

Hi! I'm Kayla, a senior at MIT. I was part of Tony's group four years ago and was a PASA swimmer for two years. Here's a bit about my college experience (mostly focusing on swimming).

I was extremely worried when I left for college in August of my freshman year. I'm not a person who generally likes change, and I had found an amazing home in my fellow PASA swimmers. I didn't think I would ever have friends like the ones I did there, and to be honest I was pretty burnt out from swimming at the time so I wasn't very excited about that either.

It seems funny that somehow once I got to MIT I would be putting less pressure on myself in the pool, but that's kind of what happened. In high school, I put a lot of pressure to succeed in the pool. School was something that came more naturally to me, but when I joined PASA at the end my sophomore year, I knew I was a tiny little fish in a really big pond. Swimming became my life the last two years of high school as I became obsessed with trying to get my juniors cut in the 200 fly and spent a lot of time in the pool or thinking about being in the pool. Even though I was in the best shape of my life and dropping time in every event except the one I really wanted, I couldn't get away from being upset. It became so much that towards the end of my senior year I was super checked out mentally.

When I got to college, that quickly changed. The people there welcomed me with open arms- the entire team, not just the other freshman. In my 3.75 years at MIT, the people I swam with became my best friends. And not only that, at MIT, I was able to rediscover my love for swimming. Swimming no longer came first in my life due to the simple fact that school was now incredibly difficult. It changed from being a source of stress to being the outlet for that stress and I started to have a much healthier relationship with the sport. As classes got harder and harder, I turned to swimming for comfort. I finally dropped time in my top events, probably partially due to the fact that I wasn't terrified every time I hopped in the pool to do a 200 fly. I went on to do really well my sophomore year and place individually and on relays at our NCAA meet.

One of the great things about MIT is all of the different opportunities it has. While studying there, I've been able to go abroad twice—first to France, then to Israel, do research in two different labs, be a part of student government, and volunteer—all things I hadn't been able to do in high school because I

didn't have the time. During my junior year of swimming, I made the decision to cut my season short and go to Israel to teach robotics to Palestinian and Israeli children who didn't have access to as much technology. Without going to MIT, I never would have had this opportunity, and because I was at MIT, the next year the swim team welcomed me back with open arms. Most people, once they leave the sport, don't want to come back, but the people I was surrounded by on the team were so encouraging and supportive.

This past year was extremely hard for me. I had essentially taken 5 months out of the pool and had to jump right back in with the rest of my team. On top of that, I had developed a pretty bad shoulder injury my sophomore year that I had to make sure not to exacerbate as I attempted to swim again. I managed to push through to the end of the year, and at our conference meet, dropped one last good 2 fly and ended up being the last person invited to NCAAs. Two weeks later, I had to sit on the pool deck as my coach, sobbing, told us that MIT was pulling the team out of nationals. I watched my fellow seniors break down while making speeches in front of the team then, eventually, me too. Even though my swimming ended up being cut a bit short, it only made me see how much all of us cared about the sport, the team, and each other.

Swimming has been a huge factor in my growth as a person since I started, but especially in college. My team has helped me deal with failure and loss and been there with me when I've been able to celebrate my successes. In the end, I wasn't upset about losing the opportunity to swim another 200 fly. I was more upset about losing my last meet with my best friends. My college experience would not have been the same without the love and support I got from my team. All in all, I had a great 15.75 years of swimming.