Learning is an ongoing, life process. One will encounter various experiences that enable him or her to grow and develop as an individual. When I entered college last fall, I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do with my life. Despite the uncertainty, I plunged myself into my new, collegiate atmosphere and embraced life with an open mind. Yet, my freshman year did not pass without adversity. Reflecting upon my first year in the College of ACES, I learned three things that allowed me to view life differently. First, I cannot always get what I want. Second, discouragement is natural. And third, relaxation is necessary.

“You can’t always get what you want … but if you try sometimes, you’ll find, you get what you need.” These lyrics are part of the chorus to the song “You Can’t Always Get What You Want,” first released by the Rolling Stones in 1969. From then till now, the meaning of those exact words has not changed. Whenever I listen to this song, I am reminded of how I need to be content with my life. Growing up, I felt the need to achieve high standards – whether they were my parents’ or my own. However, I soon discovered that “good grades” were difficult to obtain as classes became increasingly stressful. With great rebuke and guidance from my peers and other advisers, I realized that I was not being realistic with myself. In a sense, I expected college work to come easily and without worry as it did in high school, but I was disappointed at myself for performing academically at a sub-par level. Gradually, my attitude changed as I tried to be more content. When I got that “A” I worked for, I felt good. When I got the “B” on the exam I studied strenuously for, I still felt at ease. I was satisfied with my academic performance because I knew that as long as I put forth my best effort, everything else would take care of itself.
Aside from being more content with my studies, I also learned that discouragement was natural. Every time I received a dissatisfying grade, I felt inadequate. To make matters worse, that feeling of inadequacy fueled my knack for focusing on the “bad” instead of looking ahead and trying harder the next time. Because of this pessimism, I would withdraw from socializing with my friends – the very people who tried to cheer me up. Eventually, I snapped out of my moody, negative behavior. Each day was one to start anew, and I needed to remind myself of this every day. I knew that discouragement was truly inevitable, but it was my response to the feeling that allowed me to press on without regrets. Failures will happen, but they will be endured in order to achieve success. Honestly, I continue to struggle with this; but with perseverance and a thankful heart, I know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Every time I hear about an actor or actress being admitted into the hospital due to exhaustion, I can literally imagine myself in that position. It might not be something to be proud of, but if I never give myself time to relax after intense studying, I might as well call 9-1-1 right now. To me, sanity is impossible without some kind of recuperating activity. Last fall, I went to the gym almost every day and ran two miles to burn off a lot of stress. Comparatively, I did not work out as much second semester. My work load increased, I went to the gym less, I relaxed less, and I had a considerably higher level of stress. Working out was one way for me to relax. Then again, there were days where boredom was the best way for me to recover from a difficult week. If I pushed myself to study for hours – without ceasing – I was setting myself up for disaster. Relaxation was not only a benefit for my mental and physical well-being, but it let me remain calm and peaceful even in a time of supposed calamity.

Whenever someone asks me about my freshman year in college, I tend to give the simple, generic answers of “It was good” or “I liked it.” Yet, deep down, I know I learned a lot – and not just from my classes. Contentment issues, discouragement, and the need for relaxation were the most valuable things that I learned as a freshman in the College of ACES. Having gone through my first year of college with plenty of ups and downs and trials and errors, I leave no regrets. Truly, learning is a life-long process. Sometimes, the best part about overcoming adversity and gaining new experiences is being able to pass on the wisdom and empathize with others.