Kara Peterman: I don't know why anyone expects a college freshman at 17, 18, 19 years old to have any idea of what they want to do with their lives, but I've truly felt like Swarthmore enabled us to become better people. To make mistakes. To change our minds. To explore. To be young people in a nurturing environment and it's that part that the life after Swarthmore you don't get too many of those communities.

K. Elizabeth Stevens: Yeah, it's a ... Yeah. It's so interesting because we do think about messing up and succeeding as kind of different things. Categorically different things, but I think here messing up can be part of succeeding which is an excellent segue into this impossible question. Which is so what ... The question is what does success mean to you? But that's such a big question. I guess what I would ask to just put a spin on it, is has your definition of success changed? When you were her in college, did you have an idea of what it would mean to be successful in life and has that shifted at all as you've been out of college and in the world?

Peterman: Yeah. Ultimately I believe, I've always believed this that a successful person is a happy person. Somebody who is content in their life. Somebody who is satisfied with their existence. It's an existential satisfaction. To me that is success. Whatever situation brought you to that existential satisfaction to me has worked out. Worked out well for you.

In college I can say that just as an anecdotal story here as an anecdote I did very badly in one of my math classes in my first year of Swarthmore. Things started going down hill right at the beginning of the semester, and because I was failing so badly I sort of thought it was a lost cause and gave up as a consequence. It's very easy to give up when you're doing badly, and the whole semester was just a constant deflation where I would put in the effort or put in some effort. Lets be honest, not all the effort.

I would put in some effort and get a very low grade and I finished with a D in the class and it's on my transcript for all the world to see. That was a D in linear algebra, not even a very advanced math class.

Stevens: Oh no.

Peterman: Yeah, at the time that was a very obvious failure. In hindsight it wasn't a failure because I got a D in the class. It was a failure because I gave up. So when I think about what success means now, I consider something successful when I come away better because of it. A lecture or a class or even in grad school if I came away with more knowledge, if my knowledge was improved. If I came away a better person. If I came away with a wider worldview then I considered it a success.

The grade is a much more arbitrary for me after that point. Even now real life doesn't give you too many grades, but what other people think of how much you learned is inconsequential to what you actually learned. It's the same with the basic definition of happiness.

If you are not making very much money. Or if you are living in a not very nice apartment or something, but you're happy about it then it doesn't matter what the person next door thinks. It doesn't matter at all. If you're content with how you're contributing to the world and how you're living your life then that's the ultimate definition of success, I think.