

Personal History Statement

My parents' combined income as physicians at state-owned hospitals in Vietnam has been far from sufficient to cover my college tuition. The financial strain is even greater now with their recent retirements. However, I have obtained additional financial aid on top of Colby's generous assistance by consistently staying in the top 5% of my class since my first year at Colby and, more recently, being the highest-ranking student. Moreover, I have been working as a teaching assistant and tutor for various physics and mathematics courses, which has further offset costs and allowed me to discover my interests in teaching and science communication. Through this role, I have learned about how students' backgrounds can shape their paths in science and mathematics. As a result, I have been increasingly interested in my upcoming role as a graduate teaching assistant in helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed academically.

I am not eligible for most REU opportunities due to my status as an international student. However, my interest in physics motivated me to utilize the research opportunities available. I began research as early as my second semester at Colby and worked on my first project before sophomore year. This provided me with a strong foundation necessary for research internships where I would further develop my skills despite the hindrances preceding each opportunity. In 2019, my JQI internship was cut short due to a delay in OPT processing. However, it was ultimately successful because I proactively communicated with the research group about my project before starting. This March, the Perimeter Institute postponed their research program indefinitely due to the pandemic. Determined to make the most out of the circumstance, I began my Mathematics Thesis while remaining in contact with my advisor at Perimeter. As a result, by the time the program restarted in May, I had done significant work for my thesis and had adequate preparation for my project at Perimeter. Through these adversities, I learned to face unpredictable circumstances with persistence. I also learned a great deal about obtaining research experience as an international student in the US. This knowledge allows me to advise international underclassmen at Colby on the process.

From interacting with students at Colby and research peers, I know that even my biggest hurdles are merely inconveniences for some. I have been incredibly fortunate because Colby, JQI, and Perimeter have provided me with inclusive and encouraging environments in which I could pursue my interest in physics. At the University of Washington and beyond, I would like to pay it forward by emulating such an environment for my peers and future students.

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