PERSONAL STATEMENT
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Assessing the barriers to access for Women Information Entrepreneurs in rural India
Every Tuesday and Thursday in 7th grade, I would stay after school for math team practice then immediately after go to dance classes. On days when I had math team meets, I would arrive late to dance. However, I was embarrassed by my inner 'mathlete' and never wanted to tell anyone why I was late. This childhood predicament speaks to a broader tension between my interests, much of which I get from my parents. My father is a mathematician and has always encouraged my siblings and me to pursue a career in STEM. My mother, on the other hand, has always encouraged my extracurriculars in the performing arts; further, her work with refugee communities shaped my desire to learn about other cultures.

Coming to college, I naturally rebelled against the expectation that I study mathematics, despite how much I enjoy it. Subsequently, I have prioritized taking many classes beyond my majors in computer science and math. My first year I took an anthropology course focusing on Indian culture, which I came into with a strong background in yoga. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the glimpses of Hinduism I saw through chakra posters, Sanskrit posture names, and plumes of incense. It was only when I read about yoga's roots in the *Vedas* that I began questioning how western yoga is practiced and marketed. Ultimately, the course sparked a much broader interest in South Asian studies that now extends well beyond yoga.

Fast forward three years, where I am in New Delhi, sitting in the front row of the Republic Day parade with my friend Drishti. We had woken up at 4am, yet when we arrived we 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 abroad program!), the officer led us through the crowd to a section in the front. However, my now perfect view of the military tanks and soldiers only made me feel uneasy being there as a non-Indian citizen.

In that setting, I felt tension due to my own lack of knowledge about what I was engaging in. The parade was one small example of many where I witnessed the special treatment being a white American woman in India grants me. But, I found that dissolving this tension was simple: establishing a routine filled with conversations about the Delhi elections with my classmates, getting *momos* with the teaching fellows at the elementary school where I volunteered, and going to Sunday evening Satsang at a nearby yoga studio.

In the years leading up to my study abroad experience, the aforementioned tension between my interests also dissolved as I pushed myself to find the connections between them. For instance, my computer science research at Bowdoin is about social networks, analyzing large sets of user data from Facebook. I have become more interested in the sociological side of this, which I looked at in a project for my Indian Modern Politics course focusing on the pros and cons of the proliferation of WhatsApp. In addition, one of the most rewarding parts of my work mentoring students living in Portland's subsidized housing community is helping them use computers, as the study center is the only place many students have access to them.

While my interest in South Asian studies stemmed from the side of me that grew up performing and wanting to learn more about people, I no longer think of it as separate from my love for mathematics and computer science. Rather than perceiving my broad range of interests as tension, I see it as what makes my skill set unique. In the future, I hope to study computer science from an anthropological lens by addressing issues such as algorithmic bias and digital access rights, ultimately working towards making digital technology more equitable for all.