My name is David Jefts. I am 18 years old, I graduated from high school, and I am already struggling to cover tuition for my first two years of college. My parents and I have been saving for college since I was 4, and I can cover about 1 more year of school with our savings. My parents struggle to afford tuition as they make too much money to be eligible for FAFSA, and not enough to be able to afford college tuition. Therefore my only hope is to apply to and earn scholarships like this one. I am an ambitious student and graduated in the top 15% of an extremely competitive class. I am now attending Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, and my first semester cost me $12,411.

School has always been fairly easy for me and I feel the key to achieving my dreams, so I have taken advanced courses throughout my educational career. Through elementary and middle school I was part of the QUEST Program, a program for gifted, talented, and creative students such as myself. All of this was to prepare myself for rigorous college work. To reduce my tuition costs, I have been taking AP courses since freshman year and college classes since before my junior year, even sacrificing a summer to take Astronomy at my local community college. The Computer Science courses offered at my high school, one of which was AP, helped me realize my passion and natural ability for coding, a relief since I have never been good with writing English. Due to the number of college-level courses I took before college, I was able to enter Embry-Riddle with 48 credits, 29 of which were usable for my degree program. Even with this demanding course load, I stuck with my passions of piano, swimming, and helping out those around me. I successfully worked to become captain of Vista Ridge High School’s Varsity Swimming & Diving team my senior year of high school, and volunteered regularly; helping out at community events, doing piano performances for local retirement homes, and serving as a volunteer swim coach for my summer league team. I was a part of my local National Honor Society chapter in high school and completed multiple community service projects through them.

School was not the only thing I focused on. Probably because of my mom’s genes, I picked up swimming quickly around freshman year when said mother forced my stubborn self into it. I quickly realized how much fun it was, and put all of my effort into it, hoping to be able to join my high school team. Sophomore year, I succeeded and made it, and throughout the next two years quickly improved in both technique and speed. During my last year in high school, I joined a club team outside of school, and doubled my practices and effort. It all paid off in the end, as I became captain of the swim team, and managed to not go a single swim meet, for either team, without making at least one time improvement. Through swimming, I learned how to push myself even when spent. I am used to waking up early and have the discipline to get up and do what I need to regardless of how tired I am. I have met a myriad of people and learned to deal and get along with all sorts of personalities. I have had countless great experiences while on the swim team and have met some amazing people. I have grown personally and have had so many successes while swimming. The people I have met and the experiences I have had will stay with me forever, and I will continue to use the values I have learned to help me for the rest of my life. The hope of all this effort was to hopefully create another way to earn scholarships, but alas nothing has happened yet.

Currently I am a part of the Embry-Riddle Swim Club, and will be attending a meet with them in November. I am working with the ERAU Microgravity Club to create an underwater ice sampler for NASA's 2018 MicroG NExT Challenge. I am also a member of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE) and the ERAU chapter of The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineer (IEEE) national programs. Next semester, after I finish getting acclimated to the rigor of college, I plan to join a fraternity to become even more involved with my university.

My ultimate goal is to become a software engineer for NASA, SpaceX, or a similar organization determined to expand our frontiers and explore the heavens above us. I have always imagined myself being one of the engineers who is able to figure out how to send a man where no man has gone before, or creating ‘spinoffs’ in areas such as computer technology, environment and agriculture, health and medicine, public safety, transportation, recreation, and industrial productivity that revolutionize home life. I am attending the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in order to earn a baccalaureate degree in Computer Science and/or Software Programming, and I plan to minor in Astrophysics and Applied Mathematics. Astronomy has long been a passion of mine, and math and science have always been my forté. By pursuing Astrophysics as a minor, I hope to get an edge on other NASA and SpaceX applicants because I will not only have an expansive computer science knowledge base and experience with software programming, but I will come in with lots of experience with many of the things NASA and SpaceX employees deal with on a daily basis. My parents have been the greatest people for my education. They always push me to do better and praise my successes and help me fix my failures. I would not have the grades and test scores I have without their help. If I were to receive this scholarship, it would greatly help my dreams and aspirations cease to be just imaginary as it would reduce my guaranteed high-interest student loans and allow me be able to fully realize my childhood dream of working at NASA.