My Valiant Journey

“Discovery” is a word that may be scary for some people because of the danger of adventuring a new culture and adapting to it. However my case is a bit different. I lived in America when I was two through eight years old but I never got the opportunity to attend an American school, and it was my dream ever since I entered an international school. From that point on, I was exposed to American dramas, news, and magazines which made me fantasized about this country called “America”; where there is a diversity of people, freedom of speech, and respect of each in other’s opinion. Yet, there were still a lot of shocking moments that I was not prepared for.

The biggest difference between attending an American college and a Korean college is probably the variety of courses. During my years in Korea, I thought an industrial designer only designed household furniture. I was wrong. It wasn’t until I attended this school and I discovered that industrial designers branched out into car designers, furniture designers, utensil designers, etc. I got so excited, because when I first arrived at this school, I thought I was going to become a furniture designer. However after meeting up with many people, I decided to become an electronic designer. All thanks to my design teacher, whom inspired me to use a variety of materials such as metal sheets and wood planks which I never had a chance to use back in Korea. As a result, I loved using materials such as metals and wood which are really good when modeling prototype products. Also, the screen tablet in the art department computer lab made me fall in love with computer programs such as “Photoshop” and “Illustrator” which are great tools
to use as an industrial designer. With so many materials provided and great opportunities, I was able to specify my major and I don’t think I would have expected such outcome before I attended this school.

I found something very special about me when I came to this school. “Courage” is a very dangerous word in South Korea since they follow the majority’s opinion or the cultural norms. If I was to make a different statement, people will look down at me and thought it was funny because I was different from other people. This is probably why I was very conservative and scared to talk about my thoughts and share my feelings because it was against the cultural norms. However, America was different. It didn’t take me too long to find my friends gathering around me and listening to what I had to say and respecting my opinions. This was the first time I ever felt respected and this gave me courage. Before I came to this school, I would always choke up whenever I had a presentation but now with a few practice rounds, I can blow through presentations which I would have never expected to happen. As an industrial designer, “talking” is a very important factor and it was always a huge problem for me because I don’t think I could’ve convinced a single client with my conservative shy attitude. Yet, thanks to this school, I think I now have a chance when I’m finished with my four years of courses in this school.

If I was granted a chance to go back to my first day at this school, the results may have been even better than what I have right now. If I were to go back to my first day at school, I’ll try to make as many friends as possible without caring about their races or genders and try to attend as many after class meetings as I can find. I discovered that becoming social is the most important aspect when attending college since it’s all by yourself against the world and without
friends or professors to help out, it is hard to survive. Also while I’m making new friends, I’ll develop my social skills by being open minded. Improving my courage is one thing, but accepting different cultures is a challenge all international students face. For an example, looking at each other’s eyes while talking is a show of respect in American culture and as from a speaker’s perspective, they feel respected and do the same for the other. As a student of the University of Illinois, I relish the culture, courage, and open materials the school has taught me to pursue my dreams.