Layperson Summary

College is a time for growth and exploration for many students, as was the case for me. However, the change that I experienced over the last four years as a student at UNCC has been surprising, almost to the point that I almost do not recognize the person I was before college. Reflecting on this period of my life, I ask the question, “Am I a different person after college or am I just different?” I will attempt to answer this question using the theory of emergence as the framework to this discussion.

The theory of emergence relates to a variety of subjects that range from physics to philosophy. It basically says that the interaction between simple things end up creating complex things. For example, say I have a set of matches. The matches on their own are simple things. They are just matches. When I place the matches in certain patterns to represent shapes, now the matches have become squares, or pentagons, or stars. Here, the simple matches have become more complex shapes. Using this context, I will show how my identity has emerged after my experiences in college.

I have collected a set of eight artifacts that all have played a role in shaping me for the past four years. Each are separate experiences from different times. These artifacts show times when I was challenged both physically and academically. On their own, they represent separate instances of my life. When these artifacts are molded together, the result is my identity. Using the framework of the theory of emergence, my artifacts represent the simple things that interact to create me, which is a complex thing. The problem here, is what is meant by me? Have I emerged as a result of these experiences, or have there been new aspects to my identity that have emerged?