

As you read the transcript below, answer the following questions:

- What are the main reasons Demetrius stopped going to class?
- What would you have done differently?
- Who could Demetrius have asked for support?

Transcript from *This American Life* episode 552, Chapter 2

Zoe Chace: Demetrius is always about to be a star. From the back, Demetrius is a grown man—tall and broad-shouldered in a leather coat. From the front, he's still a teenager—round, freckled baby face, 18 years old. His plan is to get his associates, transfer to a four-year school, major in video game design, and then become one of the best video game designers the world has ever seen.

The story about the once is about to spill out. And this story, it tells you a lot about why the graduation rate at community colleges is one in three, how even someone as confident as Demetrius could become a dropout instead of the one who makes it.

Because when I met Demetrius, I did not know this was actually his second freshman year, his second time around as a freshman in college.

The first time he went to college, it wasn't in the South Bronx. In fact, it couldn't feel more different at Finger Lakes Community College. Woods, wineries, lakes, five hours north of New York City. His mom dropped him off.

Demetrius Wilson: It was somber, but at the same time it was exciting. Like, I'm alone. And then it was like, I'm alone!

My roommate hadn't gotten there yet. I was like, this is pretty awesome. I stepped outside as if to test it. Like, open the door, looked around. And I was like, I can just go, just go anywhere. Like, this is good. Then school started. And I was like, Okay. School's the main focus. I'm going to make sure I do it.

And at first, I was. But then, I started going to parties when I should be studying or doing homework, and started hanging out late. Xbox One and PS4 came out during that stretch.

Zoe Chace: But the big difference between college and high school—nobody is there to make you go to class. Nobody is collecting your homework. Nobody's making sure you're keeping up with the reading.

Demetrius Wilson: On occasion, I would just cut class and not go.

Zoe Chace: He says nobody seemed to notice. He got letters from the school. He ignored them. His grades were dropping. And then late into the semester, a relative died that he was close to, and he had to go back to the city for the funeral. He came back to campus but never went back to class. He felt terrible, totally depressed.

Demetrius Wilson: There would be times where I would just be in my room. I would just sit in there and cry. And at the same time, it made me feel worse because I knew I was failing. I knew I screwed up in my first semester.

Zoe Chace: Demetrius let everything slide. The checks he was getting from the government to cover his housing, he spent those. He only paid the rent once. He says he was confused about when he was supposed to pay what. By the end of the semester, there was nothing left. He owed a couple thousand dollars.

He saw his family for Christmas break. He could've confessed everything. He could have gotten help. But he didn't do any of that.

Demetrius Wilson: Obviously, I lied and said I did well in school and never brought up the debt.

Zoe Chace: And after Christmas vacation, that's when he got into some real magical thinking. He kicked up his deception to a whole new level. He was like, the circumstances of my life are on a need-to-know basis, and nobody needs to know. He thought he could turn things around all by himself and secretly handled this entire episode.

Here was his plan—get a full-time job at Taco Bell, earn enough money to pay back the money he owed for his housing, never tell anyone what happened, and quietly re-enroll next semester.

Demetrius Wilson: Honestly, I never even registered for classes. I basically started living on the run. I was hiding out in my best friend's room immediately next door. I felt like this is my mistake. It was my problem. I messed up, so I need to handle it on my own.