**Prompt 8: Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?**

For my school’s values week’s theme ‘finding passion in your life,’ my teacher offered me to interview Edgar Xavier Marvelo, a three-time wushu world champion and medallist of the Asian Games and Southeast Asian Games. Eager for a new experience, I accepted the offer.

As this was my first official interview, I went through numerous articles online to learn proper techniques to conduct an interview from tone, hand gestures, and even facial expressions. Practicing my lines in front of the mirror, it seemed that I looked at my face more than I’d ever done my whole life.

Finally, the interview day came, and reality hit. As an introvert, I struggled to manage awkward-free conversations with others, especially with someone I’d never met. “How do I maintain an easy-going conversation, allow Edgar to feel comfortable yet still get to the point?” I was a nervous wreck – terrified that I’d keep on mumbling, rambling or messing up this interview.

“There must be something in me if the teachers offered me this opportunity. Do I really want to waste this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity?” Despite my growing uncertainties, I knew that this interview was a chance for me to push myself outside of my comfort zone.

“Ding.” Edgar had entered the meeting.

I told myself, "Okay, calm down. Act normal, be confident. There’s no backing out now." To ease the tension, I initiated small talks before starting the interview. I was surprised by the seamlessness of the conversation. It was to the point that I felt confident enough to go out of script and improvised some questions based on his answer.

Afterwards, even though my heart was thumping a hundred miles per second, I genuinely felt proud of myself. It helped me realise that I can indeed accomplish goals I had previously thought impossible with just a dose of self-confidence. This experience opened my eyes and made me realise that we’ll never know our real capabilities unless we put them into action.

Hence, when invited to speak at an event "International Dimension in Schools" for A.M.M. Matriculation Higher Secondary School, one of Chennai, India's top schools regarding academic activities and study tips, I didn’t even hesitate and immediately accepted.

Just like this interview allowed me to shed my security blanket and become more confident, I won't be afraid to use these skills while facing bigger challenges, like engaging with UC's diverse communities or seizing the chance to further hone my public speaking abilities.