question and produce a multimedia presentation. Self-regulation practices from Unit 1 are applied to manage the workflow, and students complete a reflection survey to inform improvements for future projects.

Unit 3: Solution-Based Project

Students identify a problem, research potential solutions, test them, and present findings in a “Maker” video highlighting their trial-and-error process.

Unit 4: Impact-Based Project

Students tackle a community-oriented project. Similar to the solution-based project, this unit is collaborative and addresses a local issue through research, nonprofit work, activism, or other initiatives.

Unit 5: Passion Project (Choice)

Students pursue a self-directed passion project, which can range from websites and clubs to research papers or books. This open-ended project encourages creative endeavors and often aligns with students’ future career interests.

- **Role of Project-Based Learning in Developing Initiative**
 - (Saavedra & Rapaport, 2024)

- The consensus among teachers, students, and school leaders across our studies is that PBL is **more engaging** for students, can lead to more **sustained learning of content**, and is more **authentic and relevant** for students than more traditional lecture-based approaches.
 - “Plus, it builds “**soft skills**” that benefit students **beyond school**.”
 - For example, in our KIA study, approximately half of the interviewed teachers who incorporated PBL talked about students’ **growing persistence, responsibility for their own learning, accountability to others, research and discussion skills, note-taking skills, and more.**”
 - “They also referenced students’ **newfound appreciation** of the need for **daily effort, attendance, and lack of procrastination.**”
- (Novalia et al., 2025)
 - This model not only **enhances students' autonomy** but also equips them with essential skills for **academic and personal success**, ultimately preparing them for challenges in **real-world scenarios**.
 - This is supported by Lestari et al. (2024), who found that the Project-Based Learning (PBL) model encourages students to **actively participate in learning activities and project development**, making learning materials **easier to understand** and fostering the development of **independent learning and critical thinking skills**.
- **Role of Self-Regulated Learning in Developing Initiative**
 - (Boyd et al., 2022)
 - “Students with developed self-regulated learning (SRL) skills demonstrate an ability to **set individualized educational goals, select optimal learning strategies for reaching these goals, and reflect on overall progress.**”
 - “Six core themes emerged from qualitative analysis of the post-intervention survey including **learning plan development, accountability and progress tracking, goals for growth, engagement through active learning, routine reflection, and adapting to the curriculum.**”
 - (Science Direct)
 - “SRL trainings enhanced **students’ motivation** – especially **self-efficacy.**”
 - “SRL trainings improved various **(meta-) cognitive and resource management strategies.**”
 - “SRL trainings improved university students’ **academic performance.**”
- **Considerations For Implementation**
 - (Wu, X.-Y., 2024)

- “Understanding individual differences in **self-regulated learning (SRL)** within **project-based** foreign language learning can **guide language teachers in delivering personalized instruction.**
- “The findings revealed that **PBL facilitates the occurrence of SRL** behaviors and **strengthens connections across different regulation phases.”**
- “These results highlight the dynamic nature of **SRL within the PBL context**, underscoring the significance of **considering individual differences and supporting learners' evolving self-regulatory behaviors** and strategies throughout their engagement in PBL activities.”
- “To **enhance SRL in PBL**, educators are encouraged to **provide scaffolding support, promote help-seeking behaviors, and implement interventions targeting metacognitive processes and reflective practices.”**
- (Saavedra & Rapaport, 2024)
 - District and school staff want PBL to be effective for their students but don't always know the **key levers for success**. Our studies suggest that three areas are of **primary importance: materials, support, and culture.**
 - “Teachers may also need to **adapt their assessments** to ensure they are **addressing local district or state standards.”**
 - “Although teachers value having expert-created materials, they want to be able to **adapt materials to their local context** in ways they feel make the most sense for their students.”
- (Novalia et al., 2025)
 - “One **key challenge** is the **limitation of time**, as students frequently report **difficulties in balancing project tasks** with other **academic responsibilities** (Aminah et al., 2023).
 - “**Time management** becomes even more pressing when students are involved in **multiple group projects simultaneously**, which can lead to **stress and reduced learning effectiveness** (Loyens et al., 2008).
 - Additionally, the **lack of adequate guidance** from instructors can **hinder students' ability to fully develop autonomy**. Schmidt et al. (2011)”
 - “**Insufficient scaffolding** may leave students feeling **overwhelmed**, especially when they are still building their **self-directed learning skills**