
The Art of Trying: From Philippines to San Francisco (and six other countries)

The story of how I got into Minerva University despite struggling financially.



The Mayor of Lapu-Lapu City, Ahong Chan

OCT 2023 UPDATE: We've gone a long way — and [I somehow ended up in a billboard on New York Times Square](#). Thanks, Webflow.

For recruiters — this is my story on how I used tech to overcome barriers to quality education.

The Supporting Video I produced

“Dear Carl Kho,

UBC Student Number: 55120174


We are writing to let you know the results of the 2022 UBC International Scholars awards competition.

Your award nomination was very strong and as such you have been placed on the waitlist for the International Scholars award at UBC...”

Engineering physics at the University of British Columbia—that was the dream. The first college application from a guy indifferent toward academics (humble brag alert!). Unfortunately, UBC put me on the waitlist due to limited government funds. Regular admission was a no-go because my family didn’t have the money for it, even with my full-time job. The currency conversion was too strong.

I had to reject the admission offer myself. The scene kept on replaying in my head. That instance invalidated my life’s successes. It was excruciating like a slow burn.

I’m pretty sure the faculty at STEC-SHS, my senior high school, wondered why I was requesting letters and documents for all of these other colleges—LaSalle, San Carlos, and another push for the University of Toronto. Even though I was already enrolled in a certain university in Cebu, I still pushed for a successful scholarship acceptance because I wanted to feel “intelligent” again. Admittedly, I think that’s why I started “Padayon Ko,” my initiative where I made a database of all ongoing scholarships to help fellow Filipinos. While I genuinely want Filipinos to open their eyes to more international opportunities, a part of me just wanted to get accepted to every scholarship I applied to for validation.

Funny enough, I never applied for a school in the United States. I just felt like the culture wouldn’t fit me. Then life decided to give me one more chance. I remember somebody messaging me about Minerva University on the Padayon Ko Facebook page. The promise of global immersion and active learning piqued my interest, so after flushing the toilet (an important detail, I was -ing at the time), I immediately got to work on my application.

I spent a lot of money on proficiency and standardized exams for other international opportunities. What surprised me at Minerva was the process: it encourages applicants to show off their individual strengths. It was the last week of the rolling application, so I submitted my application on the day of the deadline (classic). I didn’t give it much thought, seeing how it was a very selective university with a 2% acceptance rate. On top of that, I already had the class schedule at a

university I was enrolled in.

I vividly remember how, for some reason, I woke up at 5:00 a.m. on a random summer day. I got an email from Minerva. I didn't open it until I was with my parents. When I did, the email contained only a button linking to their website and a video of the result.

I got in.

We felt elated. My family scrolled through the faces of my future international classmates. It was like a rollercoaster ride. Finally. We were happy until we saw the cost. Even with financial aid, we couldn't afford it. That brewed another season of depression within me. But my coping mechanism, as shown by the previous paragraph, was to just work harder out—utilize the passion from my grudge—so that's what I did. With the help of my developed website, www.carlkho.com, (to show credibility and future plans post-college), and my ability to write letters, I looked for sponsorship. I sent emails to companies and people, both private and public, but there wasn't much luck.

Despite that, we still paid the enrollment fee. Grasping at straws, I wrote a letter to Mayor Ahong Chan. He sponsored my robotics journey to Hungary two years ago, so he might sponsor my college. Long story short, he and the city council of Lapu-Lapu made a generous grant. God is good! The grant had a resolution with a fancy jacket and the city seal and all (RESOLUTION NO. 16-0117-2022). The new total amount was just enough for me to pursue my higher-education-outside-the-Philippines dreams.



The Golden Gate Bridge by [Carl Kho](#)

Now, I've finished my first semester in San Francisco. The lessons I've learned are a whole other post on its own—that is if my relationship with social media stays good given other demanding priorities.

I am just glad. I never expected to visit America in such a short span of time. I still space out from time to time because I still can't believe I'm **here**. Clearly, it still hasn't sunk in. Thank you, God, my parents, my support system in America, and everyone who made my pursuit of studying across seven countries in four years possible.

Merry Christmas!

By [Carl Kho](#) on [December 25, 2022](#).

[Canonical link](#)

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