Senior Maria Mor expected Florida Atlantic University to be a pit stop when she enrolled her freshman year, but she quickly found professors who mentored her, a spot in the Wimberly Library for cramming, best friends and a favorite tree to sit under to review test notes.

“There are numerous colleges in Florida that I could have chosen to attend. It has been three years and I am still at FAU simply because I love FAU,” said Mor, who moved with her family from South America to Boca Raton when she was 8 years old. “It was a matter of what I thought I could do at FAU. I am trying to squeeze out every drop of juice that FAU has to offer.”

During her freshman year, Mor joined the FAU climbing club and bonded with fellow climbers and enjoyed the exercise. She later became a photographer for the University Press, the student newspaper on campus, and joined the photography club.

Movie night on the lawn near the student dorms, the FAU owl green club events and Sunday workshops offered by the student union were some of the other extracurricular activities that she embraced.

“Even if I do not have class on a particular day, I wake up early and go to the library to get my homework done or go to the recreation and fitness center to exercise or swim,” said the 21-year-old Mor. “I visit my friends at their dorms or we have lunch either at the food court by the blue tables or we enjoy a delicious brownie with a coffee mocha at Starbucks. I do not go to FAU as much on the weekends, unless I want to go to a football or baseball game or to a gallery or artist talk.”

When Mor entered FAU, she wanted to study graphic design, but the course work didn’t inspire her. She later enrolled in photography with professor Suzie Khalil, who encouraged her to continue in the arts.

“Professor Khalil has been the best professor and mentor I have had. She believes in me,” said Mor. “This was the class that turned my creative wheels on again. I became determined, happy and inspired.”

Mor also credits Khalil for encouraging her to exhibit a class project, “Souls of Our Shoes,” a photographic series that opened to the public at the Wimberly Library, One West Gallery, on May 3 and will run through September 27.

To complete the project, Mor photographed the shoes of fellow classmates to show that shoes are an extension of one’s personality. The exhibition was viewed by Mor’s peers and professors and was featured in newspapers and on the local CBS news.

“I would never have imagined that my exhibit would have been on the morning news. I did not create something just so it would end up on the news,” said Mor. “I created something out of passion and an interest to make other people special.”

During the summer, Mor worked as a sales associate at a department store, as an intern at Boca Raton Photography and Design and as a freelance photographer. She also took dance classes, enjoyed bike riding, rollerblading and time with friends, including Fumi Saito, an FAU exchange student from Japan, who traveled with Mor to France to visit Marie-Caroline Segui, another FAU exchange student.

“I learned so much about different cultures, ate so much good food and enjoyed a completely different atmosphere,” Mor said.

Mor has returned to FAU, ready to tackle her senior year to complete requirements for her Bachelor of Fine Arts in studio art with a concentration in photography. She knows the five classes she is enrolled in will be challenging, but she is excited and confident that she will succeed.

“I’ve learned to keep positive and calm when things are hard or a little more difficult than they should be,” said Mor. “All you need is drive and determination and persistence.”