

Until January, I always imagined graduation to be sunny, well-dressed, among friends and family less than six feet apart. By March, I was trying to get my parents' flights refunded, and picking out presentable pajamas to wear for zoom convocation. Covid-19 has compromised our health and futures.

But we at the UofC are not alien to the value of compromise. As an international student, coming here meant giving up my culture, my language, for incredible academic opportunities in a nation that can't decide if immigrants of my sort should be abhorred or celebrated. When my brother went to college, I was told I couldn't get more financial aid, but I could get an additional part-time job to my existing 3. When my grandfather suddenly passed away on Thanksgiving of my first year, I could not be at the hospital to hold his hand and choke out my last goodbye. My last memory of him is his slow, serene wave as the bus to the airport pulls away from the curb, pulling me away from him. The fear of losing my grandmother paralyzes me daily, and each time my father shows up on my caller ID I fear that we have lost. But almost surprisingly, we have pressed on, knowing that 7am and 7pm agree best with our time-zones, knowing that we cannot live frozen in uncertainty or the nostalgia of whaused to be. Many of us have learned, in the juggle between our dreams and the limited resources of time and wealth, that compromise is essential to making our dreams come true.

Unlike my more vocal school-spirited friends, I did not dream of coming here. Writing an essay about shrimp that could see 16 colors just seemed like a costless study break, and coming here was a thwarted "supposed-to-be" of the lawyer I could've been. Our time here was a lot of "supposed-to-be"s, some of which I fulfilled, many of which I violated. I spent the better part of two years assuring myself that settling on Neuroscience and Economics after cycling through 20 majors does not make a fraud, and many of us have done similar 180s. We put so much weight on deciding what we are supposed to become, but I've realized that our identities are more dependent on what intentions are carried over when we violate others' expectations, these constants threading through our histories to make us one coherent being.

So as the virus continues to tear apart what life was "supposed to be", I encourage you to introspect what you are unwilling to compromise today. I leave you with a quote from the Joy Luck Club, which goes **"she had to fill out so many forms, she forgot why she had come and what she had left behind"**. The life of the mind wasn't immune to bureaucracy, and I suspect the rest of our lives will not be either. But amidst the paperwork, thank you, for constantly reminding me and each other of our steadfast intentions, to help us confidently toe the line between what is socio-politically amenable, and what is morally right.