

Coming from Beijing, China, many would assume that my family is well off financially. However, the reality of financing an international education has presented a very significant challenge. My parents devoted their 15 years of savings to fund my tuition, an immense sacrifice which deeply influenced how I approached my education. With such financial constraints, I have always had to think critically about money, limiting my spending strictly to rent and meals. This economic hardship brought daily anxiety, but it also motivated me to persevere and adapt, channeling my struggles into opportunities for growth.

The financial challenges drove me to seek scholarships, but many were inaccessible to international students, and the few I applied for never yielded results. Determined to alleviate this burden, I found two university jobs: one as a lab assistant in the ECE department and the other working under Professor Jeff Erickson to develop an autograder for our university's algorithms course. Balancing these jobs with my academic commitments taught me resilience and time management while giving me valuable technical experience.

This hardship was painful—I vividly recall countless nights spent grinding through coursework and research, fueled by a determination to make the most of my education and honor my parents' sacrifices. Yet, this period of intense effort also shaped my academic journey. The need to venture into various areas of knowledge and skill acquisition not only ensured that I received maximum value from my education but also aided me in discovering my real interests. While following this path, I acquired great interest in programming languages, compiler, and operating systems, which eventually became the backbone of my research ambitions.

These experiences have also deepened my empathy for others who face barriers to higher education. Having negotiated these challenges myself, I understand how financial and structural obstacles can limit opportunities for capable students. My personal journey has inspired me to contribute in whatever ways I can to creating more equitable pathways for others, whether through mentoring, research, or future teaching.

Overall, these financial challenges have been a source of anxiety yet a strong motivation on my path. They have urged me to work harder, create opportunities for self-improvement, and therefore expand the skill set that is informative of my research aspirations today. This experience has influenced me to this day as a student and a researcher, which taught me to use my education to create opportunities for others facing similar hardships.