



## TRAVEL

### **“Extra Page”**

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YOU’VE GIVEN ME ONE MORE PAGE to tell you about myself. Just one. There are only eight boxes for extra-curricular activities, only three lines to tell about my summers, just over two inches to write a note to my future roommate, and only one page to fill in all the holes, to color in all the blank space. Unfortunately both for me and for you, entire lives don’t fit into boxes and personalities can’t be completely sketched on paper. I have to do my best to show you who I am, and you have to do your best to find me in all this black ink. So, best of luck to you. As for me, I will write just one more page and hope it gives you a clearer image of who I really am.

You have noticed, I’m sure, my list of extra-curricular activities. What you can’t see is the struggle that went into compiling that list. For one thing, my practice list was comprised of far more than eight activities, so I was forced to group things together and to leave things out. Every summer and winter, I travel with my youth group on a service trip, sometimes within this country, other times around the world.



The summer before my freshman year and again two years later, we spent two weeks in Costa Rica, living with families there and working both helping build a renovation on a church there and playing with children in a refugee settlement called Pavas. The year in between, we ran a day camp for underprivileged children in San Antonio, Texas, and the summer before my junior year, we did various kinds of service in Columbus, Ohio. For our winter trips, we have done urban outreach in New York City and in Miami, trying to use those experiences to help our downtown church improve its outreach ministries. My service experience with church goes beyond these trips twice a year, though. I spend several evenings each year volunteering in the homeless shelter in my church's gym both with youth group and with my family. We also go as a family each year early on Christmas morning to serve breakfast at the shelter and celebrate the holiday with the guests. These are pieces of the categories I call "Central Presbyterian Church youth group" and "Community Service" that I didn't have space for in the box, but that mean a lot to me and play huge roles in my life.

Another experience that I haven't found a space for is the Maine Coast Semester, the four months I spent on Chewonki Neck in Maine during the fall of my junior year. Although my essay provides one snapshot of the experience, it cannot possibly speak to everything the semester meant to me. Moving out of my family's house and into a cabin with six girls my own age was extremely exciting for me, and what I found when I got there was even better than what I had expected. It was a place I could relate to. In science class, we would learn to identify the trees and wildlife that were living just outside our cabins. In the afternoon, working on the farm, we would lovingly tend the animals and plants that we would then harvest, prepare in the kitchen, and eat. Each of us realized our connection to every other member of the Chewonki community and to the land itself, and learned to be responsible with that connection. When I was assigned to collect recyclables before breakfast for my morning chore, I showed up just as promptly and with just as much energy as when my chore was to milk the cows or to clean the bathrooms. Similarly, when a teacher asked me to read an assignment for homework, I got it done, not simply because I wanted to keep a good grade, but because the entire class depended on each person's individual preparation in order to have rich, meaningful discussion.



Coming home, I realized that here, too, I was connected to my community. Although it is larger than the one in Maine, I still have the same responsibility to those around me, and will have that responsibility to whatever community I am part of for the rest of my life. In my daily life, just like on my service trips, I try to look for chances to benefit something greater than myself. In college, I look forward to becoming part of a new community, and figuring out how to find my niche, so that I can serve that community as well as be served by it.

### ANALYSIS

Lauren makes perfect use of the extra page offered on the Stanford application by addressing topics that weren't fully fleshed out elsewhere. The first paragraph is a little risky because there is such limited space and often it doesn't work to write about something not related to the main topic of the essay. For many students, a seemingly unrelated topic can become a tangent that doesn't add much and that consumes valuable real estate. However, because Lauren is a skilled writer, she pulls it off, and she demonstrates her personality through the introduction. She uses creative phrasing such as, "Entire lives don't fit into boxes and personalities can't be completely sketched on paper." She also demonstrates her sense of humor writing, "So, best of luck to you." The humor isn't over the top but comes across as a friendly, slightly irreverent challenge.

As Lauren progresses into describing her activities, she smartly focuses on those that she was not able to fully explain elsewhere in the application. In her synopsis of the Central Presbyterian Church youth group, she writes about specific contributions she made with the homeless shelter. It always helps to give examples with details of defined individual contributions. This fills out her experiences and gives context to what she's done. Another approach might have been to provide greater detail about one specific activity rather than list the many community service projects that she worked on through the church.

When writing about living on Chewonki Neck in Maine, Lauren describes not just what she did, but the greater knowledge she gained from the experience. As the reader, you can easily detect her genuine interest in learning and you can almost feel her excitement in studying the wildlife and trees outside their cabins or growing her own food. This authentic passion for learning is one that admissions officers admire and want to see in students who are admitted, and the way that Lauren presents this seems natural and not forced.

Finally, Lauren draws a connection between her experience with the church and the Chewonki community by explaining how one allowed