Looking back at this semester, it has been the most stressful in my academic career. With that being said, it is important to realize as an individual that you can learn from the most stressful times by getting to know yourself better, stress management, and enjoying simple things. Learning to manage my stress and academics has been a constant struggle but I have learned how strong of a person I am. I have been repeatedly pulled in every direction imaginable by my health complications, academics, work, and relationships that I have learned that I am only one person and can only do so much. This learning is important because it is something that I can use throughout my life in a plethora of career and personal fields. This learning applies to everything. Knowing how to handle stress is one of the best skills someone can learn because it allows them to be level headed and not stress insignificant small mistakes that others would let consume their thought process.

One of the most significant challenges that I have dealt with this semester is in my working career. I have had to work with a multitude of different personalities and demands from peers. Handling stress within my work environment is an essential skill to handle and I am truly proud of myself for the progress I have made. Initial opinions about coworkers can change how people interact with one another. In an environment where I work with so many different types of people from different backgrounds, I have learned that truly each member of my team has a wonderful skill they can contribute. These small contributions of different skills have made the work environment a more stable and diverse place that is welcoming to all. This experience has changed how I see myself today, compared to the beginning of the year, by challenging me to let go of my initial judgements of people and allow my relationships and interactions with others to define how they work with me and their value as a person, instead of first judgements. This has allowed me to see myself as a more accepting and open person who is truly willing to learn from anyone.

If I could change anything about this semester it would have been the classes I took and how much pressure I put on myself to do well in those classes. I am a biology major so my academics are always stressful, but I allowed myself to fall through the cracks in some classes because I simply could not handle the stress and over load of course work like I initially thought possible. I would change this because there are already additional stressors in my life and I should not have put myself in a situation where I was set up to not do well mentally and academically.

Patterns I have noticed about my choices are that I often procrastinate when it comes to assignments, never so bad that I cannot handle my work load though. In addition, I love to fix things. I enjoy problem solving so I often find myself choosing the biggest tasks to take on to fix them. Always choosing the biggest problems to solve does not always leave room for self-improvement, something we all need a little of occasionally. Not leaving time for little enjoyments in life is a bad habit because I often over indulge in my education and over dedicate myself to extracurricular activities. The significance of these patterns shows that I often put others before myself, which I do not think is a bad thing. This choice can be bad if I am not taking the time to nurture myself but being selfless is a quality that I could only hope that I hold as a human.

My independent study project this semester has given me the opportunity to directly give back to the UNC Charlotte campus community by educating myself on the issue of college sexual assault. By learning about this issue and attempting to use activism to educate others, I will directly impact other students on campus and allow them to learn about the issue and help improve out campus community. The campus is a relatively safe place to be but there is always room for improvement when it comes to educating students about sex and sexual encounters. Another way I have directly given back to the community is through community service I have done with the Catawba Riverkeeper Foundation that focuses on cleaning up the pollution in the Catawba River Basin, one of the most endangered and polluted watersheds in the United States. This opportunity has allowed myself to discover my true passion for conservation biology and the direct impact of humans on the environment. I want to work with animal and ecological conservation when I graduate college with a specific focus on environmental and species protection. Volunteering with this organization was not only fun but it can link me with connections that could be potentially helpful in finding a job after school. Both experiences have taught and showed me that education is the key means of communication. By this I mean that people are not disinterested in causes, they simply do not know enough about causes to maintain an interest. From this I think that education will be my best form of relying information to others and sparking an interest in the causes that I also find interest in.

Overall, my reflection of the semester shows that I need to take a step back and not always be the perfect person, that I too need a break sometimes. I think focusing on the topic I find the most interest and comfort in would be an excellent place to start and allow me to develop my academic interests further in the coming years as a college student, educator, and employee.