**Prompt 8 - Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California? (350 words)**

Growing up, I’ve always loved solving math riddles. I appreciated the fact that arithmetics had non-abstract, defined solutions. So when my friend invited me to a competitive programming club called Kokocoder, I was instantly interested. I believe it would allow me to pursue my passion for problem-solving from a computer science perspective. As I spent hours in the club learning, laughing, and enduring difficulties, the once-alien environment slowly turned into a place of comfort.

Throughout my journey at Kokocoder, I’ve encountered many people and been taught many lessons. From the boy with a twin brother, I learnt to not compare myself with others, and from my coaches who helped me hone my skills, I learned to accept criticism and develop a good work ethic. But one of the biggest lessons I learned came from a senior member of the club. Whenever I felt puzzled by one of the coding problems, he’d always tell me, “Start with the most ridiculous solution and see if it works, you can always simplify it later.” He’d write programs intentionally exceeding the memory limit and then optimize them to shorter, more complex algorithms while guiding me through each step. This allowed me to understand the logic behind the solution first and then translate it to more effective methods achieving the same result.

The community at Kokocoder taught me that there was no wrong way of pursuing knowledge, even if it meant using the most random and unconventional methods. And as I expanded my social circle from late-night practice sessions to partaking in memorable events like camps and field trips, it made me appreciate more the opportunities I had and how privileged I am to be in an environment where I can learn alongside other enthusiastic students, enhancing my growth and long term development in programming.

At UC, I’m eager to host community events, hackathons, and mentoring programs for others including underprivileged children to help them experience the fun of programming, just like Kokocoder did for me.