

YEAR IN REVIEW

FALL 2023, First Semester at University of Cincinnati

21 Aug' 23 – 10 Dec' 23

Horizontal Exposure and Vertical Expertise

Memories of the 'firsts' are always special, and they enjoy a very special place in all our hearts. Trip to The Queen City, Cincinnati on 13th August was my 'first' solo experience away home. In many ways, Cincinnati was a home away from home for me. I believe that relocating 8000 miles for my further education at University of Cincinnati opened doors to illustrious career and shaped my personality significantly. This university has given me a series of 'firsts', each aimed at growth and fulfilling my dreams.

“Transition is never easy, but without transition there is no evolution. There is no growth within your comfort zone. Unless you are willing to challenge yourself beyond your comfort zones, you cannot become what you can become. Sometimes, you need to give up to go up.” (Excerpt From, 'Most and More' by Mahatria Ra)

Noticing the Changes & Differences, 'The Firsts'

American Units

The American units (pound, foot, fahrenheit, gallon) are very different from the international system used in India. When I placed an order for three pounds of apples, I felt like I was on a game called "Guess That Weight!" Was 3 pounds the right amount? Was I about to buy enough apples to feed a small village or just myself for a day? That natural estimation I had using SI units (kilogram, meter, liter) was completely lost. Adding to this confusion, to get a clear idea of the prices, I had to multiply by the currency conversion factor to understand if the item had a decent price and was worth buying. This double whammy of unfamiliar units and prices made everyday tasks feel like solving complex equations.

Academic Pattern

Despite my excitement about academic freedom and the liberty that drew me to the USA's education system, choosing classes and planning my own schedule was unfamiliar territory. With this freedom came great responsibility, as I was solely accountable for my decisions. Different classes meant different classrooms, and I had to walk to reach these places. In India, students stay in the same classroom while the teachers come and go, convenient for students, right? Well, let's just say, it's a stationary journey for students and a marathon for the teachers! Additionally, I was transferring 43 college-level credits which waived all the general engineering subjects and got me enrolled in higher-level rigorous classes. Back in India, I was used to 6 to 7 hours of class time, followed by self-study, so I thought my schedule—with only 3 hours of classes daily—would be a piece of cake. However, this underestimation came at a great cost to my academics.

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With all the new tasks (travel time, food planning, recreational activities, and new course work) piling up, I remember how I missed and miserably scored on the first few assignments. The online platform Canvas had all the course details laid out, but I never took the effort to explore it until a friend mentioned its features. Never underestimate academics, no matter how easy it might seem at first glance.

Independence and Building Connections

Starting from the fundamentals and building my own comfort zone at Morgens Hall, my dorm, was challenging. I was all alone, with no one to advise me or even make me realize something was wrong. Learning to be independent, I had to build my own identity and establish connections at the university, proving my worth in a completely new environment. This experience taught me the importance of presenting and marketing myself, which is crucial here. I had all the knowledge and skills needed to seize opportunities, but convincing the interviewer was just as important as having the skills.

Struggle, Suffering, Challenges, Testing Periods, Tough Times

When I believe that 'I can do it' and really believe in it, then the 'how to do it' automatically unfolds. Believing something can be done sets the mind in motion to find a way to do it. I am an opportunist when it comes to my thinking, thus adapting to new environments and accepting scenarios is not a tough job. When things aren't as I wish them to be, I think back on all the exams, interviews, and hard work I have put in to reach where I am now. Remembering how far I have come reminds me of the hurdles I have overcome and the accomplishments I have achieved. There were times when even one misstep could have changed everything for me. Following the early weeks, I was getting along with all the students and performing well, or I as would say, 'my best possible'. I had made good connections with my professors, and they believed in me. By scheduling regular meetings with my advisors, I've created a structured opportunity for them to monitor my progress and provide me with advice on steps I could take to ensure an even better and smoother transition. This proactive approach allows me to receive timely guidance and make informed decisions throughout the transition process.

Living there, slowly and steadily, I understood the general prices, the way people communicate and how well they appreciate diversity. Ensuring my tomorrow is different from yesterday, I aim to try new things and grow every single day by trying new sports, adventures and applying to all the opportunities. Think of it this way, every day I was spending \$230 or 19,000 rupees to be in USA or at UC specifically, why waste time and spoil any moment? Being determined to be financially independent and aware of the fees, you are fighting for every single dollar. Be like you own the place and always understand that you are very welcome in the university. All the faculty, professors and advisors are there to make your experience better and so that you can perform and excel at what you enjoy.

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Building Bridges of Friendships

Living on campus really helped me meet and build my little community. All the time spent in dining halls, the recreation center is something I will never forget. It's not about the food or the infrastructure; it's about the place where all the students meet and interact for hours. You wait for 10 minutes, and then another friend pops up; the chain is never-ending. I can't imagine what would have happened if the dining center operated 24x7. Many times, the dining staff reminded us that the dining hall was closing, and we should stop talking and clean up. Eating was only for 10 to 15 minutes max; the rest was generally teasing, planning, relaxing, or talking about our day.

Advice to Past-Self for Present and Future Success

Bad Team Dynamics

I couldn't understand the power of collaboration. ENED is a bit irritating when it comes to robot-making. I couldn't figure out what steps to take when the team was not serious or committed to the project. Initially, I did all the work that was supposed to be split among the team members. Then, I sought help from friends who had different teams, leading to a variety of ideas. We made a little team of our own to function and excel at the project. This collaborative effort saved me from a near disaster. Asking for help and learning from it is not wrong. It only exposes you to healthy competition and upskills you in the process.

Being Relaxed on Grades

There is no autopilot in college-level academics. If you chill, relax, and lose attention, all previous efforts go down the drain. Just because of a single speech I messed up, I couldn't get the perfect GPA and landed at 3.93.

Reflecting back

I finished my first semester, 'Fall 2023' on a very good note, ready to take on new opportunities and challenging myself in different ways. I had very well reached my comfort zone and enjoyed my first semester there at UC. Though enjoyment could mean different things, for me it was to feel I am home and not in a foreign country. I pledge, "I will rub shoulders with people who are 'abundant minded'. I will use every brick of mistake committed only as another stepping-stone to build my fortress. After all, I am on this planet to build my castle, not my grave."