

My fellow classmates:

I'm writing you this letter so that hopefully you can take something positive from my recent experience. I have little doubt that many of you have either been in my shoes, or know someone who has, so it will be easy to relate to my situation.

A couple weeks ago I made the decision to go to Shooters and use a fake I.D. to get a wristband. It was a normal Shooters night and when Shooters turned the lights on and the music off I left with a sober driver. I assumed everything would be fine and I'd be back in bed in less than 10 minutes. However, my night quickly escalated into one that was far from normal. The car I was in went through a random I.D./drunk driving checkpoint. I assumed that since I had a sober driver and wasn't driving or anything I could not get in trouble. The officer thought otherwise. He carded all four of us in the car and proceeded to question me and the other passengers extensively. One thing led to another and an hour later I was back in bed just like I had originally planned. The big difference was that lying on the desk next to me were two citations: one for underage drinking and one for misdemeanor possession of a fake I.D.

A flood of emotions ran through me the following day. At first I was very upset at the circumstances. I thought that I had made every responsible decision I could have and that my citations were simply a matter of unlucky circumstances. I then started thinking about the Durham police officer who cited me and began accusing him of seeking me out simply because I was a Duke student. My feelings of anger over the fact that I got in trouble soon gave way to fear over what consequences were in store for me. I was scared that I'd lose my financial aid and my Duke career was over. I was afraid to talk to my parents because I knew they'd be very disappointed in me and I knew that their disappointment would be very hard to handle. I also had no idea what legal ramifications were headed my direction and what kind of fines and penalties I would face. All of my feelings of fear and anger were very overwhelming, especially when combined with my feelings of regret for putting myself in that situation.

It would be easy for me to simply blame my situation on bad luck and an unfortunate circumstance and try to avoid a similar situation in the future. On the surface this reaction may be sufficient, however I feel there is a deeper lesson to be learned. I believe I am an honest person and I want other people to believe that notion as well. However lying about my identity and age in order to drink illegally is not an honest action. Granted those decisions are made relatively frequent and widely regarded as simply being a college student. However this normative frequency does not mean that these decisions have a higher of degree of honesty. That decision, despite the fact many don't think it's a big deal, still reflects my character and directly contradicts my claims of being an honest person. Furthermore all the decisions we make reflect our character. Do some decisions have a larger reflection on our character? Yes, of course some decisions are much larger than others. Something to think about, though, is whether or not all those little decisions that don't seem like a big deal can add up and have a larger impact on not only the perception of your character, but your character itself. Maybe excusing all the little decisions that contradict who you are as a person can lead to excuses for larger decisions down the road. Perhaps they could even add up so much so that your character changes.

Obviously I do not have the answers to these questions. I simply want to illustrate the fact that every decision we make can reflect who we are. I also don't want this to seem like I'm telling everyone not to go out with your friends, be social, go to Shooters, etc. I simply want this letter to share my experience, along with some of the things I learned and began to think about because of it. It's obvious that drinking underage and using false identification can get you in trouble with Duke as well as the law. If you don't take anything else from my experience, I simply ask that next time you make a decision ask yourself how that reflects your character. Does it reflect your values as a person? Does the perception that your decision gives to others truly reflect who you want to be? If the answer to either of those questions is "no" then maybe that decision is worth reconsideration.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and I hope that it may be of some benefit for you.

Sincerely,  
A fellow Classmate