

Courage over Perfection

Before coming to UD, I imagined college life in the U.S. like a scene from a movie – full of easy conversations, open smiles, and people who became friends in a day. I thought language would only be a bridge, not a barrier. But when I actually came here, I realized that one of the most difficult things was saying a word. My voice often stopped at my throat, caught somewhere between courage and fear. At first, I blamed my limited English, but soon I learned it wasn't the language that held me back – it was my own fear.

In Korea, I learned that speaking less and being careful with my words was considered polite, and saying something wrong felt embarrassing. However here, I noticed that even if you make mistakes, the one who speaks first often leads the conversation.

Ordering coffee, greeting a classmate after class – those tiny, trembling moments became my first lessons in courage.

During my first weeks at UD, everyone around me seemed so natural when talking and laughing. But while others spoke easily, I kept fixing grammar, pronunciation, and word choices in my head – and the words stayed behind my lips. Not speaking meant there would be no mistakes, but as time went on, I realized that what I was collecting were not mistake-free memories but missed chances.

In Korea, I was taught that being quiet and careful was a sign of respect. Here, however, silence only made me feel more distant from others. That was when I began to understand that I had to stop chasing perfect sentences and start learning how to just speak.

One day in August, I decided to go to Coffee Hour alone. I had imagined it would be full of friendly faces, but when I walked in, I suddenly felt invisible – like everyone already knew each other. My palms got sweaty, and before I even grabbed a cup of coffee, I turned around and left.

Standing outside, I told myself, “If I walk away now, I’ll spend the next four months hiding.” My hands were cold, but I took a deep breath and walked back in. I didn’t just walk into a room – I walked into my own courage. That day, I met two people who later became my closest friends at UD.

After that day, something began to change. I started saying small things out loud – ordering food without rehearsing in my head, greeting people first, asking classmates about their weekends. My words weren’t always smooth, but they felt lighter each time I spoke.

There were still mistakes, awkward pauses, and times when I didn’t understand jokes. However, I stopped apologizing for them. Instead, I laughed with others, and somehow that laughter felt like understanding. Every short talk, every imperfect sentence became a small bridge – between me and the world I once felt too afraid to step into.

When I look back, my time at UD was never just about studying English. It was about learning to speak as myself, and realize it’s okay to make mistakes. The time I stayed quiet because I wanted to sound perfect still stick in my mind as small regrets. Sometimes I still think, “If I had just said it back then.” These days, I know that being honest connects people more deeply than being fluent ever could.

I came here just to learn English, but I learned something much bigger – courage. To the next student who will walk the same paths at UD, I’d say this: don’t hesitate just

because your English isn't perfect. Just speak, even if your voice shakes a little. You'll realize that courage connects hearts faster than perfect grammar ever could. Courage over perfection. That is what UD truly taught me.