

I entered college to study preventive medicine, drawn to its principle of preemptive care. While studying preventive medicine had enriched me substantially, I came to understand that my deepest aptitude lay not in biomedical scholarship, but in formal reasoning and reflective thinking, which are capacities that technical education largely bypasses. I had to choose between excelling at what institutions are inclined to measure and pursuing what I believed an undergraduate path was meant for: developing intellectual agency and character, as the capacity to do the right thing.

My undergraduate years were marked by a deliberate choice to follow what I consider a particular *moral obligation* for anyone who esteems higher education as a timeless privilege: to honor undergraduate study as a sanctuary for discovery and change. Propelled by such insights, I poured myself into leading university media services, mentoring peers, and serving on the Student Committee, not as diversions from my learning goals, but as the very heart of my education. During this time, I developed a profound respect for college years as a crucial period for young adults. It's a space where they can engage in genuine apprenticeship to great ideas and pause to gain new perspectives. I learned to pose daring questions and seek answers without guarantees. I experienced the art of creating things that others can use. And I learned to identify gaps in my experience and integrate new knowledge with humility. My academic record reflects these priorities honestly, not as a deficit to explain away, but as evidence of conscious efforts in dimensions of growth that go beyond grade sheets: leadership, communication, and the formation of self. This task of *becoming intelligent* is especially acute for those of us privileged enough to attend well-resourced institutions.

I recognize that my undergraduate grades do not fully reflect my academic potential. Indeed, I understand that rigorous research and scholarship demand sustained scholarly discipline. This realization guided my graduate work at NYU and my resolve to pursue further study balancing liberty and resilience.

Higher education should be a means to self-fulfillment that is accessible and meaningful to everyone. College should invite each person to discover their strengths and pursue a life of dignity, even when such growth resists quantification. This conviction shapes my understanding of diversity and inclusion as practice, not abstraction: holding space for overlooked voices, respecting non-traditional paths to knowledge, and meeting people where they are. My own journey taught me to accept the varied ways people arrive at insight and determination, and I am ready to bring this sensibility to my research, teaching, and collegial relationships.