Since arriving at college, I have gradually slipped in
to a daily routine that makes me as grumpy as Larry David in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. Every morning, after bargaining with my alarm for as long as possible, I read the news and aimlessly rant about it to my friends—before heading to class, where I vent about it some more. I’ve been told that I’m not the best in the morning (the actual words my roommate used were “terrifying” and “mean”), and this probably has as much to do with the news as it does with the fact that I firmly believe that “morning” is anytime before 1:00 PM.
I chose to major in Political Science in part because of my fascination with the current political climate. It’s like a bad movie that I can’t stop watching; one that leaves me endlessly frustrated because that dumb character in the horror movie keeps going into the basement, or messing with the dead dude. It’s one of those movies where you’re yelling at the TV—“Danny just leave room 237 alone,” or “Jack get on the raft you idiot”—but you have no impact. When it comes to politics, at some point yelling should make a difference. You’re yelling at real world people, who should theoretically care about your opinion regarding the course of the country. Yet today, everyone’s yelling and everything’s happening so fast that there seems to be no way to add your voice to the noise, and worse, no way that it would stand out enough if you did. This is where I end up overwhelmed, sitting in the dining hall, bothering my friends with hypothetical responses to President Trump’s latest tweets.

When I came to college, I hoped to find my peers as passionate about politics as I am. I romanticized the scene of student activism in the 60s, looking for activism that takes place in the street. In high school, I participated in a walkout over the Michael Brown shooting, and later one addressing sexual harassment and assault in our community, and I expected to find the same activity in college. The lack of rallies or sit-in protests at UMass may be because students do not know how to incite that kind of protest (I wrote an editorial about UMass’s rules restricting protests), or that they don’t see a reason to.

Regardless, I was making the mistake of thinking that one form of activism is better than another. On campus we have every day protests and behind the scenes activism which are equally important and impactful to rallies. Our student body is not at all apathetic to politics or social justice. A great number of us hold strong opinions on what we see everyday in the news—the International Relations Club held a meeting about the Rohingya Crisis, the UMass Food Recovery Network donates leftover dining food to a homeless shelter, and MASSPirg is always doing something great. When this activism happens at UMass, it doesn’t get enough attention to attract a visible mass of students—it’s not in your face. As a result, I don’t feel like I’m doing my share of the work on a daily basis.

It’s hard taking a back seat when there’s so many issues that hit home. I find myself looking at the news and thinking, “someone else is fighting this, this isn’t my problem.” Too often students like me do this—we think that we have to wait until we graduate to make a difference regarding topics that we’re passionate about. However, most of us will never again be in a community so open to engagement. One obstacle to being proactive is how overwhelming the amount of topics to protest becomes. Each day something new appears in the news that deserves attention, but gets neglected because we’re all still hung up on whatever event dominated headlines from the day before. I don’t know how to begin to make a difference when everytime I zero in on a troublesome event, another one occurs.

Another one of the reasons I found myself getting so bogged down, was I focused on the actions that people weren’t taking, instead of the positive steps forward that are happening all the time. The more you look for inspiration online, or on college websites, the easier that it is to find students who are incredibly passionate, motivated and molding their world. However, walking around campus, there’s no way to know it, and no clear way to support their endeavors, unless you seek to add to it on your own.

My blog will be about the challenge of trying to make a difference in the world while on a college campus, and my attempts to do so. I’ll talk about trying to navigate both the news and my role in it. Each week I’ll post about someone making positive grassroots change, and talk about actions that students can take on campus—such as shop ethically or go vegan a couple days a week. I hope that this blog will be a comfort for anyone reading it.
who is similarly overwhelmed, as the more that I look into things students are doing around
the world, the more encouraged and uplifted I felt about the current state of our country
and planet. I also want anyone reading to ask me questions, or challenge arguments I make
—I'm always open to discussion about my views.

A couple noteworthy links:

- A professor at UMass in the Sociology Department made the timeline: “Radical
  Movements on Umass Campus”
- Looking at “USA Today College”’s search results for “Student Activism” shows you
  what students on campuses have been up to in past years
- Also on “USA Today College” is the article “Meet 5 Young Women who are Changing
  the World,” which was posted in 2014 but is still incredibly inspirational today
- CNN Heroes always restores my faith in humanity

Source URL (retrieved on 09/29/2018 - 11:52am):
https://www.honors.umass.edu/blog/chealy/making-difference-college-campus