

Extenuating Circumstances Explanation

In September 2019, I felt that I was starting my junior year on a strong note. I had returned to the University of Illinois (UIUC) after a formative summer in Washington, D.C. learning about the intricacies of consumer finance while interning at a nonprofit think tank. I felt it was the research topic that would drive me in my academic and professional career. I arrived back on campus with a newfound sense of direction, excited to take upper-level econometrics courses and to learn more about applied research methods.

As an active student and community member at UIUC, I considered my extracurricular activities as opportunities to grow as an academic, colleague, and citizen. I have always valued civic involvement in my communities, motivating me to involve myself deeply in Champaign and UIUC social and political organizations. That fall, I was interning part-time in the office of the late State Senator Scott Bennett; served as a voting member on two student subcommittees on the University budget and sexual misconduct, respectively; was elected vice president of the Illinois Mock Trial Team (in addition to participating in competitions); founded and was the first editor-in-chief of the UIUC Undergraduate Law Review, which still exists today; and worked as the assistant opinions editor at the student newspaper, the Daily Illini, all while pursuing two degrees.

To put it simply, I was very busy. So, the last straw was when my closest friend from childhood experienced a significant setback in her life. My carefully organized, chock-full schedule started to break down. That semester, I received the only B I've ever earned in any economics course and had to withdraw from a required statistics class. I felt like a failure – I began to doubt my academic capabilities as I transitioned to the spring semester of 2020. Little did I know what was coming not just for me but for the world as the pandemic took hold.

But with more time to myself to think than I'd ever had, I took the opportunity to regroup. During the summer of 2020, I prioritized my coursework and jettisoned the extracurricular activities I felt less passionate about. I helped my friend work through her issues, learning to juggle emotional obligations and academic requirements at the same time. My senior year turned out to be my strongest and most challenging at UIUC, and I proved to myself that I could succeed. I took four advanced economics and econometrics courses; wrote a political theory thesis; and re-took the statistics course I'd had to drop my junior year and earned an A.

Through the process of slowing down and taking stock, I learned about what I can handle as a self-sufficient student and person. I grew to understand my own priorities and focus on the goals that were most important to me. As a senior I earned a coveted research assistantship at the Federal Reserve Board, where I would go on to coauthor a public research note and contribute significantly to two research projects. I continued to excel both professionally and academically as I took a graduate-level real analysis course and earned a perfect score on the quantitative section of the GRE while working full time. So, despite the pain I experienced during my junior year, I'm grateful for the opportunity to grow as an academic and as a colleague. I know that this lesson will serve me well to help ensure my success as a doctoral student and future economist.