

Before my summer program starts, I'm in a New York apartment, ten Brazilians and I, in front of the TV. We're hugging each other. Our team, Fluminense, just beat Liverpool (inexplicably an Uruguayan team) in their best performance of the season. If a stranger walked in, they would have no idea I had met everyone just an hour before.

Walking to the unknown address, I surprise myself. I had seen photos of the NY Fluminense fan group on Instagram, and — facing two nights alone in Manhattan — sent a message to the account. It didn't strike me as bold, then, walking into a group that's already shared seasons together, the youngest by almost a decade. But I knew an earlier version of myself would have hesitated to go, or wouldn't have gone at all.

I had a different mindset two years ago: I had just founded NutryBrasil with a friend, which started as an Instagram account where we posted recipes for healthy meals on tight budgets. In recent years, Brazil's health crisis has come to resemble that of the US, so we wanted to explore how possible it was to eat well at varying price points. Our account started gaining visibility, but with followers of varying ages and backgrounds, one page alone wasn't enough. We wanted to start an app that could generate lists of personalized menus and recipes. We just needed a mentor to guide us.

Before pitching the idea to potential health and tech collaborators, though, I spent summer break interning at an investment fund to learn more about the ins-and outs of _____. I did interesting research there — I analyzed the performance of companies in the car-rental sector, and my work was used to make investment decisions — but it gave me a different sense of professionalism than what I needed for a startup. There, I needed to be formal to be taken seriously, but with small nutrition companies, the same behavior made me look like an outsider. At my first pitch, determined to give the perfect presentation, I confronted a room of impatient health executives.

“We have varieties of recipes on-hand and categorized by price-point,” I said.

I looked up at the conference room. Everyone was staring at the table.

“Each recipe corresponds to one of six daily meals.”

A woman in the front pulled out her phone.

It didn't take long to notice the trend: the more I tried to “sell” our idea, the less companies paid attention, and once I lost their interest, I increased my intensity. If I wanted to make a partnership, I needed to treat potential partners like teammates working towards the same goal.

Realizing this, I changed my approach for the third pitch, with SuporteSaude. I loosened up, made jokes, and asked everyone what motivated them to work in healthcare. And only then, allowing the personal to shine through, could I best deliver the idea I spent so long crafting. It turned out SuporteSaude was constructing a similar app, and recognizing our determination, they offered guidance. I spent the next four months working alongside the SuporteSaude team, creating new content and troubleshooting design issues with a nutritionist and a programmer.

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The app is finally available to download, and I've been speaking at public elementary schools to raise awareness about health issues. And slowly, as I work to bring the organization to new heights, I feel my perspective shifting along with it.

The person I learned to access during pitches is the same person that can make friends with a group of strangers in New York, and the same person that strives to spend the next four years abroad. I know I'll come back — for reasons beyond myself, the value of my education feels tied to the prospect of making an impact at home — but until I get to that point, I

welcome the opportunity to throw myself into new places and new disciplines, to feel productively out of my element.

I've always been drawn to mysterious things. That's why when my tour guide offered me a baguette-sized worm that he'd macheted from the rotten bark of an Amazonian tree — I just swallowed it. I can't tell you precisely what it tasted like, but as Simba would say, it was "slimy, yet — satisfying."

My curiosity for the taste of turu tree worms is the natural byproduct of a lifelong desire to get to the bottom of things both known and unknown. The origins of this fascination can be traced back to my kitchen, next to my mother, a trained chemical engineer-turned-professional ice cream taster and maker of chocolate.

Since age three, I would watch my mother grind roasted cocoa beans into a powder, mixing it with precise measurements of milk and cocoa butter and meticulously setting everything into creative molds. It wasn't enough for her to read about chocolate-making — she had to learn to make it herself, step-by-step and with her own spin, a characteristic I must have inherited. When I was old enough to join, I could sense the complexity of the process, realizing even something as ordinary as chocolate — which I never thought twice about while in grocery stores — could have a puzzle-like quality to its creation.

Our home chocolate laboratory undoubtedly shaped my view of learning. On one hand, it's the kind of courageous learning that takes place when I jump headfirst into the unknown, like eating an Amazonian tree worm. But more often, it's the sense of wonder and surprise that comes with a deeper exploration of the banal and ubiquitous, finding new meaning or new discoveries in unexpected places.

This kind of thinking, balanced between noticing the unusual as well as the typical, is what led me to fall in love with Escape Rooms. Over the past few years, I've become completely absorbed with the mental puzzles these rooms present, which force participants to grapple with the minutiae around them to expose variables that ultimately allow for escape. I loved that a humdrum-seeming room, with just a few props inside, could have secrets to uncover and a compelling story to unravel. That's why a year ago, I invited my peers into the excitement and founded Enigma, Inc., a group at school dedicated to code-breaking of all kinds.

As a team, we research the puzzle-making process by going to escape rooms together, often three or four times a month. We maintain a log of all of the coolest conundrums, which we use to create our own. Our biggest job to date was building an escape room for the entire school at prom in just under 14 hours. Outside of time constraints, we faced a number of challenges while trying to balance the intricacies of implementing physical quandaries with an intriguing storyline to engage our peers. We got to work, reverse-engineering rooms and puzzles we had done with the group while adding subtle details that only those willing to examine their environment carefully would find. In the end, we placed cards in a deck that weighed slightly more than others, which once discovered, would form a password that opened a vault, revealing the stolen "Queen Jewels", the theme of our escape room.

Like my mother, I feel that there is no better way to understand something than to decipher each of its parts, and to appreciate the process as much as the outcome. A complete product or idea represents only the tip of the iceberg, while the underlying inputs and processes constitute the majority of what makes something what it is. It's this mindset that draws me to mysteries, codes, and the unknown; both the unfamiliar and the familiar alike are stimulating puzzles waiting to be solved. As I approach the one before me, in this next phase of my life, I can't wait to relish each and every clue along the way.

Briefly elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities or work experiences. (50-150 words)

While I've always been fascinated with Economics for its real-world applications, many of my peers did not seem to share my enthusiasm. It wasn't that they didn't understand the content; they did not feel connected to it.

After coming up with a solid plan for an international network of IB Economics students, I did what any rational high schooler would do... and reached out to a meme account for publicity. Specifically, I enlisted the help of one IB-specific Instagram account with 30,000 followers to launch a globally-interactive academic network: IB World Econ.

The impetus for this three-part organization was to create a space for IB Economics students to access tools to display their data, share research papers, and receive individualized peer tutoring. Although thousands of miles apart, the meme account helped the program expand to four different countries. We're now in three different continents, totaling seven approved schools (and growing).

What is the most significant challenge that society faces today? (50 word limit)

We are dangerously dependent on computing and trust the internet too much. If something goes wrong with major systems, we will lose an essential part of our world. We face the

challenge of relying less on technology at a time when it's becoming more seamlessly ingrained in our lives.

How did you spend your last two summers? (50 word limit)

Advocated to protect the "Lungs of the World"; investigated the restaurant operations industry through 140+ hours as a RockSpoon business intern; crafted animations with new technologies for interactive webpages; fell in love with yakitori in Japan; and collaboratively explored the relationship between convolutional neural networks and quantum computing at Yale.

What historical moment or event do you wish you could have witnessed? (50 word limit)

I'm in Naples, and in front of me is a man rolling dough for what appears to be -- is it possible? They say noodles are from China... but wait. It's 1275; definitely before Marco Polo's travels to China. I've witnessed a momentous time in history: the invention of pasta.

What five words best describe you?

Experiment. Action. Microscope. Catalyst. (Find things to be)
Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

When the choice is yours, what do you read, listen to, or watch? (50 word limit)

3Brown1Blue & Numberphile - Not your conventional nerdy YouTube channel.

Everybody Lies - Everything we think we know debunked using deep learning. Whoa.

Sherlock and Elementary - I'm a huge fan of all things mystery.

Jane the Virgin - More than a guilty pleasure show, a politically incisive meta-genre work of art.

Name one thing you are looking forward to experiencing at Stanford. (50 word limit)

I look forward to participating in SF design week with the d.school. I'd love to collaborate with innovators on incredible projects like last year's "Ambiguity Forest", inviting others to take

part in inclusive, creative problem-solving. I'd bring my learnings from some moonshot projects we created in Enigma-Inc, too!

Imagine you had an extra hour in the day — how would you spend that time? (50 word limit).

My 10x dream would be to work towards a pilot license to fly a plane solo. To fund this dream, I'd also spend time growing the steady income and random knowledge -- like the ingredients of bird's nest soup -- I've gained while playing HQ Trivia (to date I've made \$3000!)

The Stanford community is deeply curious and driven to learn in and out of the classroom. Reflect on an idea or experience that makes you genuinely excited about learning. (100 to 250 words)

I take the syringe and carefully align its needle -- my next move has to be precise if I'm going to get this right. With an even push, I deposit the Xanthan-pea puree mixture into the Gluco, Algin, and water solution. I may not actually be performing surgery, but with the level of chemistry, detail, and equipment involved, my experiments with molecular gastronomy often seem as serious.

I eat my science. Ever since I heard about Chef Ferran Adria and his mad-scientist creations at elBulli, the world of molecular gastronomy has made me excited about learning. Cooking and gastronomy are areas of study where I can see Chemistry in action, use it creatively, and literally digest the information.

The concoction of peas and Xanthan, when in contact with water and gluco, instantaneously create ether bonds between the oxygen atoms present in both molecules. Because this bond is so strong and quick to form, as soon as the pea mixture touches the water, a small layer of glucose and agar configure on the very surface of the mixture. The speed of the reaction allows for the surface of the mixture to become a gel, while keeping the rest of the mixture inside a puree. The result? A perfect edible sphere of pea flavor.

The intersection of chemistry and food is a fascinating way to share, and grow, my love of science. I'm always ready to put a new dish under a microscope and find out how it works at a molecular level.

Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate – and us – know you better. (100 to 250 words)

Hey new friend,

How wild is this? We're at STANFORD! I'd love to catch up in person, but our other suitemates and I are about to check out Sushirrito, so for now, I'll leave you with some quick stories:

To know me is to understand my many (mostly failed but occasionally successful) experiments. One time, I tried to measure the energy it would take to cut a watermelon with rubber bands (237 bands later, it exploded). Another time, I built a Rube Goldberg machine so complex (my neighbors would say "out of hand") that it extended down my driveway to the street's edge. Don't worry, I'll do my best to keep our shared spaces clean :)

Some would say I was "being a kid." But I'm grateful for parents that call it "exerting my creativity." They never shut down my questions; they posed follow-ups. I still laugh thinking about my dad's motivational speeches: "Never be afraid to examine the unexamined." My YouTube-inspired, home-based experiments come with setbacks, of course, but all were necessary ingredients to discovery. I really do love ideas.

And I'd love to hear yours! When you're back from Bhangra practice and I'm done with this application for Casa Zapata, I hope you'll share your story, perhaps over a bowl of Pho at Wilbur? (I'm always hungry). Oh - by the way, I'm checking out a Slmps performance later to support my classmate from Market Design class. Feel free to join me - it sounds like a blast!

Your buddy,

Stefano