

From School to University: A Reality Check I Didn't See Coming

The thick, creamy envelope arrived on a Tuesday. My hands trembled as I tore it open. There it was, in bold, official print: **"We are pleased to offer you admission to the Bachelor of Civil Engineering program at Kathmandu University."**

I remember the wave of pure, unadulterated pride that washed over me. I'd done it. Years of late-night study sessions, the pressure of countless exams, the anxiety of waiting—it had all culminated in this single, victorious moment. I was going to be an engineer. I thought the hardest part was over.

Oh, how beautifully, naively wrong I was.

The truth is, getting into KU was just buying the ticket. The actual journey? That was a reality check I never saw coming.

The Illusion of "Smart"

In my +2 classes, I was the "topper." Answers came easily, concepts were digested in a single reading, and my report card was a thing of beauty. I walked into my first week of university classes with that same armor of confidence.

It lasted precisely one lecture.

Advanced Calculus wasn't just harder; it was a different language. Physics suddenly involved concepts that felt like

abstract philosophy. The pace was relentless. In school, we spent weeks on a chapter. Here, we blitzed through a chapter per lecture. The guy next to me, who seemed to grasp everything instantly, wasn't an anomaly; he was the standard. My "smart" identity, carefully constructed over 12 years, crumbled in days. I wasn't the big fish in a small pond anymore; I was a minnow who had accidentally swum into the ocean.

The Myth of "Study Hard"

In school, "studying hard" meant memorizing the textbook the night before the exam. It worked. It worked every time.

University laughed in the face of my memorization techniques. Here, understanding the *why* and *how* was everything. You couldn't just memorize a formula; you had to know its derivation, its application, and how to twist it to solve a problem you'd never seen before. My first mid-term was a brutal awakening. I had "studied hard," but I had studied wrong. The questions demanded critical thinking, not rote repetition. The red ink on that paper wasn't just a grade; it was a verdict on my entire approach to learning.

The Freedom Trap

Everyone dreams of the freedom university offers—no parents, no strict schedules, no one nagging you to study. It's intoxicating for the first few weeks. Choosing when to eat, sleep, and hang out felt like adulthood.

But that freedom is a double-edged sword, and I cut myself deeply with it. No one *makes* you go to the library. No one *forces* you to start your assignment early. That 8 AM class

feels optional when your alarm goes off and you're exhausted. This freedom isn't a gift; it's a test. And without the discipline I never had to develop in school, I started failing it. The deadlines crept up, the backlog of unfinished topics grew, and the guilt became a constant companion.

The Redefinition of "Success"

In school, success was a percentage. A number. Clear, defined, and singular.

At university, especially in a demanding field like engineering, success is... messier. It's the satisfaction of finally debugging a code that's been ruining your week. It's the bond you form with your lab partner over a failed experiment that you eventually get right. It's managing to explain a complex concept to a friend, solidifying your own understanding. Sometimes, success is just surviving the week without burning out.

The pride I felt on getting that acceptance letter was based on an external achievement. The pride I'm slowly building now is internal. It's forged in the struggle. It's earned not by being the best, but by being better than I was yesterday.

So, to anyone out there feeling that same soaring pride after an acceptance—cherish it. You absolutely deserve it. But buckle up.

The hardest part isn't over. It's just beginning. And ironically, that's the best part. This reality check, as harsh as it was, is forcing me to grow in ways I never could have in the comfortable confines of school. I'm not just learning

engineering; I'm learning resilience, discipline, and how to learn all over again.

And that might be the most important lesson of all.