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Yesterday's printed edition of The Daily Campus accidentally included an earlier draft of the editorial that had not been reviewed by all members of the Editorial Board. The version intended for print is available on dailycampus.com.



A world globe showing Sweden and Finland. Traveling abroad helped UConn student Tamara Segal rediscover her passion for environmental engineering.

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Daily OPINION

HOW A LONDON RAILWAY SAVED MY HOPES AND DREAMS

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As a student pursuing a dual-degree in environmental engineering and English, I am no stranger to dual passions. Unique callings are kind of my thing. Yet, it would be incorrect to say that it has always been easy to embrace mine. I am also no stranger to overthinking and tunnel vision, and this past year it almost cost me my hopes and dreams. Don't worry, though, this story ends well.

At the height of my disorientation, I decided I wouldn't follow the road laid out for me and complete an engineering internship over the summer. Instead, I took a detox. I worked in library science, creating a digital exhibit for the UConn Library, and then I studied abroad at the University of Oxford, taking classes in literature and creative writing. I might not have fully understood my motivations for it then, but now I can see that this rejection of the road more-traveled was exactly what I needed.

Well into the summer, I went on a solo trip to Haworth, the hometown of the novelist Brontë sisters, and as I rode the London North Eastern Railway from Kings Cross to Leeds, I reflected on the two-hour journey that would have taken twice as long by car. With the sudden exhilaration of Archimedes himself in his bathtub, I thought to myself, "I could make a rail network like this in the U.S. I could even make it electric." I hadn't been that hopeful in a long time.

I think the last time was this past fall, on the first day of ENVE 2310E: Environmental Engineering Fundamentals. My plans as a budding environmental engineer — and in each of the majors I'd cycled through to get there — had always been to combat climate change with decarbonization and clean energy. I buzzed in my cramped lecture hall seat, aware that the day promised to begin a new chapter in my journey of climate solutions. Instead, that day I began my descent into a rigid, miserable box, about the size of Storrs, Conn.

I wouldn't blame it on the way my professor plainly stated that day that the curriculum didn't look much at climate change at all ("We know it's happening," he said with a shrug of his shoulders). Defiantly, I scribbled, "I'm going to do more than that," in my notebook. Nor was it simply that the only futures I saw represented at the career fair were consulting firms and industry positions at morally slanted companies. I avoided them and looked hard on my own time for opportunities that were meaningful to me.

But as the year went on, I fell into a deep sensation that no one around me shared my goals. I couldn't find anyone who was thinking about the things I was, like whether geothermal had much potential as a major energy source, what Trump's policies were doing to offshore wind projects and ultimately what kind of future I could build where I could spend my days making clean energy happen. Maybe — probably — they were there but not anywhere I could find them, and I felt that absence profoundly. As I think is understandable at nineteen, it slowly stripped me of all confidence I had in my dreams.

With diminishing hope for the path I had held so dear, I wrote article after article in these pages to try to compensate, because the looming threat of climate change and the unapproached solutions continued to weigh on me like a boulder. Words have never been my full battle, though. Plus, there was something about the classrooms I stepped into day after day that felt like a wave pool. No matter how much I tried to paddle in the direction I wanted to go, I felt pushed somewhere else. I even considered law school, desperate for some road that wasn't less traveled.

After I declared a dual degree in English that semester, I started wondering whether I liked engineering at all, and nearly convinced myself to leave the program.

This should shock anyone who knows me: the girl who took organic chemistry in my first year for fun, who didn't play sports in high school but was on the competitive programming team instead (we won first place, by the way) and who wrote poems about electromagnetism because she found it that inspiring. The fact was that it seemed easier to pretend I didn't desperately want something than to face the stone wall I imagined was keeping me from it.

It's hard to explain to someone who hasn't experienced it how I could have possibly forgotten that there was a world beyond the Fine Arts Building and Science 1, but I had, and then, in an instant in the midst of my anti-engineering summer, I realized how wrong I'd been.

My epiphany was more than just a moment on a train; it was the pinnacle of a summer spent orienting myself to the world. Surrounded by systems, like the UK's National Rail Service, that functioned differently than those I was used to, I was faced with the hollowness of the walls I had built up in my mind. It became obvious to me that nothing about the way that things are insinuates that they have to stay that way. Actually, everything about history — which I felt connected to in great measure as I visited antiquated castles, the Queer Britain Museum, Jane Austen's house, the Globe Theater, etc. — is proof that things are always changing. In that way, I subconsciously came to feel that it was only a matter of deciding I was going to be an agent of that change. That is to say, my dreams were utterly possible if only I let myself believe in them. It didn't matter that there was no pre-paved path ahead of me. The very track I was riding along was built in the absence of one.

Maybe this realization didn't require traveling to a new continent, but it did require turning my gaze toward things beyond what I could see in Storrs. When I stared out the London North Eastern Railway window somewhere near Grantham and thought excitedly about electrified rail, it felt like coming back to life.



The South Entry of Gampel Pavilion on Monday, Sept. 14, 2026. Students may find clarity in expanding their horizons past Storrs.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL JEFFERS, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/ THE DAILY CAMPUS