Dear New College Student,

A book that greatly influenced me and my academic pursuits at New College is *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Dr. Zinn is credited with the resurgence of interest in mindfulness meditation in western culture. This book presents an understanding of meditation that respects its foundation in Buddhism but removes it from its overt religious context and places it within a psychological framework that makes meditation immediately accessible and practical. *Full Catastrophe Living* is an excellent introduction to secular meditation that is not only beneficial for those struggling with mental and physical illness but for anyone dealing with stress and the challenges of everyday life. Dr. Zinn presents the benefits of meditation in such a manner that anyone, with or without meditative experience, can benefit quickly and safely. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in learning more about mindfulness meditation. The approach to meditation embodied in this book strongly influenced the philosophy and content of the *Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health* minor program at New College.

When I began my first year as an undergraduate student at McMaster University in Hamilton, I had just completed my high school on a high-note, achieving a very high overall average and very confident in the next phase of my education. I intended to complete a degree in Psychology which required me to take Calculus in my first year. I had done very well in my high school calculus and was thus very certain of my success in this course at McMaster. The December exam period began with my calculus exam and I was quite sure I had done well. But I was in for a big surprise when I found out in January I had failed it badly. I had never failed an exam in high school and here I had failed the first exam of my university education!!! I recall feeling shocked, even disoriented and disbelief. How could that happen? There must have been a mistake. I visited the professor to understand what happened and it was clear I had not prepared sufficiently to do well. He was very supportive but left no doubt that it was up to me to succeed in the course. I even contemplated briefly dropping out, wondering whether I had over-estimated my abilities and was not university material. After some thought I decided that I would meet the challenge the professor had given me. My over-confidence was replaced by focused determination. I took better notes, attended every class, asked from help from the TAs, got additional resources, and most importantly, spent additional time working on calculus every evening. I solved every problem at the end of each chapter and refused to go on to the next section in the textbook unless I had mastered the one before. I basically invested the necessary effort to do the best I could. My effort paid off as I achieved a solid A by the April exam period. I think many if not most students in first year university will encounter some shock academic. Many students do very poorly in first year and then in later years find that these early grades affect their academic future. University is not high school and the standards are higher and tougher. Should you find yourself in this situation, re-double your efforts, make the necessary sacrifices, and refuse to give in to negative or undermining thoughts about yourself. Your efforts will be paid off and you will feel accomplished and prepared to deal with additional challenges that you will inevitably meet at university and in life.

Tony Toneatto