PERSONAL ESSAY

Post-DS Depression

// BY RACHEL KRETH

There are myriad ways you can spend your freshman year at Yale University.

You can devote yourself to the arts and join sketch comedy, a cappella or stand-up comedy — I will let you decide for yourself how funny it is. You can pursue your lifelong political passions within the Yale Political Union and vow to change the world. You can even sign your life away to the lacrosse-finance-segue-pipeline, and coffee-chat your way into Yale Student Investment Group, Yale Undergraduate Consulting Group or whatever finance group will have you.

Or you can take the easier route and lean into Yale's time-honored tradition of knowing someone who knows someone. I say all this with love, as I've done more than one of these things myself. No judgment here.

However, I would argue that one of the most beneficial ways in which you can spend your first year on this campus is Directed Studies. DS is a first year intensive classics program comprised of tri-weekly lectures and three seminar classes. Within the small cohort, many meet lifelong friends, develop a love for the classics, hone their writing skills and learn how to pull an all-nighter — an essay is due almost every single week, worth 20% of your grade.

Now, there are no secret DS members. They won't let you forget it. I'm guilty as charged, obviously.

DS monopolizes your first year, especially if you lean into the culture of the program. I decided, as a recent DS alum, to ask other alumni of the program how they are feeling since graduating, and how they now spend the excess time on their hands.

Over text, Lionel Augustine '29 told me, "In DS, I felt a bond with the people around me that extended beyond shared academic interests. Outside the HQ lectures, I always felt an energy of students ready to have their minds, and even lives, changed by the next 50 minutes."

Lily Scheckner '29, who is also a WKND staff writer, texted me a similar sentiment, stating, "The students of DS had such a great energy, but also there was a sort of community within the texts that you read, because they were all matched to create a rounded, shared experience every single week — equally literary, historical, and philosophical."

Augustine said that this year, though he has tried to keep the Directed Studies "sentiment" alive, "through book clubs, normal clubs, and just in conversations with friends, I do find myself missing the feeling of DS as a big group project."

Scheckner echoed a similar feeling of nostalgia, writing that the "classics are always relevant, but something I struggled with during DS was what felt like a very urgent desire to address current socio-political issues that weren't being addressed in DS."

I also talked to sophomores who are still involved in the DS program as tutors and mentors for the current freshmen.

Asha Roy '29, who is a peer tutor for the program, said in a voice memo that the biggest change to her schedule this year is "having classes with people I don't know." She said this "makes connecting more difficult because it's not like all these people want to talk about Plato with me after class is done."

Unless, of course, you're taking DS Professor Dan Schillinger's class on Plato. She says the classics are definitely still relevant to her and give her "a way to think about issues."

Margot Kelsey '29, another peer tutor for DS, wrote to me, "I've definitely felt the loss of the built-in community of DS. By the end of the year, we had a shared storehouse of references that enriched our conversations in and out of class."

When looking at sophomore year, she wrote, "I've sought out smaller classes this semester because DS taught me to love the seminar format. I want to continue struggling with the questions that define DS, from how we can create the ideal government to what it means to live a good life."

Ultimately, these questions stay essential before and after Directed Studies. Students inside and outside of the program learn about and attempt to answer them, but DS gives, and continues to give, a backbone of knowledge that, it seems, keeps on giving.

A similar idea was echoed across these conversations with peers: The community of DS is there for you forever. Even now, my DS friends and I have standing lunches and dinners that are reminiscent of our meals after lectures and late-night writing sessions on Thursday nights.

To first years in DS, I say enjoy your time the best you can; the specter of sophomore year is looming in the distance, but know that DS will carry you through it. If you're frightened by the sheer workload of the program, this is my call to arms to stick with it; when you're done, you'll never regret it.

Contact
RACHEL KRETH *at*
rachel.kreth@yale.edu.



ILLUSTRATION BY BEATRICE BARILLA

WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:
TEXTING HER BACK