

**Introduction:** My name is Bria Goeller. I am currently very far away from Atlanta doing something that I didn't think was possible, which is doing art design, creation,, my own freelance practice. I graduated in 2019. I was an IDS major with an emphasis on art and education, but it was with the focus of identity and empathy and using art for social change. And then I also had a creative writing major. So I'm an artist now, and I do artwork and design. And I also have like a, it's like a mix kind of contract work, sometimes just my own entrepreneur schedule.

**Question 1:** Can you tell us a little bit about your journey (and where your headspace was at) from your Emory graduation to your current role?

**Response:** So at the time I was graduating Emory, I definitely thought that I would be doing some kind of job during the day and then doing art at night. Like everyone always told me that I would. And I figured that something during the day would be something along like policy work or nonprofit work. And I knew it would be important and good and something that I enjoyed, but I didn't think that I could do exactly what I wanted to do, which is where I'm at now. I networked for about six months before graduating at Emory and I tried to get connected in San Francisco...it didn't work. I didn't have a job lined up. I've just moved out here in January. And I was like, *I'll figure it out*. I have a little bit of savings. I worked throughout college. And so I had my savings from college and was like, *I'll make it work*. I have a couple months and then worst case scenario, I'll just move back to Atlanta where it's cheaper. After like a month and a half, I scraped together a combination of multiple jobs that I was doing. I was like, *Okay, this is fine. I'm not losing money*.

And then COVID hit and then I lost three of the four jobs. I had to reevaluate. And I think if it weren't for COVID, I think it might have taken me a while to get here. But because of COVID, I was kind of forced to be like, *Okay, like, really, what is it that I want to do because I have nothing again*. And I didn't have many choices because I couldn't go out and search for jobs at that point. So I was at home doing the things I normally do, which is art and design and just posting about it and sharing it with people. And I've managed to somehow now, after however many months COVID it's been happening, I've struck a good balance where I was able to quit the other jobs. And now I'm just contracted as an independent contractor/freelancer doing design and artwork for like, I don't even know nine or ten different organizations. Some of which are in Atlanta, some of which are here, most of which I got through connections with people that I knew or met here. So I managed to get where I wanted to be in college. I didn't know exactly what that would look like because I didn't really have a structure of what other people had done to make it work, but plenty of people here are doing similar things that now I know that. And I think it took actually being at like zero options for me to create something new, which was good, but also I feel

lucky. And I don't know if very many people that are graduating right now would have that courage because I think it would have taken a lot more courage to, if I had options, to actively choose not to be employed somewhere.

**Question 2:** What were things that were unplanned/unexpected but meaningful to your growth?

**Response:** Definitely, I had a bunch of jobs that were weird and that I didn't want necessarily, including... I anticipate having to go back to coffee shops at some point like, I still don't have a really good, solid work schedule—enough that I'm like, *Oh, that'll never happen again*. So I always have that sort of in the back of my mind. But I would say, that's not even the most important part of it. I think taking just opportunities that were thrown my way was probably like the most unexpected and helpful thing because the biggest thing for me was letting go of some of the stricter boundaries that I had around my time and around what kind of clients I was accepting. I think unexpectedly, it did allow me to have speaking engagements and engage with these communities that otherwise might not have known that I was doing this kind of work.

**Question 3:** What does creativity/creative exploration/living a creative life mean to you?

**Response:** For me right now in my life, I think creativity is when I get commissions or when I get design jobs and stuff like that, I have the freedom to approach it in whatever way that I feel is best. So people give me the sort of freedom to be like, *You have, you know, the expertise. You make it look pretty. Or, I just want your art, you make it*. And so I think that is creativity to me, is being able to approach it in the way that you think is best. Because ultimately, like everyone thinks differently, and I think the way that we foster creativity is being able to have people be genuinely who they are in situations when sometimes, it's not in the mold. I think that the most important thing is having different voices and having different people. Creativity has been my biggest asset. I also love doing so many different things. I do film, I do design, I do art, I play four different instruments, I like being outside. So it's like, I wanted all of that to be part of my life. And I didn't like the idea of when I was at Emory, picking one major. Or like now, it's like picking one job. I love—as much as I hate job searching—I love finding new things to do. And finding new opportunities and new people to help. If you're doing something creative, every weird job can always influence whatever you're doing creatively. So I think nothing is ever really a waste unless it pulls on your mental health a little bit too much. That's the only stipulation maybe that I have.

**Question 4: What advice do you have for your younger self?**

**Response:** Always, I think people will question what you're doing if you can't articulate it well enough to explain it, which you'll never be able to. So I think that it's okay for people to not support you and for people to question it. And it doesn't mean that you're doing the wrong thing. Because sometimes that just means that you're not talking about it the right way. And I think, although it is really important to talk about what you're doing the right way, ultimately, that's not the most important thing. If you're doing something and no one understands it, but you're doing it well, and it's working for you, fine. So just being okay with people being like, Are you sure? Or, That's scary, you don't want to do something else? Or even, you know, at Emory, getting a bad grade on something or maybe not being able to do the thesis that you want because the department doesn't support it. Other people's lack of support doesn't necessitate your lack of effort or your lack of success in the future. The two semesters before I graduated, I taught a class where students could, through art, sort of articulate their identities, which was my way of being. What is integral to who you are? When you sit down and think about the question like, *Who am I and what do I need? And what do I want? And what do I want to do? What comes up that isn't questioned, that you would put down into something that represents you via art?* And Carlton helped me with that, too. He helped teach the class with me.

Honestly, the biggest—and I would have said this too when I was graduating—the biggest thing I would recommend for students who are about to graduate is carving out actual time to think about: What do I actually want my life to look like? Not what is available to me because that's totally different. But if there were no restrictions, monetarily, location wise, COVID wise, anything. Best case scenario, in a perfect world, what exactly would my life look like? And that could be as simple as waking up at 11am. Maybe I don't want to go to work at 8am or having a seven-hour workday or having three hours a day to do—even after my eight-, nine-, ten-hour shift—having three hours to do my art, or my music, or whatever. And so articulating that helps, then, with the boundaries that you set later on when you're applying. If you want to have your weekends free and a job is only on the weekends, don't apply to that job, even if you need a job, if it's going to stop you from doing what you ultimately want to do. It helps you sort of stick to the pathway. And that can change, obviously. But at least you have some kind of space in your head for what your imagination could bring you to. There is always a place for everything and there's a place for everyone. Your skills will fill a need if you're courageous enough to offer them.