

Sydney Vo
EDUC 251
Jondoue Chen
February 11, 2026

Week 06 Reflection

I grew up in Everett near Casino Road and Airport Road. A lot of people describe Everett with negative stereotypes, but for me it was just where I went to school and spent most of my time. I attended Mariner High School, which did not always have the same resources as other schools in the area. My AP Calculus BC class only had four students, and I was the only junior. We were never sure if the class would continue because enrollment was low. Many students around me worked part-time jobs after school or helped support their families. Advanced classes existed, but they were limited, and sometimes students had to advocate just to keep them available.

At Mariner, people talked openly about real responsibilities. Some classmates relied on food banks or government assistance, and that shaped how they approached school. Success did not always look traditional. Students balanced academics with work, family responsibilities, and financial stress. At the time, I thought this was normal because it was the environment I knew. I did not realize how different it felt compared to other schools until I started spending more time outside Everett.

Things changed when I began traveling into Seattle alone for programs and opportunities. Taking the bus and light rail felt like a big step toward independence. At the same time, I noticed differences between myself and students from more resourced areas. Many of them had access to activities like debate, coding camps, or competitive math from a young age. They seemed more

comfortable speaking in professional or academic settings. I sometimes felt behind, not because I lacked ability, but because I had not been exposed to the same opportunities earlier.

During a trip to Washington, D.C., I also noticed how economic differences can be visible in physical spaces. On a layover in Chicago, one neighborhood looked well-funded while another nearby area looked neglected. That moment made me think about how history and policy shape communities over time. It reminded me of Everett and how certain areas receive fewer resources or attention. Seeing that helped me understand that class differences are not just personal experiences. They are connected to larger systems that influence education, housing, and opportunity.

The course readings helped me connect these experiences to broader ideas. Research shows that economic stress can affect how students experience school and achievement (Evans et al., 2011). That reflects what I saw among classmates balancing work and academics. Data about the American middle class also explains why people in different financial situations may still describe themselves in similar ways, even when their access to resources is very different (Kochhar, 2024). Another article discusses how many people with higher incomes still identify as middle class, which can make class differences harder to recognize or talk about openly (Aleem, 2015). These ideas helped me better understand why moving between Everett and UW sometimes feels like moving between very different environments.

Being at UW has made me more aware of how my background shaped me. I notice differences in resources, expectations, and experiences among students, especially in the field of computer science. But I also recognize the strengths I gained from where I grew up, and how it contributed positively to my character. My experiences taught me to adapt, to advocate for

myself, and to value opportunities when they appear. I've met and interacted with people from different economic spheres, and widely different upbringings. But instead of seeing my background as a disadvantage, I now see it as part of my perspective and definitely something that influences how I approach education and community. Having lived through these experiences, I hope to lead with even more patience, empathy, and altruism.

References

- Aleem, Z. (2015, February 3). *Why do so many rich people think they're in the middle class?* MIC.
- Evans, G. W., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Klebanov, P. K. (2011). *Stressing out the poor: Chronic physiological stress and the income-achievement gap.* Pathways.
- Kochhar, R. (2024). *The state of the American middle class: Who is in it and key trends from 1970 to 2023.* Pew Research Center.