I was so excited to move in and see the campus. Shopping for groceries and last-minute essentials, laughing with my family as we ate lunch together. But, the moment they left my entire world switched. I sat down and all my excitement turned into fear. Even though I just filled my new room with all new things the room felt very cold and empty. My roommate's bed still had the plastic on. Her side of the room was even colder. I realized everything around me was unfamiliar. The room, people, and the environment itself. I was all by myself. I realized that now I must start my own life. College symbolizes independence and growth. But I was just beginning to understand what that had truly meant.

Before college, my life was busy, but never as busy as it is now. Though in high school my days were full they were predictable. I had full days of class, eight in the morning to three in the afternoon. I was never really on top of my schoolwork in high school. I did enough to get by. In high school I was social. I knew everyone, everyone knew me, but I only had a small group of friends. I hung out with the same three or four people everyday. I only went to the same events and activities. My schedule rarely changed.

I have always loved dance. I was on the poms team and the flag team, practicing after school most days. A lot of the time, I went straight to work after practice and would not get home until eleven at night. On the weekends, I spent time with my family and friends. Growing up, I was taught that family was very important, and that value has always stayed with me. I especially love spending time with my sister; she is my best friend. We shared a room for most of our lives, and I could never have imagined living without her. As a big sister leaving my baby all alone was really hard.

Going to college completely changed my life. Suddenly, I was on my own. I had to learn how to be my own person. A woman and not a girl that lived with her mom. Everything was different. I now live in a small room, with an even smaller fridge, which is very inconvenient because I love to snack. I no longer have my own space, and I live with a complete stranger. At home I had my own room. I have always been the type of person that likes being alone. Alone time everyday is very essential to me. Being in tune with

myself is one of my top priorities. So going from being alone to having a roommate was an adjustment because every-time I go to my room someone is there. Also, having a roommate that is not involved is tricky as well because you have no alone time unless you all's class schedules are completely different. My schedule changes every day. Some days I have one class, and other days I have four. I also have responsibilities outside of class, like labs and required events. I still dance, I joined the Final Warning Dance Team, which remains an important part of my life. I have met a lot of new people.

The hardest part of adjusting to college was learning how to balance and manage everything. During my first semester, school was not my priority. Having fun was my priority. I would be at practice late into the night and be too tired to go to class the next morning. The college dance team is nothing like high school. I actually have to make an effort or I will not perform. I slept in, spent time with friends, and then went right back to practice. This became my daily cycle. I tried to do my homework, but when I was not attending class, I did not understand the material. I was too afraid to talk to my professors, go to tutoring, or use the academic services NIU provides. I lacked motivation and ambition when it came to school. I was not depressed, I was genuinely overwhelmed with dance and trying to figure out who I was.

I had to take a step back and really think deeply. Who am I, and what is my purpose? How do I want to be viewed in the world? What is my reason to keep going and striving? That reflection started with doing better in school. School aligns with my purpose because God created me to do remarkable things. I feel as if I was created to make a change even if it is not in the world. I could change generational curses within my family. I can change the way my family looks at things and give my family knowledge about things they do not know about. I am the oldest daughter of a single mother. I am a first-generation college student. I will make my family proud and get my education. I will be the first in my family to get a bachelor's and master's degree. It is important that I live the life my ancestors dreamed of. Being a black educated young woman is important to me. My whole life I thought school was a scam. I realized that it is more than just a scam. I learn things everyday. Wether it is educational or an emotional intelligent situation. Coming back from winter break, I was in a completely different headspace. I have never been

great with schoolwork, but now I am learning how to manage it. Every Sunday, I make a list of all my assignments for the week and check them off as I complete them. I even break my work down into daily to-do lists. Since I tend to forget assignments posted on Blackboard, this system helps keep me organized. I am now used to having a roommate and honestly, it's not that bad. My roommate and I have created a bond. A girlhood that I will never forget. Having a roommate has taught me that being alone all the time is not always the best thing. Meeting new people and creating bonds is important. You learn how to be cooperative and communicate. I also learned that sometimes people you think you would never be friends with you might have more in common with.

I learned that college takes effort and commitment. You cannot do just enough to get by, you have to work hard. You must engage, complete your work, and most importantly, attend class. It took failing my classes for me to realize how serious school truly is. That failure taught me that learning and gaining knowledge should matter to me. The material I am learning now will help me in the long run. College feels like a period of growth. What was once unfamiliar has become my life as a young adult. My fear has turned into motivation, and my failure has turned into determination. My goal is to be educated and hold myself accountable. Adapting to college life has been the most important experience of my life, and it continues to shape who I am becoming.