**Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?**

I’d ask myself, “Why do I feel disappointed when I like being alone?”

Going to college, I knew opening up to people would be one of my biggest challenges. I enjoy the idea of being alone in my dorm room; it makes me feel safe. However, I was unaware that I’d impeded myself from any opportunities of developing networks with people. I later learned that the sense of belonging through having a community of friends is very important, yet I didn’t have any of that.

I wanted to change, but I knew that I had to do it right or else I’d just gravitate back towards my dorm room. So, I joined intramural soccer figuring that it was a good idea to socialize with people of similar interests. Yet, I wasn’t able to make meaningful friendships.

As I analyzed my “friend-making” approach, I realized that, perhaps, I lack genuinity: I’d laugh too hard at someone’s jokes or I’d beat myself if someone had ignored me even though I hadn’t been making eye contact. As much as I didn’t want to admit, my approach could ‘ve been better. I also reflected on whether I’ve opened up with them or been too shy to express my true self. It’s more likely the former, so I knew I had to try again. This time differently.

Seeking opportunities on projects related to environmental sustainability, I joined an NGO. Determined to not repeat the same mistake, I interacted with them more genuinely: I didn’t laugh too hard at someone's jokes, I made fewer excuses about wanting to “be alone” and would hang out with them after our meetings. These small changes that I made have finally made me feel like my “loner” tendencies gradually found its closure.

I’m thankful to my half-baked connections with the intramural soccer people. I’m also equally thankful to my new connections in the NGO. It’s enabled me to re-think my approach in building a genuine relationship with people. As I became less of a loner, I realized that building connections is a two way street. Once both sides open up and are comfortable enough to reveal their true self, authentic and long-lasting relationships happen.