

My initial plan for my junior year was to enroll in a high-level art class or two, secondary to my regular high school courses, but what I saw at a Freestyle Academy exhibition changed that. I was enamored with the animation students' productions, and witnessing their showcase became my biggest inspiration for joining the Freestyle Academy of Communication Arts & Technology and sparked my interest in pursuing a career in the animation industry.

As an aspiring visual artist, I saw Freestyle as an opportunity to expand my options for expressing myself by learning to work in new media mediums and develop my critical thinking abilities through unfamiliar technology and a challenging curriculum. When I entered my first semester, I was not disappointed.

My animation elective began with a series of 2D animation made traditionally on flipbooks, phenakistoscopes, and using stop-motion animation. I was appreciative of how the assignments gave students a good amount of freedom when deciding what the characters or objects in our animations would look like and how we would work best. For one assignment, I was allowed to make a flipbook of one of my original characters (named Ajak) in action. Seeing the final animation of my own creation moving and coming to life before my eyes, I knew I had gained an incredible power to express myself like never before.

However, Freestyle sometimes managed to catch me off guard in terms of the new environment and skills I would be required to learn, especially in my Digital Media course. Learning to edit audio, video, websites, and even write code was new and challenging. Specifically, I struggled with using Adobe Dreamweaver to write HTML code to change aesthetics for my Wordpress website. Though I didn't give up, my attempts to solve the problem on my own were fruitless. I grew upset, and shed more than a few tears. After wallowing for a while, I mustered up the courage to ask my Digital Media teacher for help. To my surprise, he didn't brush me off, and set up time to help me figure out the problem. In addition to that, a nearby student who had overheard offered to help as well. It was then that I realized the value of the strong community of creatives surrounding me. I had "found my people" as my mom likes to say. I sat down with my teacher and we solved the problem together. From then on, I was much more comfortable asking for help from teachers and fellow students alike. I was able to redefine my values after the experience, having learned that asking for help does not mean "giving up." Instead, making an effort to learn from those around you and using resources that are there to help you is incredibly important to becoming a better student.

Thanks to Freestyle, I now understand my strengths and weaknesses as a creator and know what I need to improve to achieve my goals as a visual communicator. Through collaborative team projects and hands-on experience with industry-standard equipment and practices, I have developed the ability to adapt to new software and equipment and integrate into a creative community.

Currently, I value animation because it is a powerful force of evolution that constantly pushes me to improve. It forces me to adapt and learn new things by encouraging me to collaborate with other artists, improve my technical skills, look for feedback, and put my work out there. It inspires me to interpret and translate the depths of my worldview. For me, being able to animate is one of the most influential and beautiful ways to communicate stories and messages. Freestyle was the first step in my journey as an aspiring animator, and I hope to continue to develop into a person and artist I can be proud of in college and beyond, even as I adapt to new circumstances and continue to strengthen my values.

