**The Norlin Scholars program seeks curious individuals who see college as an opportunity for both personal and academic growth. We want to build a cohort of students who encourage and support one another on this journey. Students who thrive in our program are interested in growing their knowledge, awareness, and efficacy for improving their own and others' lives.**

For more detalis about program philosophy and requirements go to the Norlin Scholars [web site.](http://enrichment.colorado.edu/norlinscholars/) If, after perusing our website, this seems like a community you'd be eager to join, please **watch the video** you'll find on the website and then answer the question below in an essay between 750 and 1000 words.

Write about a time when you believed a single story about a person or group and an experience you had that challenged that single story.

**\*\*NOT PART OF THE ESSAY, BUT A QUICK INTRODUCTION:** the video referred to in the prompt is a TED talks speaker, Chimamanda Adichie, discussing a) a single story she had on poor people, and b) the single story that our society has on Africa (she is from Africa)

Chimamanda Adichie observes that “the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.” Classifications often find logical basis, but are woefully inadequate in communicating the intricacy of human thought and experience. Generalizations deprive any instance of its subtlety, dynamism, *vitality*. My experience at the university has challenged the simple story of the academic community with which I left high school. As I have striven to remain an artist and a human while becoming a scientist, my limited idea of academic identity has blossomed into a rich composition of many stories. I had too narrow of a view of intellectualism to envision my place in the overall picture, and feared that to gain distinction in the academic community would require that I be fulfilled by the stereotypes of my area of study. A great pivot in my personal development was the realization that I could embody many stories. My experience at the university has done far more than imparted knowledge; the culture has infused *life* into my understanding of the human experience, promoted my self-security, and enhanced my intellectual engagement.

I recall the misguided feelings I had toward college as I graduated from high school. I had only a superficial notion of what it meant to be an artist, a scientist, a philosopher; an academic. I had the single story that, in choosing a discipline, I would be forced to draw a line around myself, restrict my interests, and sacrifice many of the things I hold most dear. I entered the engineering school, I wanted to study physics, and I found the stereotypes surrounding those disciplines to be crushing. I never wanted to be inexpressive, lifeless: the labels that shadow the sciences. I thrive on the creative fluidity and receptiveness of music, and the universality of artistic expression. I thrill in the process of logical reasoning, be it philosophy or mathematics. I crave on a deep level to understand how the world works. I fully dread that moment of finality when I subscribe to a discipline and discard the passions that make me who I am.

I assumed that the disciplines of academia were necessarily distinct from one another and one-dimensional in themselves. The simple act of labeling a person by their profession (“this is an engineer, over here we have a historian”) inaccurately suggests that a person can be adequately defined by this categorization, and that they fall comfortably within its bounds. Yet the university community I encountered here directly contradicts this notion. The multiplicity of stories abounds; every discipline overflows with people who seek knowledge and personal growth in all areas of life, and who have preserved their unique personal and intellectual background in their everyday work. Varied interests are an advantage. The substance of the group identity seems to be that we have more in common than is immediately apparent, because no one *can* fit their interests in a box. I have found both inspiration and comfort in many people on campus who embody confidence in the value of their own story, and would not limit themselves for anything.

The academic community that I have encountered is multi-dimensional and internally diverse, a proof by contradiction that my single story of it needed desperately to be replaced by something more suiting. I studied with a graduate student in the College of Music who is enthralled by quantum mechanics and spends his free time reading about physics. Through music he seeks expression, emotional identity, and through science he seeks fulfillment of curiosity, a sense of universal identity; where do we draw these distinctions between art and science anyway? The Engineering Honors Program overflows with an equal abundance of musicians, photographers, dancers, writers as it does of engineers. Even my curricular experiences have softened the boundaries between seemingly-disparate disciplines. The procedural logic that we study in “Literature and Values of Friedrich Nietzsche” is not so essentially different from the logic used in mathematical proof; the expression is much more different than the method itself. All study and curiosity is fundamentally united in being an expression of our humanity, a seeking toward the elementary questions that have probed the human spirit for all time; although the disciplines all approach these things somewhat differently, I believe that the essential yearning is the same. It is not discontinuous or unnatural to have many interests because the disciplines are so similar on a fundamental level. Each individual has a distinct background and desire, their own story, the multitude of which make up the character of the community. If this were not the case, academia would be a drastically different thing than I have found it to be.

The many stories I have observed on the character and fluidity of the academic community have renewed my perspective on the institution entirely, and allowed me to feel secure that my diverse interests could be incorporated into my academic life. Having a single notion of the group was crippling, and had it prevailed much longer would have encouraged me to sacrifice my interests and damage my potential. I am fortunate that the culture of the University of Colorado swept me up, forced me to challenge my ideas, and opened the door for me to engage *all* of who I am.