

“A Journey of Academic Resilience”

Winston Churchill once said, “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” My academic journey in the USA reflects this great quotation. As an international student, my academic journey was defined by two very different moments. In one moment, I was sitting outside with my luggage, uncertain about where I would spend the night without secured housing. After only a few months, I presented my research in front of an academic audience at the International Graduate Student Conference in Hawai’i. These two experiences, one filled with uncertainty and the other with possibility, capture the transformative journey that has shaped my academic experience. The "unique" reality is the terrifyingly thin line between achievement and vulnerability, where we are expected to reach for the stars while our feet are struggling to find solid ground.

I still remember my first class at GVSU, where I was hesitant to talk and raise my hand, even rehearsing every line in my head from my native language to English before speaking in front of anyone. I was worried about my accent, my grammar, and whether my ideas would come across clearly. Coming from Bangladesh to study in a new academic environment meant learning how to communicate, think critically, and participate in an entirely different educational culture. Initially, I was afraid to participate in the discussion, but gradually, I have noticed that my previous work experience as an apprentice lawyer and my perspective on the global south have added an extra lens to the discussion.

The GVSU community has opened my eyes to mentorship that extends beyond the classroom. Other than helping with the course material and assignments, when I finally reached out to my professor about my housing situation and informed him that I was outside for the whole night, the response was a symphony of support. My professor, the Dean of Students Office, the International Office, and the Housing team arranged emergency housing for me and helped me to find permanent accommodation afterwards. They just did not help me survive, but to thrive.

I consider all of these incidents as part of my academic journey. These experiences have allowed me to learn to build resilience, be independent and open doors to new opportunities and personal growth. Academically, they have helped me to research important social issues. I have worked on projects examining the academic and cultural transitions of international students and exploring the connections between intimate partner violence and risky behaviours among adolescents. Through these experiences, I developed stronger research, analytical, and writing skills.

To those following my footsteps, I would say, no one tells you your greatest academic lesson might happen at 2:00 AM on a street corner. So expect the unexpected, but trust the community. Expect a journey that tests your resilience in ways you cannot predict. While the academic opportunities here are boundless, the transition can be challenging. You will have moments of "arrival" that feel like magic and moments of "survival" that feel like a marathon. You will find that the "American Dream" is sometimes heavy to carry alone. My advice is to leave the "go alone" mentality. Do not mistake silence for strength. The moment you speak up, you will find that this campus is filled with people who are ready to help you to carry the weight.

Looking back, it is incredible to think about that journey, from being on the verge of being homeless to the person who used to be hesitant to talk in front of others to presenting research at an international conference. I carry the memories of that night with me to remind myself that failure is not permanent if we decide not to quit. All these experiences have shaped the person I have become today.

