

Academic Struggle

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In this document and imagined exhibition, I'll be exploring one of the reasons as to why people drop out of university. I hope to portray the feelings and emotions that this student is going through onto the viewer.

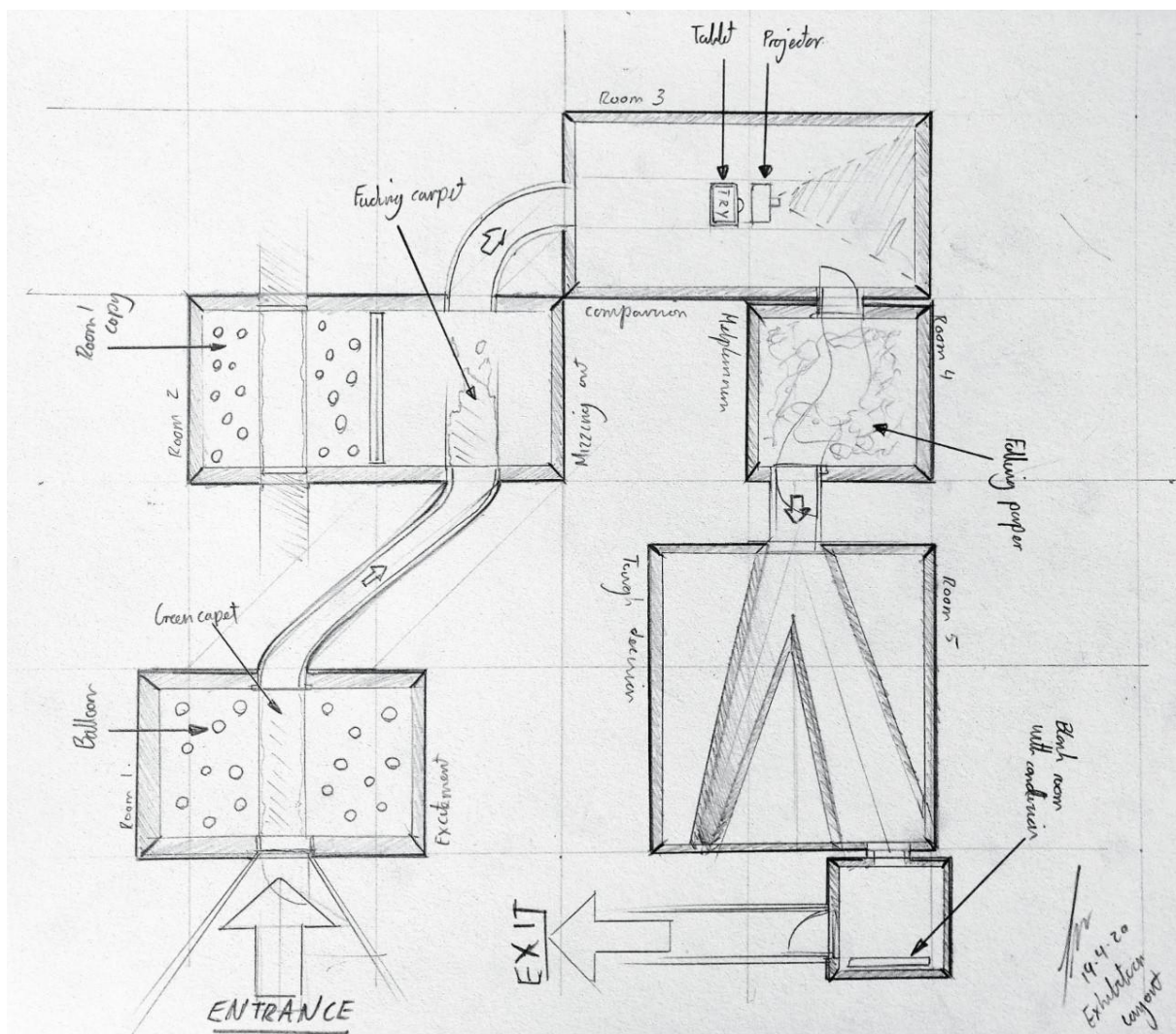
I want to portray quite a grim reality of university that most won't consider before heading out onto this life changing adventure. This is of the amount of people dropping out of their university course. I've heard stories from both tutors and students about how half of the students who start their first year, won't make it to their third. This is purely within the automotive design course though and could vary within different subjects.

8.8% of disadvantaged students and 6% of more advantaged students are likely to drop out in their first year. (Department for Education, 2019). Even though these percentages do not sound significant, "541,240 people were accepted through UCAS to start an undergraduate course in 2019" (Universities UK, 2019). That is roughly between 32,474 and 47,629 people who could feel the same emotions as I have tried to portray through the exhibition. These statistics are representing all of those who dropped out, thus meaning not all of them will be suffering with exclusion, helplessness and comparison emotions that I'm trying to portray in my exhibition.

The exhibition will be a walk around tour, through five different rooms. There will be objects and experiences trying to portray the emotions and feelings that these dropout students might feel throughout university. These feelings will be extreme and over the top to exaggerate the students and how they feel isolated from everyone else. This is

due to how little dropouts are spoken about and I want to ensure that everybody is moved and fully understands how the student might feel at any given point throughout the exhibition.

Map of Exhibition



Each room represents a different feeling or emotion.

Room 1: Excitement – When the student first goes off to university with support and backing from family and friends.

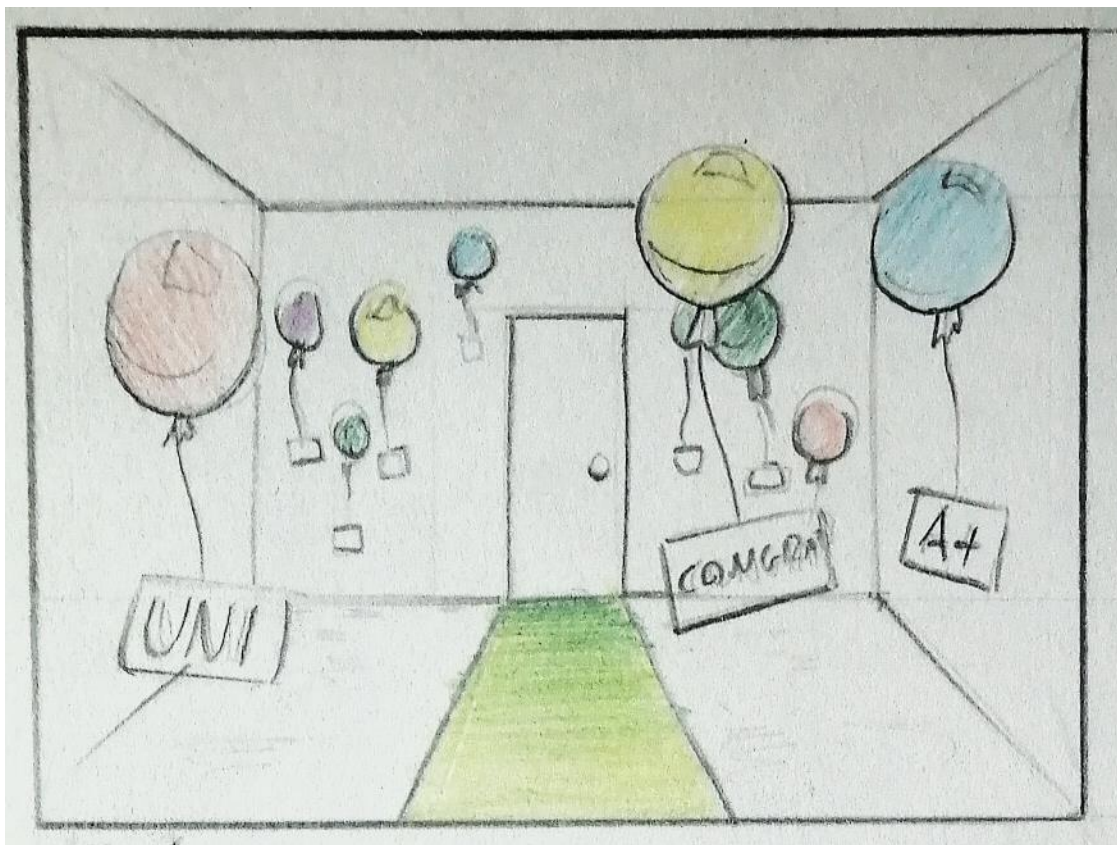
Room 2: Missing out- Exclusion and not fitting in. Not being on the right path.

Room 3: Comparison- Always looking at other students on the “right path” and comparing your work.

Room 4: Helplessness- Is this what you want? Feeling of being lost with what you know the most.

Room 5: Tough Decision- Carrying on the way you’re going or leave it behind forever.

The first room of the exhibition is dimly lit with floating balloons of various sizes and colour. The balloons are suspending cards from friends and family, congratulating you for getting a place in university. There are also report statements and result cards, showing good grades, along with a congratulatory acceptance letters from universities. There is a singular green carpet leading through the room to the next door.



There are five balloon colours. These are red, yellow, blue, purple and green. These colours represent core semiotic behaviour, where each colour is formed of research. John Berger states that looking is an act of choice and what we see is brought to us from our research. (Burger, 1972) This means that the red balloons represent love because of the connection with the heart. This also continues throughout the other colours with yellow representing happiness, blue represents peace, purple represents wealth and green represents success. "The most arousing ("mood-lifting") were saturated reds and yellows, whereas the most calming were pale (whitish) blues and purples." (Simmons, 2006, p.251). This Journal also backs up the colour theory based on our research, making this universal. The cards attached to the balloons represent the emotional support behind you. (Connected with the balloons). Whereas the report cards and acceptance letters are there to show that you have previously done well and that everything seems on track. This should easily convey to the viewer that this is based on a student's story, and it may also bring them back into a memory when they had just finished school or college, thus bringing them into the moment. And giving them an emotional connection with the exhibition. The green carpet that leads you straight to the next door is meant to represent simplicity and straightforwardness. This is how you think the course will go, as one straight and easy line, with the green representing success.

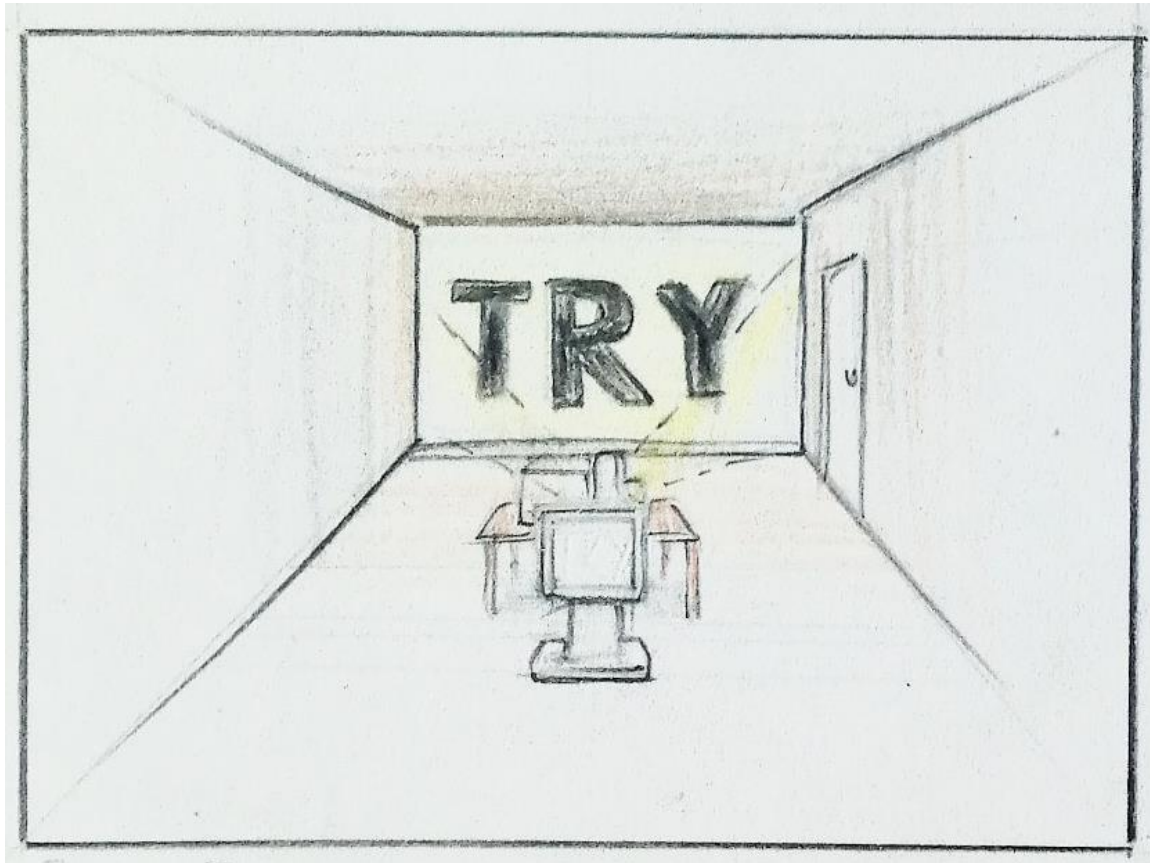
The green carpet carries on into the second room, but the further you go in, the more it fades and tears away. There is a glass barrier to your side with an identical copy of the last room opposite.



The fading carpet represents the clear direction of where you want to be. The further you go on, the more you realise that there is more to your course than you initially thought, and your goals fade because of the extra workload with some subjects not interesting you. The exact copy of the last room represents other paths and journeys that other likeminded people are on, making you feel less special about yourself and choices. “like my students—are no more or less important than anyone else’s.”

(McCullough, 2012). The glass pane in the centre represents the hidden barrier between students. On the other side of the glass pane is someone or a group of students that you believe are succeeding and have everything under control, but it is also exactly where you want to be but you can’t find a way to get onto the other side of the pane.

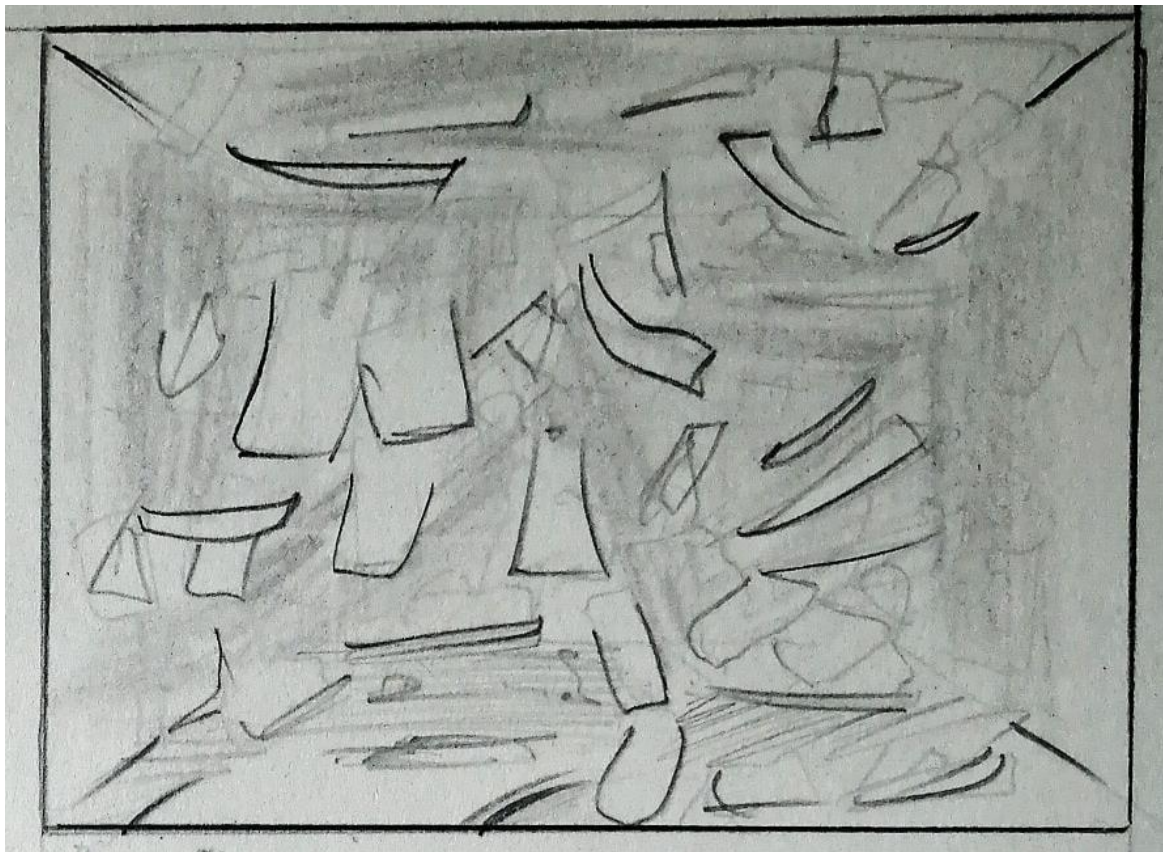
The third room has a blank tablet in the centre of the room with a mechanical image projector pointed towards the furthest wall projecting 'try' in a harsh and sharp tone. As you draw or write something on the tablet, the image changes on the projector and it's of a more advanced and better version of what you've done.



The purpose of this room is to make you feel that no matter what you do, there will always be somebody else that can do better than you. This emphasises your hopelessness and makes you seem useless and undesired. The mechanical image projector is used to focus on your hearing senses, where it uses a loud and unbearable noise to change image every time after you've finished on the tablet. These "harsh sounds trigger aversion brain areas" (MedicalNewsToday, 2019), and where the noise is in the 40-80 Hz range, "These sounds solicit the amygdala, hippocampus and insula in particular, all areas related to salience, aversion, and pain. This explains why

participants experienced them as being unbearable.” (Arnal, 2019). This image projector will be in this sound range, making the noise as unbearable as possible every time you create something new on the tablet, making you want to stop.

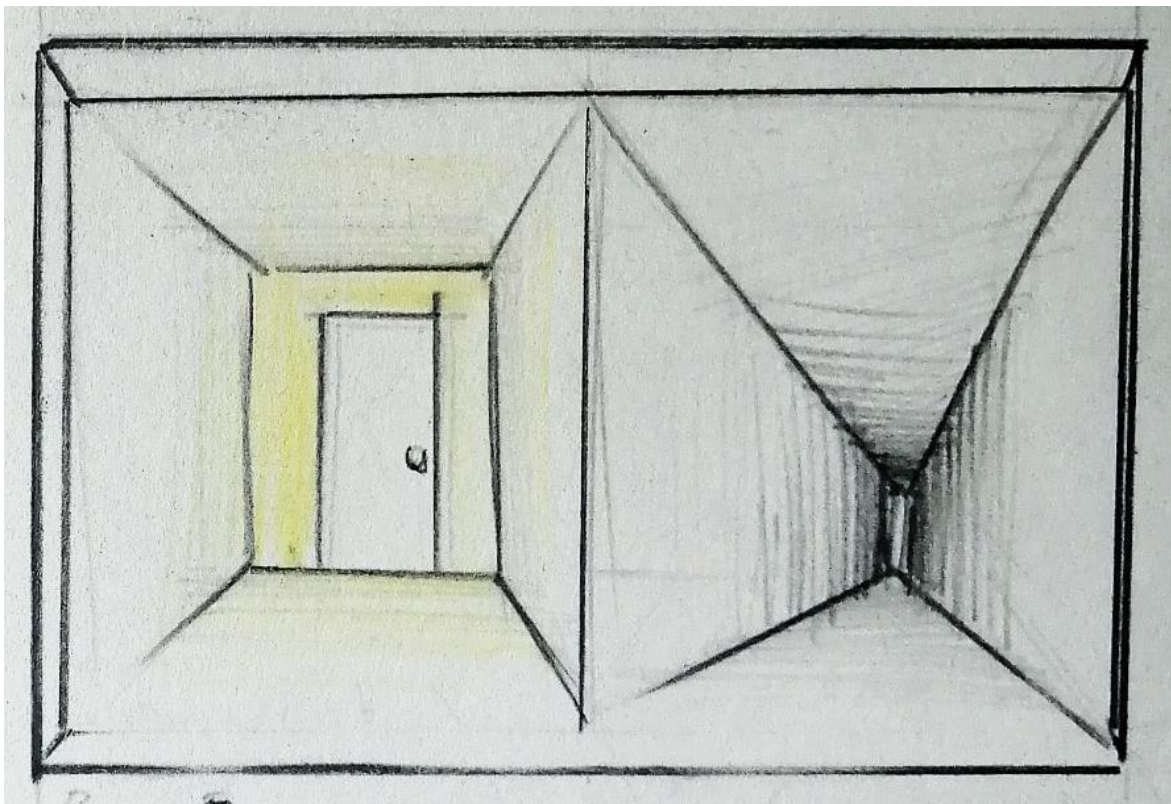
The fourth room is filled with falling paper that never seems to stop. The paper is covered with your old work and everything you’ve done to get up to this point. There’s no clear path through to the next room because of the dense wall of falling paper.



You are forced to walk into the falling paper to proceed and when you go further into the room, you lose your sense of direction. You feel lost with everything falling around you and you start to feel trapped because of the work. This is meant to represent when students ask themselves if this the direction that you want to take in their life and “Have

you become a slave to your work?" (Ho, 2019). With this negative thinking and worrying, "Your logical mind gets sucked up into the drama of the monkey. You start to think of "what if's" and "if only's" that your monkey mind creates to add even more drama and negative feelings." (Burkes, 2017). This room represents the beginning of the negative thoughts from the path you've chosen and starts making you hate and regret what you've done. I want you to question your choices and if this is what you really want.

The final room splits into two openings. The right opening narrows on itself and seems almost impossible for a human to squeeze through it, whereas the left side widens to a dimmer box that has a quiet and calming music playlist coming from it.



This room represents the final choice that all students go through before they drop out and the reasons behind it. The right side represents the future of you on the course, but because of the tight space (representing more pressure), you do not feel as if it's viable. There is also no light at the end as you don't know when things will ease off and become easier for you. It seems never ending. On the left side, the opening entices you as it is the easier choice that requires you not to feel all the emotions that you have been through thus far. The box at the end of the left tunnel is meant to represent you not being able to advance in this field any further (Nowhere you can possibly go after getting there and making your decision.) This opening feels like an escape, whereas it's trapping you from ever getting back into the industry. The music removes all the stress and feelings you've had throughout the exhibition, drawing you into something new that might be more successful and painless compared to what you've experienced.

Conclusion- Exclusion, helplessness and comparison are all emotions that this field of students are going through, even to this day, and after coming out of the exhibition, I hope people will start questioning if their friends and family are okay in university and if they have any pressure or weight on their shoulders. This will also expand into others looking out and helping them more, showing that they have got someone to go to in their time of need, instead of suffering and possibly dropping out.

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