Kim Hancock
Personal Statement
Assessing the barriers to access for Women Information Entrepreneurs in rural India

My interest in Indian culture began in perhaps the most American of ways—studio yoga classes. Glimpses of Hinduism were shown through chakra posters, Sanskrit posture names, and plumes of incense. It was only when I participated in a yoga teacher training and learned about yoga's history, such as its roots in the *Vedas*, that I began questioning how western yoga is practiced and capitalized on. Why did we spend just one day rushing through the story of the Bhagavad Gita while many were spent on how to make ourselves more marketable as teachers?

Fast forward three years to a very different setting. I am sitting in the front row of the Republic Day parade in New Delhi with my friend Drishti. We had woken up at 4am, yet when we arrived couldn't see anything past the dense wall of people that had engulfed us. Drishti comes from a military family, so she spoke to an officer in an effort to get us closer, then asked me to introduce myself in Hindi. After just a few words (I was only 3 weeks into my Hindi classes!), the officer led us through the crowd to a section in the front. Yet, my now perfect view of the military tanks and soldiers only made me feel I didn't have the background to be there.

In both of these situations—my yoga training and the parade—I was left with an uneasy feeling at my core, caused by my own lack of knowledge in what I was engaging in. The training made me realize how the history of yoga is diluted to make it more palatable for a western audience; it is a double-edged sword since western instructors have capitalized most on studio yoga. The parade was one small example of many where I witnessed the special treatment being a white American woman in India grants me. Throughout my time in Delhi, I realized that dissolving this unease was simple: establishing a routine filled with lunch conversations on campus about the Delhi elections, getting *momos* with the teaching fellows at the elementary school I volunteered for, and Sunday evening Satsang at the nearby yoga studio.

My computer science research at Bowdoin is focused on social networks, analyzing large sets of user data from Facebook to improve the algorithms used in online social networks that target individuals for ads. The reason I bring up this project is because I became more interested in why people care about this type of analysis in the first place than I was in the nitty gritty mathematical abstraction. With my tendency to over-extrapolate ideas by stringing them together to find the "bigger picture," I started to think about how technology can be pictured as a series of networks built atop the fabric of society, but used within the underlying social structure. Inequity of digital access is a part of this structure that I engaged in through a club I lead mentoring students living in Portland's subsidized housing community. I spend more time helping the students with using computers and smartphones than anything else.

Throughout college, I have focused on two academic interests—computer science and Asian Studies. I attribute these seemingly disparate interests to my parents. My father is a mathematician and has always pushed my siblings and I towards pursuing a career in STEM. My mother's work with refugee communities shaped my desire to learn about other cultures, which was especially impactful given the homogeneity of the town where I have lived my whole life. Finding the threads of connection between the two has led me to my proposed project, which would allow me to broaden both perspectives. And finally, while I am still unsure of whether it is my place to be teaching yoga, I have come to view my practice as my own evolving spirituality marked by continuous self-reflection and pursuit of understanding in all parts of my life.