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Multimedia Writing

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Visual Essay Reflection: <https://new.express.adobe.com/webpage/yzQIKhtPjid0E>

Everyone seems to know me for different reasons: some as the person who plays piano at LaFortune, others as the Duncan Hall DJ, and even as the guy who blasts music while skateboarding around campus. But the label that has stuck the most is the one I have become the least proud of: the guy who doesn't sleep.

I have several friends who complete their work comfortably before 9 PM and find building a steady routine to be easy. In complete honesty, I tell myself that it is because I am taking twenty credit hours or because engineering is demanding, but in reality, I struggle to work productively during the day and keep myself in a constant state of survival of recovering from previous nights. Yet, as campus slows down at night, my workflow shifts. I "lock in". There is a destructively motivating yet peaceful energy every time I sit down to work past sunset. This is where it felt natural to focus *Running on Ramen* on the routines that have quietly defined my time on campus.

As much as I tried to capture the energy-driven parts of my nighttime cycle, it was not my intention to promote this lifestyle at all. Rather, I wanted to deliver the stark reality of finding motivation in otherwise unimportant aspects of life that one learns to value over time. There is almost an intrinsic idealization of glorifying burnout as success within Notre Dame and other

T20 schools. Unfortunately, I have fallen into that mindset myself, leaving little time for rest or reflection. An understated danger in sustaining this cycle is apparent, not because the act of irregular sleep patterns is some terrible thing, but because the mental tolls that come with it are often overlooked. One of my biggest inspirations in the images I captured involved a discussion I had with my Moreau class. In one of our readings, we were presented with a depressing statistic of suicides from students at highly academic schools due to overbearing workloads. Within almost every case we discussed, there was a repeating idea of people who chose to hide their mental turmoil with the worry of what others would think of them. Because of this, I chose to emphasize the idea of studying with others within my essay. Mental burnout from university coursework has been somewhat of a global pandemic in recent decades and has even surfaced with severe incidents occurring even within my hall at Notre Dame. The reality is that everyone, despite how extroverted or connected one may seem, ultimately bears an isolating sense of responsibility with coursework that extends to one's mental well-being.

Similarly, I wanted my essay to hint at the quiet truth that no one can fully see what others are going through, especially when outside factors make things even heavier. A few weeks ago, I found myself in a similar position, dealing with problems back home while also maintaining a remote job that consumed any possibility of rest or free time. Quitting that job was one of the best decisions I have made for myself. With this, though I focused my essay reflecting on the academic side of Notre Dame, I hope that my audience can connect to the visuals I presented. In turn, one may visualize memories of outside factors playing a pertinent role in balancing a sustainable cycle, from social life to figuring out how to quickly adapt to a college environment.

Apart from learning to translate my emotions into words, the process of selecting images proved to be far more complex than I anticipated. There were several photos I had originally taken with an actual camera that, while higher in quality and perhaps more fitting for a news article, did not accurately convey my real experiences. My finalized photos were all taken in the moment, with unedited and often spontaneous perceptions that allowed my essay to be portrayed in more of a relatable sense. In emphasizing realism, I also explored the idea of finding excitement in small changes of routine. One important aspect of building a consistent rhythm for me has been finding short-term motivation. While the task of working on college-level curriculum is not always portrayed as the most exciting pursuit, I chose to capture small variations that catalyzed my energy in an otherwise mundane setting, from treating myself to Starbucks to spending time with others. In doing so, I have learned to enjoy the challenge of keeping up with an academic workload, and my college environment seems more rewarding as a result.

Despite this, one could argue that I failed in providing a holistic perspective of what a steady cycle should look like. While I was exploring the idea of finding positivity in living for the “late-night grind”, I was also overlooking a stagnant truth I had almost purposefully left out: the physical toll behind everything I had described. This lifestyle is almost unrealistic. Throughout the essay, I explored the aspect of cultivating a balance between academics and finding happiness, yet I implicitly ignored the overlooked effects of which it had on my health. For this same reason, the act of both self-reflection and social connections is crucial to not slipping into a story of burnout hidden behind success. It is unreasonable to argue a particular workflow or lifestyle as perfect, and even upon finding a rhythm that works, routine is bound to change. To an extent, I was glorifying my habits, often convincing others to stay up late with me.

Yet, for the same implied reason that I decided to end the essay with a picture of my bloodshot eyes after a long night, I would not recommend following my footsteps. Rather, this project ultimately became less about glorifying endurance and more about understanding balance: building a philosophy that works for you and learning to make the most out of a constantly shifting rhythm between ambition, rest, and personal reflection.