This week, I will charge head first into the infamous senior year. As I ascend to the top quarter of the high school totem pole, I will wage a war against the widespread and lethal-for-the-transcript senioritis.

I will resume my position as co-editor-in-chief of the school yearbook, anticipating the arrival of last year’s publication. Looking toward November, I will campaign for our president and other progressive causes with other Bloomington High School South Young Democrats. Until then, though, I want to breathe and reflect.

As my junior year came to a close, none of the aforementioned subjects troubled me. Instead, I sat on my bed engulfed by course notes, flashcards, dictionaries and textbooks all carrying the same information — how to speak French.

In just two unsettling weeks, I would jet off to France to participate in the Indiana University Honors Program in Foreign Languages, a seven-week study abroad program tailored specifically to incoming high school seniors from the state of Indiana.

My home for the summer was to be Brest, on the northern coast of France. But instead of daydreaming of the sea and baguettes, I was paralyzed by one thought — immersion. The cornerstone of the program, the language commitment, mandates seven weeks without English. For nervous, monolingual me this rule might as well have been seven weeks of silence.

So as I sat in my familiar room, in my familiar town, in my familiar English-speaking country, I tried to cram as much French into my head as possible to prepare for the unfamiliar.

I was consumed by doubt. Once I arrived in France though, I made a discovery. Though I struggled just to muster a complete sentence, speaking solely in French was at the same time humbling and empowering. With the support of my wonderful host family, the instructors and the other American students I survived, and enjoyed, each day. I discovered that the unknown is not quite so frightening. Though puzzled looks and chuckles were a common response to my French, I realized that I was capable. Moments like these provide us with the strength to later confront deeper unknowns.

For me, this gained confidence came at a perfect time, just before the college admissions process. Though the stacks of college mail atop my cluttered desk are overwhelming, I am more composed and less doubtful, and even a bit more hopeful. While in France, I often encountered an expression that I plan to keep in mind as I face this potentially trying time. “C’est pas grave.” Translation: Don’t worry; it’s no big deal.

Bloomington South senior Ellie Fuqua regularly writes a School Diary column.