A New Approach to Finding Balance: Circus Circuit

Before even arriving on campus from her home in Loves Park, Illinois, Kate Oteng-Bediako ’22, knew that her career at MIT would be well-served by learning how to handle stress in a healthy manner. As a participant in the Interphase EDGE summer program, she learned the importance of balance in ways even she may not have expected.

Kate signed up for the Fitness & Stress Management course because she was looking for one that “would be engaging, discussion-based, and focused on improving my overall lifestyle to increase my success at MIT.” The stress management content offered Kate the chance to try some simple, practical relaxation techniques and strategies for balancing her studies and personal health. The activity part of the course introduced a very different kind of balance. “Circus Circuit” involves applying physical coordination and balance to poses that students created with partners. At first, Kate said, “I was not sure if I could replicate the different balancing poses Laura, the instructor, showed us, but I was eager to try it out for myself.”

At the start of each session, Laura Golitko demonstrated a series of balancing poses with the help of a student volunteer. After watching the demonstrations, students formed pairs and decided which poses they wanted to attempt. There was a lot of laughter as the pairs worked together to execute the demonstrated poses and combined them to flow from one pose to the next. When all the pairs felt comfortable with their routine, the group sat in a circle on the wrestling room mats and shared what they had learned.

One at a time, the student pairs moved to the center of the circle to present their routines. Each feat of balancing skill was followed by applause from the group and an occasional “ooh” or “ahh.” To close the class each member shared something they’d learned. Kate noted that, “Now I know that my classmates and I can do any of the different partner balancing poses. It’s just a matter of trusting your partner and practicing the best stances to counterbalance one another for any given pose.”

Kate, who hopes to study Biological Engineering at MIT, enjoyed developing the concept of balance in all aspects of the course. She noted, “The sleep habits, nutrition tips, information on how to maximize cognitive function, and stress management skills I learned surprised me at times and have really helped me in my transition to life at MIT.” Kate plans to continue pursuing a balanced lifestyle by taking yoga and other physical education and wellness course that focus on improving overall health.

For more student stories, visit http://mitpe.mit.edu/Pics-and-Stories/