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I THOUGHT GETTING IN WAS THE HARD PART: Reflecting on the first semester of my Honours Journey at UCT

My honours journey began with a mixture of excitement, gratitude and self-doubt. For a long time, studying at UCT had been one of my biggest dreams. I remember having countless conversations with one of my closest friends during my undergraduate years about how hard we needed to work if we wanted to study here one day. Getting accepted felt like a dream come true. I thought getting in would be the hardest part, but I soon realised it was only the beginning. As time goes by, I felt out of place, overwhelmed by the workload and the distance from home.

The start of my postgraduate journey was unlike anything I had experienced before. From the very first week of February, we were immersed in coursework, and the pace of postgraduate study was much faster than I had imagined, with little time to slowly adjust to postgraduate life and settle into a new environment. A few months later, I began my research project, which brought its own set of responsibilities on top of the demanding academic schedule. Academically, honours have pushed me further than I expected, it challenged me in ways I had never imagined. Between lectures, research, assignments, presentations, tests, and exams, there were moments when I questioned whether I truly belonged here.

Beyond the academic workload, I was also navigating a completely new chapter of my life. Moving to a different province meant leaving behind the familiarity of home, my family and my support system. At the same time, I was facing uncertainties around funding, trying to adapt to a new city, a new institution and a new way of learning. It often felt as though every area of my life was changing all at once. There were days when I sat with overwhelming self-doubt and wondered if I had overestimated myself. I remember thinking, "I worked so hard to get here, but what if I'm not good enough to stay?" Those thoughts were difficult to confront because this was the very place I had dreamed of for years. Sometimes, dreams ask even more of us than we expect. They stretch us, expose our fears and force us to grow beyond the versions of ourselves that first imagined them.

Yet, in the middle of those difficult moments, I discovered something unexpected: I was never walking this journey alone. One of the greatest blessings of this year has been the people I have met along the way. My classmates gave me an opportunity to learn from them, each with their own unique perspectives, skills and talents. They became more than just fellow students, but a community of people who understood the highs and lows of honours life, we encouraged one another through difficult days and reminded each other that none of us had to carry the weight alone. Slowly, I started to see that struggling didn't mean I didn't belong, it meant I was growing. I am equally

grateful for my supervisors, lecturers and course convener. Their patience, support, encouragement and willingness to listen when I needed to vent made a huge difference. They created an environment where learning extended far beyond academics and science.

Looking back over the past six months, I realise that although I have learnt a lot academically, the greatest lessons have been about myself. Although this journey has been incredibly challenging, I would not trade it for the comfort of staying where I was. Had I remained at my previous university, I may have avoided some of the difficulties, but I also believe I would have missed out on the profound personal and academic growth that this experience has given me. UCT has challenged me, humbled me and transformed me in ways I never imagined possible. As I look ahead to the remainder of the year, I know there will still be obstacles and challenges to overcome. Research is unpredictable, honours is demanding and the journey is far from over. However, I now face the months ahead with greater confidence than I did at the beginning of the year.

Above all, I thank God for His grace and strength throughout this journey. I truly would not have made it this far without the love, prayers and unwavering support of everyone who stood by me, especially my mom.