**4. UT-AUSTIN ESSAY (REQUIRED)**

**Note: This is the only long essay UT-Austin requires. *We do not require any of the Common App Personal Essays.* Common App Personal Essays will not be used in our holistic review process.**

**Tell us your story. What unique opportunities or challenges have you experienced throughout your high school career that have shaped who you are today?**

**Please keep your essay between 500–700 words (typically two to three paragraphs)**

DRAFT 3

A text message read "Cat, I need to talk about the rubrics and concept of the competition." My smile vanished, and my heart started beating out of my chest.

The judge, who was my teacher, called to tell me that she disapproved of the existing rubrics and concepts. Though I had a lot of questions in my mind, I quickly adjusted the plan to align with how the teachers envisioned it. **Being a perfectionist, I did not delegate any tasks to my members. Now, I had to face the consequences of fixing the last-minute changes by myself because time is running out, and re-explaining everything that needed to be done would just waste more time. This led me to feel completely alone and stressed, with no one to back me up.**

After the event, I tried reflecting on everything that went wrong. Could the problem be prevented if I had delegated more and shared every process with them? This constantly runs through my mind. In all group projects, I’ve always been chosen as the leader of a group but I prefer working independently because it’s quicker and more efficient. I consider delegating and explaining plans to my members as a setback and with that mindset, things just ended up backfiring. Since then, I remember promising myself that I will start doing things differently, by changing how I lead and guide my members.

A few months later, I had an opportunity to organize Walkathon, a fundraising event in my new school that gathers donations from students, teachers, and staff encouraging their families and friends to pledge a fixed amount of money for each kilometer they walk. The goal was to raise $9,000 within 2 weeks, so we must ensure that we had enough participants to achieve our goal.

This time, I knew I wanted to lead in an inclusive leadership style, different from the events I organized before. I began with distributing tasks based on the willingness and skill set of each member, ensuring they knew their tasks thoroughly. Apart from this, I started trusting my members because collaboration reduced workload and encouraged members’ participation. I also paid extra attention to the teachers' and head of school’s opinions towards the event proposal to avoid any kind of miscommunication by consulting and updating them with the newest progress or changes.

Promoting the fundraiser took a lot of trial and error as there was continuous improvisation on strategies to encourage students and teachers to participate. This time, however, I made sure to ask for ideas and opinions from each member, which led to stimulated team engagement and participation, especially during our daily meetings. They proposed innovative ideas that were nearly impossible for me to come up with if I was working alone. For instance, they suggested that we hold interviews with some of the children who would be benefiting from the fundraiser for the promotional video. Believing it would be a unique selling point to encourage participation, I entrusted them with the responsibility of creating the video.

Through each member’s contribution, our fundraiser was hugely successful, resulting in more than 100 participants joining. We collected a total of $9,200 for the Hoshizora Foundation which would transform the lives of 80+ underprivileged children in receiving access to proper education. **Was it tiring? Yes. Was it worth it? Definitely. When I had a final meeting to celebrate the closing of Walkathon, none of my members regretted being a part of this fundraiser. I saw how my inclusivity resulted in each member expressing how they feel exhilarated and content with the result of this fundraiser. All of their hard work had paid off because despite it being impossible to send all underprivileged children around the world to school, we were able to enact a small change within our community by providing access to education for Hoshizora’s children. Thus, leading Walkathon successfully made me realize how effective collaboration can positively impact society for the better.**

From this experience, I learned how to become a leader who respects, listens, delegates, and communicates with their members well. A poorly organized and mismanaged factory would never result in a well-synchronized production, and I believe it goes the same way with becoming a leader. Having an exclusive leadership style will only discourage the participation of my members and cause demotivation, which is the complete opposite of what I aspire to in building a team. I can now comprehend the bigger picture of what a leader should be and how a leader can pave the path forward. Although I might not have the ambition to start my own company in the near future, leadership holds great importance for me because it’s about positively influencing the people around me to reach newer heights. Now, I aspire to become a leader who can help provide guidance, resolve conflicts and establish a clear vision for the team.