Don’t get me wrong, I can get as nervous in front of a crowd as the next person. But truth be told, I am usually pretty confident about public speaking, making reports in class or addressing a large audience. I’ve always seemed to rise to that type of occasion and take on the challenge with successful results. But I also know that it only really goes well if you are prepared, understand the subject matter thoroughly, and/or have great enthusiasm for the topic or the task at hand. Quite simply, making an impression is work. In the past, I have had the experience of feeling intimidated by better presenters who spoke ahead of me and basically derailed any confidence I had arrived with. And I’ve sensed when I was less than prepared than I should have been for the moment. Suddenly, in those situations, my voice is likely higher pitched or I may begin to speak too quickly – all in a subconscious effort to shrink away or just plain be done.

But this Residential Commons experience is different.

From the beginning, I have wanted more than anything to be a contributing member of the Residential Commons Leadership Corps – to make a difference. And because I’ve been here since its start, I think I can say that we (The Corps) have made sure we are prepared for every situation. We’ve worked really hard and put in countless hours of planning and brainstorming. It’s been gratifying to know that we have been responsible for so many first impressions when it comes to the new Residential Commons at SMU. But more than anything, I have discovered just what it means to have your heart in it. You see, I realize that all the preparation in the world goes only so far.
And, sure, dressing the part in professional business attire for standing in front of the Board of Trustees, or making things fun and silly for a dorm floor audience is all smart strategy. But caring, really caring passionately, about a project or an effort — the way I care about the Residential Commons at SMU — is infectious. It can be your ace. And once conveyed, the people you address gain more than just the facts — in fact, they can’t help but become engaged in it all. I’ve come to know that this is an oral presentation advantage that no English project or BLI session can teach. But it’s a gem I will take with me from this experience for the rest of my career. Become impassioned. Convey your connection to the subject as much as the subject itself.

Every presentation about the new Residential Commons has been an opportunity for me, and other Residential Commons leaders, to contribute to making SMU a better place. That’s not an opportunity afforded to many students here or at any university. And I, for one, am so very grateful for the experience and everything it has taught me.

Speaking publicly and in so many situations about the new Residential Commons has been just one part of my investment in this effort. As a result, I wasn’t really surprised that I became rather melancholy at our last Residential Commons Leadership Corps weekly meeting last Friday. Come fall, we are set to launch, and I look forward to the opportunities I will have to once again speak on behalf of the Residential Commons and SMU!