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Reflection

Becoming comfortable with change

I remember assuming that Honours would feel like a natural extension of undergrad rather than a much harder, separate degree. I told myself, "Besides, it's just a year." Given that I had completed my undergraduate degree at UCT, I expected everything else to feel familiar. I was so wrong.

The first day of Honours was both interesting and exciting. I was shocked to learn that my class had only 10 people, including me. I had never been in such a small class, so this was definitely a change. As time passed, we started with our modules and had multiple tests and submissions, which was very overwhelming. I felt uncomfortable with the change and started wondering if I belonged here. How did I make the cut to be a part of this programme? How was I one of the 10 people selected, knowing so many people had applied? Am I strong enough, smart enough to make it to the end? It wasn't until our first test that I started experiencing imposter syndrome. It was a horrible feeling, and it took a while to push away.

What helped me push through it was realising I wasn't the only one feeling this way. After that first test, a few of us started talking honestly about how overwhelmed and out of our depth we all felt. Hearing that everyone else was struggling too made my own doubt feel less like proof that I didn't belong, and more like a normal part of adjusting to something new.

I've learned that having a community and asking for help throughout this journey is very important. Forming relationships with my classmates and talking to the course convenor made me realise I wasn't on this boat alone. I felt seen, and my feelings felt validated. It felt comforting standing outside IDM in a small circle, complaining about being tested on things we hadn't learned, drowning in 100+ slides, not knowing how to write a project proposal, all of us feeling like we had no idea what we were doing. That Honours was a completely different ball game. I appreciate having that sense of community. I also appreciate the Division of Human Genetics, including our wonderful course convenor and the HOD, for making us feel welcomed, offering support and being so kind to everyone. They definitely made this transition a lot more manageable.

All in all, I learned that change is very frightening and uncomfortable, but also necessary. I'm not sure I'm fully comfortable with change yet, but I've learned to sit with the discomfort instead of running from it, and that, in itself, feels like growth. Even though the first six months were challenging, I am so grateful and proud of myself for making it this far. I am grateful to have met my wonderful classmates and cool, amazing people outside of that. This programme and this department is filled with so many

brilliant minds, and it's always inspiring to learn about people’s journeys and the work that they do in this field. Going into the second half, I’ll be starting with my research project, which is a bit nerve-wracking but exciting. I want to remind myself and whoever is reading this that struggling with something new doesn't mean you don't belong; it just means you’re still learning how to do it. I feel lucky and grateful to be a part of this programme. I can't wait to see what the second half has in store for me.