Hello!
I first entered the Disability Resource Center in early 2008, feeling much like a stray animal seeking shelter from a downpour. Several years into my tenure at the University of Florida, I was struggling academically, hindered not by typical college shenanigans but by persistent health issues. Looking for respite, I began reading articles about students in similar situations. Many of them seemed to have discovered a lifeline in their colleges’ disability services. Figuring I had little to risk, I made an appointment at the DRC.

The initial experience was unnerving, but I felt reassured when I found everyone eager to help. Appointments at the DRC were easy to make, and the office offered a useful array of accommodations to suit all kinds of needs. Perhaps most important, though, were my sessions with DRC staff members, who served as both mentors and advocates.

As any UF student can attest, it's easy to feel adrift at such a gargantuan school, but a sense of detachment and isolation can be magnified for students with disabilities. What made the DRC so significant to me was not the classroom accommodations it provided, but the knowledge that people there were looking out for my interests and my health. If for some reason I floundered, I had no need to worry -- a safety net was tied firmly in place beneath me. Knowing that the DRC was ready to work on my behalf became a great source of strength and encouragement.

A year and a half after I registered with the DRC, I graduated UF with degrees in journalism and religion. Although I hadn't planned on attending the graduation ceremony, I eventually decided I'd come too far not to don a cap and gown for the occasion, so in August 2009, my family members drove to Gainesville to watch me walk across the O'Connell Center stage. A proud moment, to be sure, but there are still many others at UF waiting for that same epilogue to their college careers.

Now that I've graduated, I'm living in Atlanta and searching for work that will allow me to do some good for others -- perhaps a career in journalism or public service. For now, though, I hope to do a tiny bit of good in this essay: If you are still struggling, I encourage you to register with the DRC. The center is by no means a panacea, but its services and staff members can be invaluable resources, and you will likely find the same support there that buoyed me. In the meantime, do not give up hope, because before long, you'll be wearing your own cap and gown.

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