My College Cupcake

My experiences the past four years at UNC Charlotte can be compared to something I love to do: baking cupcakes. How do I make this experience the perfect four year college experience? Comparatively, how does someone make the perfect cupcake recipe? First of all, you need good quality ingredients, and they have to balance each other out. My ingredients would be my experiences, which are a mix of good and bad memories. If you think about it, ingredients like flour or butter don’t necessarily taste good by themselves, but when you put them all together—that’s when the transformation happens! They need to be added in the right proportions, and once that balance is achieved, they work together and depend on each other to deliver a great final product. Life is something that requires a lot of balance, and I’ve learned that some of the best qualities I have today were acquired after going through a few rough moments in life and learning to make the most of the situations.

I like to think that I am writing my own recipe, in the sense that I am choosing what inputs will result in the best output, regardless of whether it’s a cupcake or a college career. The key word in the initial question is “perfect.” Is that even possible? When I have time to bake, the recipes I use are my own, and it took a lot of trial and error, experimentation, and tweaking before I found the right combination; however, I’m finding there is still always room for improvement and nothing is ever perfect. This has been a hard realization because I have been a perfectionist for most of my life, and I have to accept that not everything will go
according to plan. Coming to college, I was definitely forced out of my comfort zone and had to learn to go with the flow, keep an open mind, and who knows where life will take me? It’s all about balance, understanding, and being ready for change, because as I move on to the next chapter of my life, I will need to embrace these traits and utilize them in every phase of life. I will use the following artifacts to support my theme and reflect on some of the biggest moments of my four years at UNC Charlotte.

To start, my Excel experience is the basis of my college career, just as you cream butter as the first step in making a cupcake. When I thought about living on my own, paying for my expenses, and paying my way through school, I was sure I needed a system in place to keep track of it all. Excel makes all of that possible. My solution was to build a workbook (with a spreadsheet for each year) to keep track of all my expenses and income. At the end of a school year, I analyze my results and compare with previous years. I compute cumulative savings on purchases as well as analyze cash flows per month or semester, and the whole process is something I enjoy doing! This is when I realized I wanted to be a finance major. To my surprise, business students are only required to take one Excel course, which only covers the basic Excel skills. I think students, finance majors specifically, should be required to continue Excel training, as it makes up a large portion of job duties in the finance industry and will prove to be valuable for personal use as well. Ultimately, I began tracking my expenses out of necessity, but I ended up enjoying it so much that I switched my major from marketing to finance.

My attempt to be my own boss and an entrepreneur is something I have dreamed about ever since I began working as a cupcake decorator at a bakery back in high school. The summer after junior year, I finally had the motivation to get it started and see where it would go. My
sweet, inspiring concept related to the idea that there is always something to celebrate in life, and why not do it with cupcakes! I created a logo and a Facebook page that now has over 140 likes, despite the fact that I haven’t had as much time to dedicate to it as I’d like. Taking the time to work on this personal project gave me a taste of what it would be like to be the boss, to run my own business, and to have the freedom to do things my way.

One assignment, my Body Image Autobiography, really made me face my insecurities about myself head on and tell a story about how they have shaped and changed my life. I added the Honors Body Image course to my schedule for junior year because I knew I had problems that needed to be addressed and discussed. It was the time to question my old, unhealthy habits and to learn from my mistakes. I struggled with an eating disorder through high school, and I was constantly starving myself to keep my figure. To touch on the idea that not all ingredients are good, I’ve started a fight with my mom in the past because she put too much butter on something she cooked for dinner! On top of a very strict, limited diet, I also played sports almost every day of the week after school. Since I’ve been at college, my lifestyle changed; as a result, I gained weight, and I couldn’t handle it at first. I had to overcome my skewed view of myself, and realize that my past was unbalanced, unforgiving, and miserable.

Another huge event in my college career was having a boyfriend, and ultimately breaking up with him after 14 months. I had to be strong and stir all the separate ingredients of my life together after losing one of my best friends and first serious boyfriend. This part of my life was when I had to learn that you can’t change people. Accepting this and trying to move on was really difficult for me. This part of my life was hard to overcome, but if I never went through this, I would have never learned how to move on or how to cope with drastic change.
The experience also helped me rebuild my independence. Not all of the wounds have been healed, but they will in time.

Another Honors Topic class, Food through Culture, allowed me to mix my culinary interests into my undergraduate course of study, and helped bind my college experience together. I originally wanted to go to Johnson and Wales for baking, but when that plan fell through, I decided to study business at UNC Charlotte. I learned a lot about immigration and food, genetically modified organisms, and other topics that reminded me of old interests that are still alive. One topic that really sparked my interest was focused on genetically modified foods (ironically, I am currently in another Honors topic class that has a segment on this). I have always been aware of organic versus nonorganic food, but the idea of genetically modified food is something that has not been brought to the public’s attention. Products are being made with these organisms without any required labeling in the US, whereas in other countries, they are banned because of unknown side effects. I quickly have taken a side on this matter and believe that we should know what is in our food. This class allowed me to balance my course load with mandatory classes and optional, exploratory classes that let me dive deeper into topics that interest me outside of the business school.

A large part of my college life was spent working at Starbucks, and I have so many memories and stories to tell about all I have been through with my coworkers. Unfortunately, the experience I had at Starbucks quickly turned sour as I saw my coworker being arrested and consequentially, my manager was fired. There are many instances in the past four years where I question how people can justify their bad decisions or careless actions, because I know I would
never even think to do those things. I progressively realized how deceitful people can be when you least suspect it, and to be more cautious about people and their hidden agendas.

The 17 month internship I am a part of, the Applied Technology Program, really brought my college experience together, and I wouldn’t want to replace it for anything. This 17 month long program is a partnership with Bank of America and UNC Charlotte, and has ultimately set my “career recipe” up for success. We started in January 2014 and will continue with it until graduation, which is May 8th, 2015. It is one of my proudest accomplishments by far, and it really goes to show that hard work does pay off. I was so doubtful that I would get this position, and honestly, now that I have it, I couldn’t imagine my life without it. It has taught me about professionalism and about the corporate world, which is not something you can learn in a classroom.

Finally, a motivational piece of advice and encouragement I picked up over the past few years is this: Failure paves the way for success. I have a few examples: attempting to join a sorority, Alpha Chi Omega, and not receiving the job I thought was going to be my first full time position. From both experiences, I have realized they just weren’t the right fit, and that something better is waiting for me down the line. I need to be patient and have faith that my moment or opportunity will come. As I start to apply for jobs, I have to continue to stay positive and understand that failure is necessary to pave the way to success. Everything happens for a reason, and failure can be one of those reasons. I have to enjoy the process of making the cupcake, in addition to enjoying the final product itself!
As I complete this project, I will be following the Kolb’s methodology. I have completed the first step, which is gathering, sorting, and determining the artifacts that I wish to use. Secondly, I will reflect on these artifacts and experiences to help me build my reflective essay. Thirdly, I will compile my artifacts into an e-portfolio on Wix and write the reflective essay to tie into my initial theme/question. Finally, I will take what I have learned through this process and apply my thoughts and mentality to my future endeavors as I move forward into the next part of my life after graduating college.

I have chosen Carrie Silver to be my thesis advisor. She was my UPIP (University Professional Internship Program) manager and mentor, and she always gives great advice. She also is very helpful when it comes to writing and correcting papers, and gives valuable feedback along the way. My reader will be Barbara Presnell, who was my Honors English 1103 teacher for my freshman year. Her writing background will help me with structure and I believe she will provide insightful feedback as well. Both my thesis advisor and reader support my theme and will be great coaches and mentors throughout this project, and throughout the rest of my senior year in college. I look forward to working with them!
Bibliography

*Food, Inc.* Dir. Robert Kenner. Movie One, 2008. DVD.
Schedule to Complete Portfolio

Fall Semester

November
Proposal due Tuesday, November 11th, 2014 for Spring Thesis

Spring Semester

January
01/16: Meet with Carrie: Review proposal and adjust accordingly.
01/26: Establish the layout I would want my website to have, and begin adding to it and updating it with artifacts.

February
02/09 and 02/25: Meet with Carrie
Continue to update website/e-portfolio.
Start elaborating reflective essay portion.

March
Finish updating the website/e-portfolio, most, if not all, content should be on the website by the end of the month.
03/16: Review website with Carrie and ask for feedback or changes that would be beneficial.

April
Prepare to submit; make sure to get reviews early and to finalize essay/portfolio.
Prepare presentation and note the date to present to the board.
Submit the proper forms and present my portfolio.

May
Graduate May 8th, 2015 with University Honors!