**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 4

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.

Being the lead organizer for the school’s 3 days end-of-year event, with each day consisting of different competitions and activities for 1,000 students was challenging. The judge, who was my teacher, called to tell me that she disapproved of the existing rubrics and concepts. With two days remaining, I had to fix the last-minute changes by myself because, previously, I only delegated menial and trivial tasks to my team members and not the high-stake tasks. Now, I had to face the consequences of working alone, because reaching out to team members at this time and explaining everything that needed to be done would just waste more time. I didn’t sleep during those two days. I was lucky that the miscommunication issue didn’t impact the event, but this led me to feel stressed and pressured – a memorable personal struggle for someone who likes to work independently.

After the event, I tried reflecting on everything that went wrong. Could it be prevented if I had delegated more and shared every process with my teammates? 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 organized a Walkathon, a fundraising event with a goal to raise $9,000 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.

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 with the hopes that collaboration would reduce each person’s workload and encourage members’ participation.

During the daily meetings, I made it a habit to ask my members for ideas and opinions to encourage team engagement and participation to seek their unique ideas that I would have never come up with if I was working alone. For instance, their suggestion of incorporating interviews with Hoshizora’s children into the promotional video was an interesting idea that could significantly encourage participation because it shows the audience, the children who would be benefitting from the fundraiser.

At the end of the event, we had more than 100 participants joining and raised a total of $9,200 for the Hoshizora foundation which helped transform the lives of 80+ underprivileged children to receive access to proper education. Although it had been an intensive and energy-draining event, none of my members regretted being a part of this fundraiser because their hard work helped enact a small positive impact within our community.

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 because it often results in a poor outcome of work output, and I believe it goes the same way with becoming a leader. Like a factory, having an exclusive leadership style impacts the results of the work output by discouraging my team members from contributing to the team. I can now comprehend the bigger picture of what a leader should be and how a leader can pave the path forward. Leadership holds great importance for me because it’s about positively influencing the people around me to reach greater heights. Now, I aspire to become a leader who can help provide guidance, resolve conflicts and establish a clear vision for the team; all components needed to achieve excellent work output.