WRITING SUPPLEMENT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Writing Questions

Themes   4. "Culture is what presents us with the kinds of valuable things that can fill a life. And insofar as we can recognize the value in those things and make them part of our lives, our lives are meaningful." Gideon Rosen, Stuart Professor of Philosophy, chair of the Council of the Humanities and director of the Program in Humanistic Studies, Princeton University.

Essay

Culture for the Uncultured

I am the son of Chinese immigrants. I cannot speak my mother tongue, nor do I have any memories of my homeland. I have never met my grandparents, nor is there a farm, out on the countryside, where my ancestors once lived. I do not celebrate the Chinese New Year. I do not read Chinese literature. I know nothing about the arts, politics, mores, vernacular, or religions of my race.

I am a resident of North America. Half of my life was spent in the United States, the other half in Canada. I am not Christian. I do not celebrate any holidays. I follow neither hockey nor baseball; I prefer a game of soccer instead. During the World Cup, I supported Germany.

Instead of a regional or racial culture, my sense of humanity comes from the culture of computer science. There are no religions, but programmers swear by their text editor (Vim above all!) or operating system. As for arts, optimized algorithms and elegant computer code will receive much more admiration from me than anything in the Louvre will. With social customs comes the formation of stereotypes, and, as a glasses-wearing teenager who is absolutely engrossed with his laptop at all times, I am their manifestation.

Regional cultures are not chosen, but adopted, and one usually assimilates to the surroundings that they are born into. For cultures of interests, however, I found the one that suited me the best. When I was younger, I never pestered my parents with "kid questions" like "How does the stereo work?" or "How do I fold the best paper airplane?" Instead, I just asked to dissect the stereo, or for a stack of paper to fold. An internet connection, a laptop, an inquisitiveness for the world around you, and an eagerness to figure out how it all works form the only barriers to entering the field of computer science if you're willing to learn it on your own, and I was. A few hours spent in internet tutorials ignited a high school career filled with writing programs and studying algorithms.

Computer science forms a large part of my identity, much more than any regional culture, and I genuinely love the field. My friends joke that I've become a hermit, spending all day shut in my room programming. My teachers understand how much computer science means to me, and show me activities and competitions where I can combine it with biology, physics, and other subjects that they teach. I lecture about computer science almost every week, as the leader of the computer science club at school, and train other students to succeed in the field. I wrote this essay in mostly one sitting, taking breaks in between paragraphs to compete in programming contests or to append a few lines of code to a side project. Or rather, to write this essay, I took breaks from a life dedicated to computer science.

Extracurricular activities or work experiences

On Thursdays after school, I stop being a student and turn into a teacher. As the leader of the computer science club, I conduct contests and train other students with programming. Sometimes, they'll ask me questions on a concept that I was sure I had already mastered, only to see it in a different light. There are other times where I'll see them deep in discussion about the contest problems that I've written. It's rewarding to see a student grow from

a total novice who didn't know a lick of code to the winner of city-wide junior programming contests, as I give back to a community that has provided so much for me.

Last two summers

I had only two goals for Summer 2015. I spent half of Summer 2015 training in competitive programming on websites such as Topcoder, Codeforces, WCIPEG, DMOJ, SPOJ, UVaOJ, Project Euler, AOPS, and Codechef. The other half was spent studying for my SATs, raising a score from the 2000's to 2300+. Hopefully, my skills in computer science raised similarly.

Summer 2014 was more varied. I volunteered at a nursing home and delivered newspapers in my neighborhood. After an online course with Linux, I made the switch to Arch Linux and now use it full time. On Arch, I familiarized myself with Vim, Android programming, and web development through more online courses.

Your favorite book and its author:	The Long Walk, Richard Bachman
Your favorite movie:	Gattaca
Your favorite website:	codeforces.com
Two adjectives your friends would use to describe you:	Mathematical and self-effacing.
Your favorite recording:	Hello Internet
Your favorite keepsake or memento:	A crayon from a boy that I chaperoned at a school event.
Your favorite source of inspiration:	Most of my eureka moments are in the shower.
Your favorite word:	Optimal
Your favorite line from a movie or book and its title:	"Do Panic." - The Hitchhiker's Guide to Programming Contests