

“How I Got Here: Alex—Educator-focused Video”

Lucy:

Hey there, I'm Lucy, and to set the mood for this video, I want you educators to think back about to your own college experience and answer the question, how did I decide what I wanted to do? Keep that in mind while we look at Alex's story. We're going to break this down for you into three sections, what, so what, and now what? First, the video you're about to see tackles how following your passion isn't always a clear path. Finding the right college is key, but it's not necessarily always a final decision. There are twists, turns, and discoveries along the way that are all part of the process. The journey of our friend Alex is a very real portrayal of the pressure involved in finding that direction. He had a major passion for video games growing up, but where does that passion take him? What options opened up for him? How did he finally decide on a major? Yep, that's a big one.

There's no doubt that declaring a major can create a tremendous amount of pressure, even the word declare evokes a feeling that might make you think, oh fiddlesticks, is that it? Do I only get one shot at this? Is it a bad thing if I changed my mind? Am I even allowed to change my mind? How much will my indecision cost me? What will my mom say? It's so important to convey that this entire decision making process is perfectly normal. In fact some would say that questioning your goals and focus are a part of the typical college experience. It's a time in your life to question just about everything. Use this video of Alex's journey to spark a discussion with students about what to do if they decide to change their major or focus after they start college. Talk about how that even though you might know your passion, there's no way to know what other opportunities may come up. It's like driving a car at night, sometimes you can only see as far as the light goes, but you've got to keep driving.

I'll pop back in shortly to give you a few more things to think about as Alex finds his way. After the video use the gallery walk activity to mimic the type of information that will be shared with others once a student declares a major. Ask why it interests them, ask what kind of job the major leads to, ask what options may be available to them. Be sure to engage the student by asking questions and encouraging them to discuss specifics with classmates during the presentation portion. For now, let's watch Alex's story. See you in a bit.

Alex:

I think playing video games offers an experience like no other, you're living out the fantasy of playing a character, saving the world, saving the galaxy, it gives an outlet for imagination that you can't really get anywhere else. I'm Alex, I work in Austin, and video games are pretty much my life right now. I loved playing video games as a kid, but I never thought I would be working as a career. While growing up I wasn't allowed to play video games funny enough. I would often be borrowing a friend's computer. Finally my parents realized that they could no longer keep me away from playing them. My mom told me, "If you want to play video games you have to do something constructive with it."

I went online, saw that there's this game movement going on called Mods. They take existing games and turn it into something else. It was a hobby, around the later years of

high school I developed an interest in photography and I soon realized maybe art is what I wanted to do. I just decided to look at colleges, I looked out of state but most out of state tuitions, they're really expensive. My parents, they weren't the most financially stable, I decided to apply at the University of Houston. They provided fantastic financial aid. The instructors are great, the classes were fantastic, but I put more focus on video.

Outside of school I would shoot footage of my friends, maybe cut little videos together. Unfortunately U of H didn't have film classes. It was almost like a midlife crisis to a degree. Did I want to stay with graphic design, or photography? Does this school provide everything that I need?

Lucy: Intermission, at this point Alex has discovered that his passion for video games has led him to choose a field of study. He decided to stay in state for college and major in graphic design at the University of Houston. However, it was his interest in film that made him really think about whether or not he was at the right school. The big takeaway here is that defining your passion may open up new options. Keep in mind his decision to look at which school offered a strong film program isn't too big of a leap from what he was already interested in. His affinity for video games led to an interest in photography, which led to an interest in film. All three of these fields are in the same swim lane. It's not like he said, "I love video games but I want to be a lawyer, or a vet, or a scuba instructor." His focus remains on the visual arts.

What does this mean for your students? Transferring to a different school isn't always easy. It's important to tell students that even though a school might offer a field more in line with what they want to do, it's equally important to make sure that switching schools is a step forward in completing their degree, and not a step backwards. Everything that Alex has done up to this point is getting him closer to being a professional video game producer. Deep down in his gut he knows that he needs to go to a school better suited to what he really loves, but he doesn't take that decision lightly, and ultimately has to wait to transfer. He spends his time at U of H knocking out basics, with an eye on heading to UT to study film at some point. Another thing to point out is that even though there seems to be some cloudiness in his trajectory, he continues to complete basic courses at U of H so that he isn't wasting any time or money. Of course it would have been really easy for him to just stop and write it off as, "I'm still finding my way bro."

Instead he keeps his eye on the prize and is unafraid of questioning his path. Okay, I'll let you finish, then I'll be back to wrap this up.

Alex: I discovered the University of Texas top film program. I got rejected, I was shocked, I didn't know why. They told me they unfortunately did not receive my transcripts. I didn't want that to stop me so I had to wait another semester. At U of H I got most of my core classes out of the way, the school is a lot more affordable. Finally when I got in at the University of Texas it was absolutely exciting. I think I was a lot like the other students, I thought I would become a great director, even a cinematographer. Soon I discovered that they provided classes for animation, and motion graphics, which is pretty much what is used in video games. That reminded me of when I was playing

video games as a kid, how fun that was, how creative it was. It just brought me back to those times where I had a real passion for it. I knew these were skills that I wanted to cultivate and work on.

UT set up an information session with a big video game studio called BioWare and they produce some of my favorite games. They focused mostly on stories, which means role playing games, RPG's, Balders Gate, Dragon Age, Mass Effect, Knights of the Old Republic. They were recruiting for open positions. I applied right away and finally got that fateful phone call that told me I'm in. Working at BioWare is just unbelievable, it's almost like it's a whole different world. You play games for a living.

Welcome to my desk, check it out. I bet you want to see what the rest of the studio looks like so let's take a look. Hey Toby, what you up to?

Toby: Making magic everyday.

Alex: Everyone there has the exact same interests as you, you just see Foosball, game rooms, BioWare is fun. I make all the videos that you see online from the trailers, to the behind the scenes video. For a young video producer being right out of college you make a pretty good salary. Let's check out the audio team. Hey Danny, so what are you working on right now?

Danny: Awesome epic death sounds.

Alex: Working at BioWare is definitely a dream come true. Finding the right college can be a very difficult process, it's not exactly a set path. Take some time, really find out what would make you happy and what you would really like to do. Don't give up.

Lucy: See, didn't I tell you this video was great? Alex's story is an inspiring example of how the road to your passion is not always crystal clear. Students need to know how to use all the information they can to find the right fit for them. A counselor once told me, "Choosing a college isn't a race to be won, it's a match to be made." Encourage students to make sure their passions match up with what the school they're attending actually offers. Wondering where to start? Begin by guiding them closely as they look for information. Make sure they're using credible sources and employing smart strategies for evaluating information, and making sense of statistics. It's a daunting task, but you need to tell them that all this work will eventually lead them into making the best possible decision, we promise.

Another thing to emphasize is that they're certainly not alone. Explain to your students how their academic advisor or counselor can provide a support system as they continue their search for the right college. Maybe that awesome advisor is even you.

Now what? Encourage your students to start with defining their passion. What drives them, what's the one thing they can happily see themselves doing for the rest of their lives? To help unlock that passion you can start by asking them, "What's the one thing they'd love to do for the rest of their lives if money was no object?" Then use that

information to inspire passion projects that could turn into college majors, and eventually full on careers. Or try asking what drives them crazy, identifying a problem they'd like to solve could also unearth a previously unknown passion.

When they find their passion and learn more about themselves as thinkers, doers, and learners, their educational future becomes more clearly visible in amazing technicolored splendor. Just like it did for Alex, a slight chance in course can mean it's game on and definitely not game over.