Dear Common Read and First Year Experience program coordinators,

Thank you for your interest in my debut graphic novel, *Freshman Year*. This book is a reflection on my first year at the University of Minnesota, inspired by the drawings and journals I created during that pivotal time.

When I arrived on campus, I had a vague understanding of the hard feelings that would happen alongside the academic work. I knew I was moving away from my friends, but not what it means to *feel* that distance. I knew my classes would challenge me but couldn’t anticipate that my shifting world view would ripple into everything in my life. I knew that dorm food was supposed to be underwhelming, but I didn’t know how I’d respond to new food routines. Everyone reacts to the stimuli of college differently. I now know that intimately: I saw my new friends flourish in exciting directions while I tripped over every hurdle.

I began the project that would become *Freshman Year* in a graphic novel course early sophomore year. With a summer of reflection behind me, I needed a creative way to share my first-year experience. The twelve-page comic I produced seemed to strike an emotional chord with the class. Freshman year had been hard to describe for all of us, and there was a lot more to unpack.

A lot of high school seniors receive sentimental children’s books at graduation (for instance, Dr. Seuss’s *Oh the Places You’ll Go*), only to be assigned denser works for adults upon matriculating at college. My hope is that *Freshman Year* can bridge that divide, priming young people to engage in the college transition with more humor, openness, and active curiosity. I hope the vulnerability in these pages can both provide an intimate, individual reading experience and spark larger community discussions in high school or university campuses.

One of my favorite things about the graphic novel format is how often I see it reaching many kinds of students—those who identify as readers, and those who have no interest in reading at all. While it might be hard to find the energy to finish an entire prose novel for some, a graphic novel can be read in a sitting or two. But every page is just as rich, and just as transformative.

As one teacher recently shared, *Freshman Year* is "A true and realistic view of college, especially when you move away from home and don’t really have many friends. Brought me to tears probably because of how closely it resembled my own experience. A good read for older high school or college students to remind them that college is not always as fun and perfect as it seems online.”

Thank you for the crucial work you do keeping books in students’ hands. I’m grateful for your time.

