Academic Goals

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I just turned 18 a few days ago, and that milestone isn’t just an entry into adulthood, but a marker of the 13 years I have spent in school. Education is such an important part of our lives. As I embark on the next chapter of learning, I want to reflect on my time in the public school system, how those experiences shaped me, and what my future academic goals are.

From kindergarten through twelve grade, I was a student in the North Carolina Public School System. My last two years were definitely my most formative, because I attended a STEM-focused public residential high school. I got to interact in an academic and social context with motivated students from across the state, opening my mind to how lucky I had been in my educational experience. Hearing from students coming from rural areas about being underfunded and under-resourced in school was my first “key moment”. Those interactions taught me to be appreciative of my education, and I realized that not everyone had access to the same opportunities as I did. My big takeaway was that I needed to always put forth my best effort and take advantage of those opportunities so hopefully one day I would be in a position to give back. My next key moment was as a student on a local robotics team. Through a fun and engaging setting, I learned about the teamwork and expertise needed to pursue a career in robotics. Years of collaborative and outside-of-the-box thinking while on this robotics team taught me that education doesn’t just happen at school, but rather is balanced by learning soft skills in team settings. My goal after that experience was to continue involving myself in my community and seek more team-based projects in the future. My final key moment was the day I walked across the stage at graduation. I vowed to have a positive mindset that took all of the lessons I learned in school and applied them to university. I wanted to make sure that I took full advantage of everything before me in order to become the best person I could be. So far at UTD, I believe that I have lived up to those expectations.

Being in an environment of higher education is tricky because my definitions of “education” are shifting. No longer is success in school based off of how many AP classes you take, but rather on GPA, research positions, internships, and later, your career. Although learning paths diverge significantly after high school, education can still be defined by: the process of giving and receiving necessary skills in order to benefit the learner and their community in the future. My personal path to becoming educated will likely involve graduate school and then a career in tech, but that looks different for everyone.

Now that I’ve defined what education means to me, it is necessary to lay the groundwork for educational success by defining my goals. First of all, I plan on graduating from UTD in four years with a degree in Computer Science and with no debt. While everyone has a different take on financing higher education, my personal view is that I shouldn’t go into debt in order to get an undergraduate degree. Dr. Long at McGill University shares my concern about the cost of university and endorses a model where the government is the sole provider of loans (Long, 2018). This is a very pressing issue for many young people in the world, but luckily I am at UTD on full scholarship and have the incredible chance to focus on my studies rather than worry about working a full-time job. My next goal is to obtain internships in the field of robotics in order to propel myself into a great graduate school. To fulfill this goal, I am pursuing job opportunities in the summers and doing a study abroad within the next few years. Although many of my personal goals revolve around my current major or Computer Science, another important ambition of mine is to stay true to myself. If I find myself not enjoying CS, I want to make sure I have the courage to take care of myself and adjust my goals. Within the major of CS, research has shown that most major changes happen early in the semester, and are often the result of improper goal-setting (Peteranetz et. al., 2018). I will also keep an eye out for my peers during the early stages of the year in order to support them in the CS major.

Most of my life has been spent in school up to this point, but as educational paths start diverging after high school, I am beginning to understand how much more control I have over my future. Setting goals, sticking them, and adjusting when needed is a crucial part of educational success, and I can’t wait to see where it will take me.

References

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