The Daily Campus

JULIA GILLEGO

SENIOR COLUMN

THE G WORD



SHE/HER/HERS

OUTGOING CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT

As cliché as it sounds, you never really believe your college years will fly by as quickly as they do. Now, in my final weeks as an undergraduate, the word "graduation," or as my friends and I call it, the "G word," feels almost off-limits in our vocabulary. It has taken on a meaning far beyond just a ceremony. It represents everything that comes after, the uncertainty of what's next and the realization that a chapter of our lives is coming to a close.

Even the thought of walking across the stage in front of the Class of 2026 is enough to bring us to tears. But they are not tears of sadness. They come from a place of gratitude, because I can say with complete certainty that I wouldn't change a single part of my undergraduate experience, even if I had the chance.

From starting as a freshman with no declared major to eventually committing to not one but two, Communication and Journalism, the journey was anything but straightforward. There were moments of confusion and stress, and times when everything felt overwhelming. Looking back, those moments were necessary. Even the friendships that didn't last taught me something valuable. They shaped my perspective and helped me grow into who I am today. I still think about my freshman dorm, the cramped space and the shared bathroom with one working drain and questionable décor. As much as I love living off-campus now, those memories hold a kind of warmth that only comes with time.

Some of my most meaningful experiences began in that first year. Meeting the people who would become my closest friends, navigating every freshman "first" and celebrating a National Championship win on my birthday are moments that feel both distant and vivid at the same time. I spent that year exploring majors and constantly second-guessing myself, but each step led me closer to the path I'm on now.

A major part of finding that direction came through my involvement in campus media. Being a part of The Daily Campus allowed me to step into journalism in a real and tangible way. It pushed me beyond the classroom and into spaces where my voice and perspective mattered. Writing and contributing to a publication with a real audience gave me a sense of purpose and confidence that I hadn't fully found before. It was not just about producing content, but about understanding the responsibility that comes with storytelling and the impact media can have on a community.

Beyond The Daily Campus, being involved in other campus publications and media spaces expanded my perspective even further. Each opportunity challenged me to adapt my voice, think more critically and approach storytelling from different angles. Whether it was experimenting with new formats, covering different kinds of stories or collaborating with other creatives, those experiences helped me grow not just as a writer, but as a communicator. They reinforced my passion for media and showed me that this is something I want to pursue long after college ends.

Coming from a small town where my closest friendships were built over years, stepping onto a large campus initially felt overwhelming. But finding my people early on, along with joining Greek life, transformed something unfamiliar into something that felt like home. It gave me a sense of belonging that made a big campus feel more personal.

That is what makes the "G word" feel so daunting. It marks the end of a time in my life where everything felt close and constant. My friends were always nearby, opportunities were always within reach and I was given the space to figure things out as I went. At the same time, it represents growth. Every late night, every article written, every risk taken and every memory made has led me here.

So, while I may still hesitate to say it out loud, I am beginning to understand that graduation is not something to fear. It is something to carry forward, a reflection of everything I have experienced and everything I am ready to step into next.