A Frosh Perspective

By Jordan Schwartz

*Just 20 more minutes… 15… 12… 10… 9… 9... 9…*

The clock seemed to be indefinitely frozen at 11:51 and Xander was close to her death. Normally between glances at the clock the hands move. **This just so happens not to apply in the last 10 minutes of an incomprehensible physical anthropology lecture when you’re in a sea of 45 students.** While she understood a large introductory humanities lecture at a large university would be for probably 450 people, **her insanely small high school made even 45 people an eerily large class.** She barely knew her professor and knew he didn’t know her. While the anonymity soothed the anxieties of oversleeping on occasion or staying in to catch up with work, it did make going to the professor a lot more intimidating than it needed to be.

*6 more minutes…*

At this point it’s almost undeniable that the clock is conspiring against Xander. **She begins to distract herself** with thoughts of her dog and doodles of random flowers and patterns. At the mention of returning last week’s homework, her head jerks up from her notebook and she yet again looks at the clock.

*2 more minutes…*

Slowly laying out each individual student’s work in alphabetical order makes it seem as if the professor is intentionally trying to make the class run over.

*And 0 minutes…*

I would say she quickly threw her things in her bag, but **everything had been packed for maybe 5 minutes with the exception of her notebook** for doodling. Xander grabbed her homework and was out the door.

*Negative 3 minutes…* *not bad…*

Power walking out of the science building, Xander meets her friends and they continue to the dining hall. She has a little less than an hour until her Topology class. **Specialty mathematics being not as popular as an intro-level humanities course, topology was much smaller and much less intimidating in some respects.** She is very close to her professor and actually knows who is in her class… it’s rather hard not to know who the 6 other people in the room are after half a semester. This time, **instead of anxiously waiting to leave Xander constantly checks her phone to be sure she has enough time to make it to her class.**

While many people meander in a couple of minutes tardy to their large lecture classes, **it’s a little harder to do so discretely when your 5 classmates and professor are all in place.** Coming from a school where some of her classes had 2 and 3 students and an 18-person honors science course successfully demanded there be the creation of a second section, **this was comfortable for her**. Also the subject matter meant a lot more to her personally. While introductory classes for your major are related to what you’re interested in, they’re not always the most captivating courses you will ever take in college. Smaller, more personalized classes are naturally more engaging. **Also for Xander the smaller group meant she felt much less hopelessly loss, no matter how complex the material became. The professor is more approachable and there’s a lot more time for questions during class.**

**Switching between the environments is a challenge.** On more tiring days, the cloak of the larger class is comforting and allows for one to zone out without much remorse. This is not an option, however, in a class of 6 students. One has no choice but to be engaged and on task. And even if one does not feel up to working, there is no ideal or respectful way to, for lack of a better word, slack. **In high school, even those 2 to 3-person classes had a fair amount of in-class individual work and much-desired days of non-productivity.** While often slipping out for 20, maybe 30 minutes in her small classes her senior year, **Xander never missed a minute of her topology class here at college**. Sometimes it was honestly for lack of a clean escape, but the class is always active- much different from workbooks and vague instructions.

*15 minutes until Topology…*

Xander, having been antsy for last 10 minutes, grabs her bag, makes quick homework plans with her friends for that evening, and is off to class. By this point she has made sure her Topology homework is in place at least 5 times and makes a quick check for it yet again before she departs from the dining hall. She is the second one to arrive as she situates herself. She pulls out her assignment for the day and begins checking over it, making small talk with her classmate Elliette in the meantime. Soon Annabella and Dess arrive, following suite as **they pull out their assignments and wait**. As usual, Dahl is the last to arrive.

Being so small and only meeting once a week, this class often feels more like a club to Xander than a demanding academic course. The work for this class is almost a respite to her, something to look forward though. Topology involves a lot of drawing, which is always peaceful, and the math is natural to her.

*5 minutes until Topology…*

Their professor walks in and after some brief greetings they dive into the past week’s assignment. Each student details their work over the past week and **it’s almost unnoticeable that each students presents for roughly half an hour**. In almost no time, 2 of the 3 hours are gone. Then it’s Xander’s turn to explain her work is when the nerves kick in. True it’s a small group of people, but the people in the group all are talented at the course and will be directing comparing her product to the other students as well as her past work. **This is when small courses become intimidating.**

Between her actual presentation and questions however, Xander’s presentation ends up just as long as the others and is in no way less adequate though she feels it is. No matter what, showing her work to this group of individuals will always put her on edge.

*20 minutes until the end of Topology…*

And this is when looking at the clock for the first time is a shock. In both the lecture and the small class the clock is noticed about 20 minutes till the end. The difference is the lecture is only 1 solitary hour, not 3 hours like Topology. Though neither class is very interactive or collaborative, Xander’s educational experience allows her to fare better in the smaller environment.

Transitioning from the high school class where small groups were left to work on their own to college groups where the teacher engaged the class originally did feel a little more restrictive, but it’s definitely the more practical method of education. Detaching from a lecture in a room of 45 people makes it seem almost unnecessary to actually go to class. When there’s a small group, however, the pull is greater because there is a promise of inclusion and even if one does not want to be included, there’s no hiding an absence. Also in this environment, student-professor relationships can be stronger so that the student is more comfortable approaching the professor about the course material or just in general.

*5 minutes left in Topology…*

And the instructor provides next week’s assignment. Having been there for three hours and with many things to get accomplished, the class speeds off till next week. Xander slowly makes her way to the gym for swim practice, sifting through idea after idea for the upcoming assignment.

