I am from Northern Indiana, a booming metropolis of entertainment, I know. About as far away from the film and television industries as you can get. Instead of passing skyscrapers and movie sets on my way to school, I drove by horse and buggies (this is not hyperbole, there is literally an Amish community about 15 minutes away from my house). Despite this, from a young age I had a love for animation. When I was younger, this passion manifested in the form of drawing, mostly portraits of characters that I thought were cool, or people who looked a little different to me. I particularly loved drawing old people. You can tell a lot about a person from their face. As I got older and went off to college, I looked for ways to incorporate art and storytelling into my career. I took a few classes in screenwriting, in particularly comedy writing, but my stories always felt difficult to translate into reality with traditional filmmaking methods. I started working for the athletics department at Notre Dame, editing videos for the football team and made my first attempts at VFX and animation. My first creation wasn’t exactly Avatar. It was a 10 second animation of a touchdown pass, with a golden outline of the players painfully keyframed over the course of about a week until I could present it to my boss who said “cool”. A ringing endorsement. It was around that time when I took my first classes in animation, creating 3D modeled characters using Maya and Mudbox and I realized that 3D animation was the best way for me to incorporate my film skills with my artistic background. In particular, I wanted to focus on 3D character modeling in order to one day create my own animated comedy show, however I realized that while I have skills in modeling, editing, and writing, I don’t know how to put them all together, which is why I am looking to further my education in graduate school.

Although my dream is to one day create my own animated tv show, I am applying to OSU partially because of how many faculty members are experienced in video game development. One of the areas that I think film and television is limited is the singularity of its storytelling. Whether it’s a show or a movie, there is one singular storyline, and that storyline is final, all the other potential alternatives the story could take are wiped away. It operates under the philosophy that there is one “correct” story, and I think that philosophy can be wasteful. As someone who has been involved in the writing process before, both in screenwriting classes, and in helping pitch production ideas, I understand how many potential storylines are pitched, yet because of the way movies and shows are structured, only one gets to see the light of day. I think an interesting potential research area would be finding ways to mesh film and video game storytelling, where a character can pursue multiple different storylines depending on what path they choose. An example that I’ve seen done is the Black Mirror Bandersnatch special, where the storyline changes depending on what choices the viewer makes for the main character. Finding ways to blend video game and film styles is something I am very interested in and I think Professor Kyoung Lee Swearingen is someone who would be very helpful in tackling this issue because of her experience in both the film and game animation industries. Not only being able to hear her experiences of how these methods of storytelling differ in the respective industries, but in finding out how she would solve certain problems is something I would look forward to doing. Tackling this issue through 3D modeling and animation is an area I could see myself researching.

I also believe OSU is critical to my continued development in 3D modeling and animation because it would provide me with the technical background that I am currently. For my undergraduate degree, I attended the University of Notre Dame, and while I love Notre Dame, there is only one animation professor at the entire University. I didn’t take my first class in 2D animation the fall semester of my senior year, and I taught myself Maya over winter break because there wasn’t an introductory 3D class offered in the Spring. I never had a thorough instruction in many of the technical aspects of modeling, such as game engines, or other modeling programs outside of Maya and Mudbox, so learning from professors who have experience working with these programs in a professional setting would be crucial for my growth as a creator.

Finally, I know that OSU is well positioned to enhance my growth because of how many faculty members specialize in areas of animation that I am not particularly familiar with. I have experience in character modeling however, I haven’t done much work in spatial design or world building, which is essential to storytelling in both film and video games. Professor Addy would be someone that I would be interested in working with, as I think learning about how to create realistic immersive environments is a skill that would translate well over into the world of film and game creation. Working with Professor Matheny would also greatly enhance the work I am able to create. From my experience in sports production and in filmmaking on my own, I understand the importance of lighting in creating mood and emotion for any production, animation included. Understanding how lighting works in a composition and how it affects the viewer is something I have wanted to research for a while and researching at OSU would allow me to do so. The diversity of expertise within the department would complement the skills I already have and form me into a much more well-rounded modeler and animator.

My junior year I took a documentary film class called Barn Stories. The goal of the class was to create a documentary about a building on campus (I’m not really sure why it was called Barn Stories), and my building was Notre Dame Stadium. I had seen about 9 million videos about Notre Dame Stadium and how great it was, so I focused on the ushers of the stadium and in particular, an old man named Mack. Up until we interviewed Mack, our usher stories consisted of everything from meeting Bon Jovi to fans trying to sneak full sized salmon into the stadium, but Mack was different. When we asked him what his favorite memory of being an usher was, he told us about how just last year his wife had died. That week, some of the other ushers took him to the grotto, where students who had met Mack at games were waiting for him to help lift him up. I will never forget hearing that story and then seeing the reactions of other people hearing it for the first time at the film festival. Being able to create that type of emotion with other people really made me proud of what I had created and ever since then, I have strived to do that in all my creative work. Whether it be through laughter, tears, or joy, being able to connect with someone else on an emotional level is what I want all of my creative work to achieve, and I believe that because of the diversity in teaching experiences offered, the ability to learn technical skills, and the numerous research areas available, Ohio State will allow me to do so.