Dear Hiring Manager,

I am writing regarding the Technical Assistant opening at Car and Driver. Like many of the current staffers, it has long been my dream to work at C&D. In fact, I applied to this same position almost a calendar year ago. If not emotionally, I was still *technically* in school, and tentatively imagining a career as an automotive engineer. I was dismayed, then, when I learned that my academic schedule would prevent my dreams from being achieved. Still, landing that interview was the first moment my auto-journo delusions seemed at least a little less delusional. Since then, I've learned to be much more accountable with myself, and to take my aspirations more seriously. Part of that means trying to write more, spend more time building things, play more music, and be more conscious of the conversations I have. And part of that means leaving school behind.

I always struggled at Carnegie Mellon, not with the material, but with myself. Although I learned a lot and was always (okay, usually) grateful to be there, in order to perform well as a student, I had to sacrifice many of my personal values. That's the short version of the story I give anybody who asks: I felt like I could be a good student or a good person, and shouldn't that be an easy choice? The long version is more of a passionate rant about the education-industrial complex and Carnegie Mellon's sinister social and ethical practices. Not only do I lack the space, I have subjected far too many people to those ramblings (including Associate News Editor and fellow Tartan, Caleb Miller) to include them here.

While I do have some bad blood with Carnegie Mellon, I certainly learned a lot in my time there. Not all of it has to do with my own emotional literacy, either. With five semesters under my belt as a Materials Science and Engineering student, I am an excellent top-down planner, a good metallurgist and lab worker, and a proficient coder. And having survived two-and-change semesters as a Communication Design (engineering hybrid degree) student, I could also be described as a videographer, installation planner, and graphic designer. Even vocationally speaking, though, everything I learned in class pales in comparison to the education I was given by Carnegie Mellon Racing.

Carnegie Mellon's Formula Student team is competitive. They consistently engineer, manufacture, and race the continent's best FSAE Electric car each year. Everything they do is in service of speed (or of resumé points), which sometimes means excluding newer members, overworking experienced ones, or even doing someone's work over for them. Even so, from my time there, I have extensive technical and management experience on a large engineering project. CMR is structured much like an actual car company, meaning that besides being technically adept, each member must also be a successful collaborator (including with teammates with fundamental philosophical differences) and work under strict deadlines. In my time with CMR, I milled, welded, assembled, and tested minor electrical parts, learned how to lay up carbon fiber bodywork, designed and fabricated brake rotors, and jump-started the team's new brake dynamometer program. As Brake Lead, I had the chance to prove myself as a leader and team player, coordinating six fellow engineers throughout a nine-month season as we created and integrated the car's entire braking system, including the hydraulics, driver interface, and actual braking mechanisms. Despite the cutthroat, ego-driven community, this was my closest contact with what I imagined an engineering career could be. In the end, though, I felt that the know-it-all, do-your-work-over-again, conflicting-demand-making team culture took the joy of expression away from any engineering I was doing.

That, I think, illustrates the thesis to date of my (broad, personal) education. I value empathy, community, and mutual sympathy. My greatest discoveries have been about who I am, how I can express that, and how it affects the people around me. I want to align my life, my actions, and my creations with these values, and there just isn't a space or time for me to do that at Carnegie Mellon. But perhaps there is one at Car and Driver.

I value cars. To an extent, I *am* cars, and I have always been trying to express that. My first word was "truck", and I never learned how to crawl because I was always using a toy Beetle as a crutch. I don't have social media or games on my phone, I have car blogs (C&D is my most-visited website!). I got my first car before I could (legally) drive, and then I dailied an engine-swapped Miata for five years. I started engineering school to pursue a career in cars, and I'm leaving engineering school to pursue a career in cars. I've spent years photographing cars, doodling cars, wrenching on cars, building cars, and talking about cars. Cars require intense collaboration, awareness, and intent to create, and to successfully appreciate. They foster communities and generate stories. I care deeply about the experiences, characters, and narratives embedded in the interactions we have with cars, and paramount to those stories, as with any story, is sharing them. There is a real, mutually sympathetic, accountable, honest community in the journalistic world, because in the end, we're all just sharing stories. I would love to contribute.

Sincerely,
Cal McCullough