**UC ESSAY 7**

**What have you done to make your school or community a better place?**

Academic excellence was ALWAYS a priority and a metric for success in my school. Excellence in nonacademic related activities such as sports and arts were of low priority.

Students with good grades were favored over who did well or showed talent in sports and arts. Those without good grades were often labelled “un-gifted” and were advised to spend more time studying instead of pursuing their respective talents.

It was frustrating to see this subtle form of segregation in my school especially when I was on the receiving end of this unfair treatment as well. My passion is in swimming and as I was participating in several national and international swimming competition, I was spending lots of time training.

With the desire for fair treatment, I was determined to change the perspective of the school towards students who are inclined towards the sports and arts. The school should be a place where it is safe for students to freely develop their passion in both academic and nonacademic related activities.

Realizing that individual efforts weren’t enough, I gathered fellow sports and arts enthusiasts, banded together, and organized awareness events throughout the school-year on the benefits of sports and arts on academics and vice versa. To draw the attention of the stakeholders: students, parents and teachers, the events were held before school assembly, after school during student pick-ups, report card day, etc.

After months of perseverance, changes started to happen. Fellow students became more open towards their interests outside of academics, parents started requesting more sports and arts-related activities, and the teachers were more focused on developing well-rounded students.

Today, as I walk through my school entrance, I can see a swimming pool with lanes, I can see a proper sized basketball courts even though it’s an outdoors court, and I can even see rooms being prepared for paintings and various music instruments (apparently a lot of students have different music skills). Our school has finally started promoting both academic and non-academic extracurriculars!!

Even though I may not have a chance to fully reap the fruits of our labor, I am delighted that I was able to lead a change in my school. I finally understand that change does not have to be dramatic. A small change can too, create a domino effect that would lead to a significant change.