|  |
| --- |
|  |

**Sample essays 2017**

**Cornell University**

**A Song For Somebody Special Tarek Sultani**

**Write about someone who has influenced your life or a time that you have experienced great change.**

When my English teacher died last spring, I wrote in his tribute a song called "Confusion." It is not the most technically impressive thing I have written, but it's my favorite because it conveys emotions I still can't put into words. Taking center stage to act out his lessons, Mr. McGovern seemed to have no problem finding words to make his feelings understandable to everyone.

"Confusion" is a guitar piece, slow, sad and dark. It must be finger-picked by each finger, not just the thumb or plectrum, to create a tone of smoothness. Although it is sad, it is also somehow calming. It's about a search which keeps returning to the same point. Each journey becomes more difficult, yet each one, despite increasing hardships, comes to the same sad destination. For instance, in the third verse, when the song shifts to the higher pitched chord of D minor, it seems for a moment that simple happiness is within reach, but returns immediately to the A minor chord before going to the even deeper and darker sounding E minor in root position. At that point the darkness deepens, and it lasts twice as long as the other verses of the song because, instead of reverting to the chorus, the song repeats its darkest verse. The hope of a happy ending is defeated. The song ends on the same chord it starts with.

Mr. McGovern was inspired by the connections between opposites. He told us that all things are intertwined and interdependent, that harmony depends on relations that seem discordant, that human nature starts with the discordance of the three fs: feeding, fighting, fucking. Like any other animal, man can be horrible, hungry, or hopeful. We listened raptly as he paced across the semi-circle of our desks and gave us words for these oppositions: Apollonian-Dionysian, Yin-Yang. We knew that as he spoke Mr. McGovern was making sense of his own confusion and was encouraging us to try to do the same.

"Confusion" may seem to fall short of Mr. McGovern's ideal of resolving opposites. Its key is solely minor. In all my other pieces in a minor key, I raise the final chord by a third, the so-called picardy third, which transforms a minor into its relative major. But the picardy third did not belong here; mixing the happy major with the melancholy minor seemed inappropriate. If this unresolved tension seems to oppose Mr. McGovern's spirit, that was not my intention. The song is melancholy since it is an elegy. The searcher, who is actually me, has lost the direction given to him by his mentor. The title refers to the time before I came under his tutelage and also to the time immediately after. The long search for enlightenment, never completed, lasts the duration of the song, like my futile efforts to understand myself. The chorus, or the place that I always find myself in, is the blunt answer to what I am seeking. I cannot accept this so I try to understand myself by some other means. The significance of the song is that the harder I try to find myself the harder the search becomes. The ending of Confusion is the only ending that fits. The song's echoes the most valuable thing I learned from Mr. McGovern: we are inherently the way we are, and to understand ourselves we need to accept the truths about human beings. The picardy third would imply that I found the answer to my search, despite my self-centered method of searching, and would provide a happy ending. The more fitting ending is an understanding of human imperfection . By ending the piece on the same chord it begins with, the song says that humankind needs to relieve itself from the vanity apparent in the verses in order to recognize its equal role in nature. "Allow not nature more than nature needs, man's life is cheap as beast's." (King Lear, II, iv, 307-8).

**Anorexia Anonymous**

**Ask, and then answer, an important question you would have liked us to ask.**

"Relate a clever anecdote from your life in which you make veiled references to your academic abilities, talents, and personality in the fashion of a college admissions essay. Be neat."

Last summer, I was accepted to attend Brown University for a four-week creative writing program. However, there were a few more bureaucratic hoops I had to jump through before I could get on a plane to Providence. For starters, I needed to provide evidence of immunization.

I went straight to the source on this one: my parents. "Mom, have I been immunized?"

"Yes."

"May I have the records to this? Preferably notarized. And mailed to this address by four p.m. today. Oh, and here's 37 cents. Thanks in advance."

Unfortunately, my mother had no such records. But perhaps my doctor did.

So, I called up the only clinic in the Sunbelt covered by my HMO and asked for my records. They informed me that only a doctor could access my records, because they apparently require Level 50 Pentagon clearance.

Unluckily for me, my HMO doesn't cover medical expenses incurred as a result of "injury" or "disease." Furthermore, the operations that they do cover (currently limited to animalist rituals and blood donation) requires co-payments most third party campaigns couldn't afford. However, these records were vital, so I asked my parents for money, and drove down to the clinic.

After a brief wait during which I read an outdated "Newsweek" highly critical of the McKinley administration, I met with Dr. Franklin, whose first words were "You've lost weight."

I realized then that in my fervor to obtain the records, I had overlooked the fact that my doctor had the silly notion that I was anorexic. Whoops. And I thought it was a bit suspicious that they weighed me before going in.

So, we got into an argument. She pounced on me for being "anorexic," and I sort of sat there and acquiesced. Then she wrote down on a little pad "Anorexia Nervosa" very patronizingly and slid it over. Again, acquiescence.

Fortunately, the mood changed, and we got into a discussion about literature. (The flow was: anorexia --> repression --> social norms --> iconoclasm --> 20th century authors) Apparently, she personally knew Kurt Vonnegut many years back, which I thought was pretty interesting, since I loved Cat's Cradle.

In the end, she suggested I read Siddhartha (which I would find interesting, but not astounding) and said the Brown trip would be "therapeutic" for me. And she didn't have the immunization records.

That left me out a $20,000 co-payment and several hours of my time, all for a sticky note. In a final show of defiance, I placed the anorexia note on my breast and drove to my school, which would certainly have those useless records.

The dramatic irony of this final scene exists in that I did not know I was still wearing the note. But it all worked out, as I would go on to successfully attend Brown without spreading my horrible infections to very many people.

# The Drama of Politics Anonymous

**Describe your intellectual interests, their evolution, and what makes them exciting to you.**

The history of politics reads somewhat like a petty drama. The son of the president who lost to Clinton later beats Clinton's vice president. His brother, Jeb, beats a guy who beat Clinton's attorney-general in the gubernatorial primaries. Mel Carnahan, Paul Wellstone, and Strom Thurmond die. Walter Mondale makes a brief return as a Senate candidate. And who will be the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate? And will Cheney still be on the GOP ticket by then?

Strangely, some of my earliest memories are of electoral maps and my father rambling about class structure to himself. (He wasn't very sociable.) Naturally, this was all unremarkable until I entered high school.

Sophomore year, I began to define my convictions. Having read some Ayn Rand in English class and participated in civics discussions in world history, I developed a more definite interest in politics. That summer I took my first two AP classes online: Government and Politics, which was not offered at my school at the time, and U.S. History.

From there, I started discussing politics more often with friends and on the internet. Part of my fascination was probably driven by a sort of strange emulation. As I learned more about political issues and personages, I wrote about them in a skewed satirical view within the realms of both fiction and nonfiction. In essence, I acquired a better grasp of politics and history partly so I would be able to craft stories such as these epic dramas myself.

# Humor with Value Anonymous

**Take a look at your list of activities and work experiences above. Please tell us about the one you value most and why.**

Headlines like "Baghdad Residents Treated To Magnificent Light Show" and "Duraflame Introduces Slow-Burning American Flag" aren't typical of mainstream publications. But writing such leads has been a major interest of mine for the past year and a half.

While I've always had a flair for humor, it wasn't until high school that I began to put hand to keyboard and seriously write. I started reading satire as well: Jonathan Swift, Dave Barry, and Al Franken were among my idols. But it was the Onion, a straight-faced, satirical rag, that provided the inspiration for "Witty Tirade."

At the end of sophomore year, I started regularly writing pastiches of news articles and publishing them on a website I designed myself. From March on, I spent my entire Saturdays writing articles for the site's weekly updates.

Forty-four online editions of Witty Tirade were produced before I received the long-awaited opportunity to advance to another medium: print. Having spent a year on the school newspaper staff, I was invited to create an entire page on a regular basis. Thus was the current incarnation of "Witty Tirade" born.

Armed with PageMaker, a program I had never used before, I created an entire layout from scratch over the summer and spent the rest of the time writing and diligently refining the articles and layout up until my first deadline. While readership was low, I would continue to write, composing, not to persuade or even entertain, but solely for the opportunity to create humor with value.

# Accounting and Art Anonymous

**What are some of your most notable awards, honors, or achievements in academic or extracurricular areas? Which one is the best? [ed. -- obviously not verbatim]**

</i>]

My surprise at winning the district FBLA Accounting competition was understandable. Accountants are, on the whole, prosaic individuals, and I didn't consider myself a prosaic person. Or an accountant, for that matter.

Yet I did win, and as a sophomore I received the opportunity to advance to the state competition. Emboldened by my surprise triumph, I studied bookkeeping after school with Mr. Belscher, my avuncular and encouraging accounting teacher, in preparation for Orlando.

My hard work paid off when I won first in the state competition. Out of the entire body of first-level accounting students in Florida, I was (assuming testing is an accurate measure of intelligence) the best. Needless to say, having never before won anything of that magnitude, the victory boosted my self-esteem greatly.

Despite my aptitude, I never ended up becoming an accountant. Or prosaic. Instead, I gravitated towards liberal pursuits: writing and drama. Senior year, I wrote a parodic skit and performed the lead role for the Humanities Society's Homecoming festival entry. Thanks to the hard work of all those involved, we won second. (Naturally, we'd have won first had the judges been able to appreciate quality.)

Apparently, the skit garnered us amateurs some notice, as a week later, our school's thespians director invited us to try out for parts in a stage performance of a Titanic documentary. I ultimately portrayed Third Officer Herbert Pitman, who survived and I assume became an accountant.

# Freelance Writing Anonymous

**Consider the academic programs in the school/college indicated above. How will you utilize them to further explore your intended major or field of interest?**

Sitting in Starbucks in Providence, I had one day to complete three "character sketches." A friend and I figured a coffee shop would be a good place to find unique individuals to describe, though we ended up taking different approaches - she focused on people sitting in the shop, whereas I stared out the window.

When I attended this four-week creative writing course in Brown University last summer, I received my first samplings of both life at an ivy league school and participation in an interactive workshop. As writing pupils, we received unique prompts and read passages in large group sessions to encourage us to explore new styles. On alternate days, we met for tight-knit, focus-group-style workshops where we'd share and discuss our work, citing strengths and suggesting improvements.

It is for instruction like this that I want to attend Cornell's College of Arts and Sciences. Writing, both satirical and serious, is important to me, as I feel I've both a capacity for unique ideas and a flair for expressing them innovatively. Either would be meaningless without the special refinement and cultivation that I could receive through writing instruction at Cornell.

Additionally, simply being a Cornell student provides many opportunities for an aspiring freelancer. I'd love the chance to contribute to or even publish a student publication or campus periodical. Furthermore, to someone who has lived so long in suburban Florida, Cornell is the perfect atmosphere for meeting people and gaining experiences to write about.

# English Setback Guntawee Thipmanee

**Evaluate a significant experience you have faced and its impact on you.**

While my classmates were eagerly participating in a discussion of The Grapes of Wrath, their hands constantly raised, I looked down, avoiding eye contact with Mr. Colgate, and pretended to jot down notes. I wanted to say something, but my mouth would not open. Trembling, my hands became cold and my heart started beating fast. "Will people understand my English pronunciation?" I sighed, nervously, thinking, "will I say something irrelevant because I misinterpreted the question?"

During my first year studying in the United States at Loomis Chaffee, transition to life in such a challenging educational atmosphere was harder than I ever expected. Like many other non-native speakers of English, I had found the expectations of English at my previous schools undemanding, allowing me to perform well without much pressure. At Loomis, however, I faced a major challenge with the language barrier.

Though I had been studying for four years at schools where teachers taught in English, I realized quickly that my language skills lagged behind those of my peers at Loomis. I felt lost every time the teacher spoke too quickly or used sophisticated words. The sound of his voice flew by my ears; rarely was I able to translate or comprehend what he said. While my peers laughed at the teacher's jokes, I remained nonplussed because I did not understand. In my attempt to write essays, hours of unproductiveness passed as I struggled to express complex ideas in succinct and articulate writing. With so many words and idioms from which to choose, I found it hard to decide how to write the best sentence. Each night I moaned, as I spent hours reading Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, homework that usually took my classmates merely forty-five minutes.

Despite the language barrier, living in such a focused intellectual community did provide me the opportunity for personal growth and progress. The educational atmosphere at Loomis - a school so far away from my home in Thailand - forced me to communicate only in English, though I sometimes could not resist the temptation to speak Thai with the handful of other Thai students at school. The school's library - the place for group studying with my friends and a resource for intellectual readings - soon became one of my favorite getaways on campus. I always carried a dictionary; despite my slow pace, I strove to read more in English as I sat, ducked away in a corner of the library. I devoured Lance Armstrong's It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life, TIME magazine, and Chicken Soup for the Soul when I was not hard at work on physics, math or German.

The boarding experience also allowed me to establish relationships with people of different views and backgrounds, and to immerse myself in American culture. I finally enjoyed and understood watching baseball and American football - sports that almost do not exist in Thailand. Having friends, both American and international, not only helped me to survive in a foreign culture but also boosted my confidence in socializing and communicating in English.

In retrospect, my two years at Loomis Chaffee - though not always easy - have made for quite a valuable, nurturing experience. I have discovered self-confidence and perseverance. My optimism reassures and prepares me for any future challenges in life. In my English class today, I raise my hand and state my ideas clearly, confident in my pronunciation, without a dictionary.

# #0000FF's Joe Walsh

**Write about someone who has influenced your life or a time that you have experienced great change.**

When life throws me a curve, I try to find an equation for the best-fit line. Actually, life never really throws me a perfect curve, only a series of data that resembles one. Most people are content by connecting these random dots, forming a rudimentary picture by which they interpolate a meaning. But to me, all of that unpredictable, theoretical thought never made as much sense as a good logarithmic function. My mind tries to think in absolutes, in binary, with little extraneous interpretation. I can handle 1's and 0's, but understanding the 2's is what takes effort. Life threw me a big '2' when my older brother passed away of cancer when I was just fourteen. My mind could not construct a logical way to feel. In an instant, my perfect, predictable world was turned upside-down. Feelings of confusion, regret, and sorrow swirled in my head, all of them unforeseen obstacles in my attempts to make a predictable world. Grasping for an answer, I struggled to keep afloat, grabbing any steady truth I could hold on to. I needed to take the zeros and ones of my mind and make a two, a task I could not fathom how to do at the time. What I didn't realize was that sometimes the answer is as simple as '10'. Looking to the life my brother led for inspiration, I saw his courage and strength in the face of adversity and found my ability to grow stronger. After having his leg amputated at the age of six as a result of his first bout with cancer, he lived oblivious to his handicap, continuing to golf, swim, ski, and succeed. In my brother's example, I learned, adapted, and grew stronger. I took the pieces of my binary thinking and constructed a two. Developing a sort of assembly code for my brain, I constructed a solid foundation for abstract thinking in my once absolute world.

Seeing the way this method of thought fit me, I took the binary foundation I started with and synthesized it into more intricate forms. Though I'll probably never be able to predict the actions of the stock market through patterns in pi, my system helps me to analyze the curves that life throws me. I can break down problems and work logically and efficiently towards the solution in ways I never thought possible. I am even able to understand and appreciate literature, a concept that was always just out of my grasp. To me, literature was a world where there was no right answer, no function to relate everything, just some random dots with an infinite number of ways to connect them. Now, instead of disregarding anything without an absolute solution, seeing only right and wrong, black and white, I can finally interpret with all the colors of the rainbow, from #FF0000 to #330066. I want to keep building this analytical knowledge, opening doors and solving problems with a delicate mix of reason and the abstract, connecting the dots in my own unique, yet logical way.

# From the Peach State to the Big Apple Rebecca van Laer

**Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, or risk that you have taken and its impact on you.**

>From the Peach State to the Big Apple

by, Rebecca van Laer

September 1, 2003

<b><i>Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, or risk that you have taken and its impact on you.

</i></b>

By the time I was fourteen, I finally knew that "ya'll" was the appropriate way to address my classmates, that "ma'am" was the way to address all women over 18, and that criticizing the Baptist faith made one a Satanist. After years of life in Georgia, I did not always adhere to standards of etiquette, but I grasped them. I was also accustomed to the lifestyle. Time always seemed to move slowly, probably because of the oppressive heat=2E The languid mood affected the entire school system. It took years to understand geometric proofs, and millennia to learn declensions in Latin. With the pace so painfully slow, I skidded through school with ease. My peers quickly picked up on this oddity. With the "Yankee accent" I had retained from my childhood in New York and the liberal views I had inherited from my parents, I was bound to stand out. Nonetheless, my classmates chose to accept me, and my eccentric wardrobe and lack of enthusiasm for the Atlanta Braves ceased to be issues. In turn, I stopped correcting the lazy grammar of my classmates, and only made fun of their drawls in jest. Georgia and I had finally reached an agreement.

My experience with Southern customs and education came to a grinding halt, however, when I moved in with my father. On a freezing cold day, a day that by my standards should have felt like early summer, I was thrown into the bustle of Tappan Zee High School. A woman ushered me into an office and proceeded to forget my name three times. Once my transcripts were in hand, my guidance counselor informed me that my first year of high school was, according to curriculum standards, worthless. Political Science was not a Regents Class. Neither was World Geography. Not even Latin! The Regents system laughed at my credits and filled me with fear on our first meeting. According to its mandates, there was no evidence that I belonged in honors classes, as my Georgia classes were all mysteriously labeled "gifted." Every classroom I walked into furthered my despair. Teachers looked at me skeptically, and many expressed doubt that I could earn credit. Students found me enigmatic. I was questioned relentlessly.

"Why don't you have an accent?"

"What are you doing here?"

"How did you get your hair pink?!"

It seemed hopeless. Despite the lack of support, I finished the year respectably, but not happily.

One plus, however, was that my guidance counselor decided that I had earned the right to enroll in more advanced classes. Without a social life, I threw myself into my schoolwork. My English essays were completed with record quality, and my Spanish improved with deadly speed. Every report card, I felt I had succeeded in my quest to prove myself capable. After months of diligence, I finally took another look at the situation. It was no longer necessary to do homework as if my life depended on it. Instead of looking at me with suspicion, my classmates looked at me with an acceptance that echoed that of my former friends. It taught me a valuable lesson: one's worth is not dependent on one's geographic location. Besides, I believe my experience has helped me =96 with the manners of a southerner and the competitiveness of a northerner, how can one go wrong?

# The Piano James Yang

**"A picture is worth a thousand words" as the adage goes. (You're limited to the space provided, however.) Attach a photograph (either online or hard copy with the paper application) no larger than 5 x 7 inches that represents something important to you, and explain its significance.**

The announcer called my name.

I walked up to the stage towards the piano. My footsteps echoed like a metronome through the grand performance hall at the University of Georgia. I had woken up early that morning in January 2002 to spend a couple of hours warming up ahead of a competition for which I had spent the last six months preparing and dreading. I was representing the State of Virginia at the Southern Division of the National Baldwin Piano Competition. This was my first regional piano competition since I started playing the instrument at age three. I felt all of my life's work in music culminating in this defining moment. Such a burden rested heavily on my shoulders as I made my way across the large stage, feeling not ready at all, wishing I had more time to practice.

I felt the impatient stares and heard the obligatory clapping of the audience, and responded with a feigned smile and bow. I sat down on the uncomfortably hard bench and rubbed my sweat-drenched hands against my pants which made it even worse. My heart was beating audibly and my mind raced through all the piano lessons and all the hours of practice in a desperate attempt to remember everything. I noted how ridiculously cumbersome and restrictive my tuxedo and dress shoes felt. Despite my piano teacher's endless lectures on focus, I was decidedly unfocused. I brought my hands over the keyboard and held them there as I listened to the pounding of my heart - boom-boom - and pondered my eventual success or doom. Then, suddenly, my hands fell of their own will towards the keyboard.

The moment the first keys were depressed, the hammers struck the strings, which resonated with an intense beauty. The series of octaves at the beginning of Beethoven's Sonata in D Major served as a grand opening to my program. The world around me soon faded into blackness and I was alone with my piano. I became consumed in the playful staccatos, the heartbreaking leggieros, and the thundering climaxes of the music. My anxiety slowly faded as I eased into what I love - creating music. I became one with the emotional drama of the music, my fingers mere extensions of the keyboard. Nearing the end of my final piece, a Prokofieff Sonata, I suddenly broke away from my fantasy and eagerly anticipated the conclusion of my best performance yet. My mind was already racing ahead to what lay ahead - the awards announcements.

The sonata finished with a thundering fortissimo and the audience burst into applause. This time, I responded to the audience's enthusiasm with a genuine smile and bow. I walked off the stage to greet my parents. What followed was an agonizingly long wait for the remaining contestants to finish playing. All the while listening, I was silently critiquing their performances, feeling great about my near 'perfect' playing, and certain that I would come in at least as an alternate, if not a finalist.

When the awards finally came, I was stunned. I came in third. How could I only win third place? The question kept racing through my mind over and over again. Needless to say, I was disappointed. Why did I ever bother to compete?

As my mind slowly went over the day's events, I came to realize the superfluity of my performance anxiety. Sure, I like to win, but being a musician is much more than just winning competitions or gaining fame. It is about being able to savor a rare gift earned by years of practice and about spreading the joy of music to others. I had given my very best that day and I was honored to compete amongst the best of my peers. I left Georgia State University feeling humbled and yet victorious.

Since then, I have gone on to win numerous regional and national competitions. However, every time I walk up the stage, I think of Georgia, and I remember one of the greatest lessons of my life. And instantaneously, my performance anxiety disappears. In its place is a natural outflow of what I love - music, shared freely and abundantly with the audience. I no longer worry about the outcome - I just enjoy myself. Strangely enough, the less I worry about winning, the more I win. Of all the performances and competitions I've participated in, Georgia sticks in my mind as the most memorable.

Losing is not failing. It reveals and defines the self more so than winning ever could. To me, Georgia was what I needed to push me to the next level of musicianship.

# English and Me Joel Herzfeld

**The essay answers the two parts of the "Academic Interests" question.**

I love English. I love its little quirks and idiosyncrasies, I love the etymology, I love the language. It all started back in the second grade when I checked Robinson Crusoe out of the school library. Every day, I would read a few pages on the bus ride to school, and before I knew it, I was finished. So I checked out Moby Dick. I devoured it. Treasure Island, The War of the Worlds, and Huckleberry Finn soon followed. They never stood a chance. After a few years of this, I began to slow down a bit, savoring the intricacies and meanings of the language. From there it was just a short jump to poetry - Dickinson, Frost, Poe, even a bit of Burns. I didn't understand some of the more difficult works, but I enjoyed them nonetheless. Next came etymology and linguistics. I took to memorizing Latin words on a daily basis. After that, I moved on to more complex poetry and prose such as Shakespeare, (The Taming of the Shrew was the first work of literature that ever made me laugh out loud, believe it or not) Nietzsche, and Bronte.

I have and always will love English because it is so dynamic. Take Death of a Salesman for example. There are literally dozens of different ways of interpreting this play, and no one way is more correct than another! Or A Separate Peace - even the author didn't know if Gene pushed Finny out of that tree or not! Brilliant.

Incidentally, I am penning this essay right on Cornell campus in the Center for Jewish Living. As I have just finished telling the English major who is currently sitting right next to me, I too want to be an English major in the school of Arts and Sciences. I like the small writing classes - the opportunity to share my work with others and to explore new viewpoints is exactly what I am looking for in developing my language skills, and I will also undoubtedly enjoy every last bit of it. I hope to be an English professor one day, and the discussion in writing and literature classes is exactly what inspired me to choose English as a career.

I also look forward to the linguistics courses offered at Cornell. The history of language has always fascinated me, and I hope to be able to teach linguistics one day in addition to literature. I am very impressed with the abundance of linguistics courses, not to mention those in English literature. I have yet to read about a college that has anything even approaching the caliber of the English department at Cornell.

# Yeye Anonymous

**Who has influenced you the most?**

Waking from calm dreamless sleep, I find intricately patterned welts on my skin, embedded by the woven bamboo mattress, the only reminders of the night. I descend from the bed and frown as my feet reach the cold and damp dirt floor. It rained early in the morning, silent, without warning, a commonly decided upon secret among the capricious gods. Curling up my toes, I toddle across the room to a wooden dresser, its top reaching slightly above my head. He stands there, immersed in brushing his teeth, as I watch, silently and barely noticed from below. He glances down quickly, without moving his head, makes his decision, and spits into the porcelain washing-bowl.

I would go to school with him today. I bite on my lower lip to hide a smile. Dressing quickly, I run outside and leap over a group of scattered brown and white chickens in the yard. I pick a small, immature tomato from the garden and begin to eat it as I wait by his bicycle. We journey down the only paved road of Majia Village. Unfastened on the back of his bicycle, I cling to his shirt and hold my legs out so that they stay free of the spokes. We turn into the school courtyard and he places the bicycle against a wall. Upon entering his classroom, rows and rows of students stand from their seats, turn toward the door and, in unison, salute their teacher, my grandfather.

When the Communists emerged in China, they failed to completely destroy the old order. My grandfather remained the domineering patriarch, unquestioned and proud. A cursing, self-righteous, incessant drinker, his family relations were shaky at best. I was born a girl in a new one-child society where, despite all talk of progress, boys were preferred. My grandfather demanded I be sent to the countryside where I would not have to officially exist. My mother refused and alone named me and registered me in my birth town of Shuangyashan by Siberian Russia. In 1988, my parents immigrated to America and I was to follow. The year before I left, I stayed with my grandfather, yeye, and my grandmother, nainai, in the little farming village that bears my name.

"Sit there," he points to a chair in the corner.

I walk proudly and slowly across the room and alight upon my appointed throne. I am after all the daughter of college-educated parents living in the mysterious and magnificent land of America, for which I will soon depart. I tell this self-servingly to a girl in the class, adding, "They have yellow hair in America. My hair, too, will become yellow." My intention was to invoke jealousy, which I assume identical to exaltation.

Yeye looks up from his desk and hears my grandiose speech, pulls me out of the room and slaps me on the cheek. "You are nothing," his harsh voice reverberates off the walls, "until you make yourself something." I am bewildered and angry and stare back fiercely, as he continues: "The moment you think yourself superior, they have already become one thousand times better." I look down at the ground. His features soften, his voice, subdued: "I am a poor farmer, and perhaps will never be greater. You can have everything. If the whole world disappears, that will be the only thing that matters to me."

At that moment, my grandfather, Ma Zhijiang, unyielding sovereign of the family, imperial descendant, survivor of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, dignified village elder, forsook all his pride and admitted to a four year old that he was less than what he'd hoped for. And all of this to tell her that his sole wish was for her to live well and humbly. In spite of yeye's temper, his preference for boys, the unchangeable things rooted in his nature and customs, I forgive him for what he told me that day.

# The Magnetism of Labor Studies Daniel Gregory Dolgicer

**Consider the academic programs in the school/college you indicated above. How will you utilize them to further explore your intended major or field of interest, or general academic interests if you're undecided?**

The School of Industrial and Labor Relations truly beckons me. It combines my fascination for government and politics with the labor issues of our era. Courses incorporating public policy and law--in which I will dissect issues such as the civility of the American minimum wage--will enhance my comprehension of government interaction with both the corporate chieftain and common toiler. The school's emphasis on the international workplace, exemplified by classes such as "International Labor Law" and "Labor in Global Cities," coalesces with my fascination for foreign affairs, and will prepare me for a career in global diplomacy--working specifically to ease tensions between management and its employees. By taking such classes, I will be able to understand workers in both Brooklyn and Bhutan. The school's training in dispute resolution will improve my social and analytical abilities, and will make me a more apt person - both personally and professionally. Furthermore, the courses of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations engage in ageless debates that have long intrigued me, such as socialism vs. capitalism, labor vs. management, and whether universal healthcare is a feasible goal.

Cornell is a demanding institution known for its considerable workload--I see this as a challenge that I am more than willing to engage. Succeeding in the rigorous courses of the ILR School will hone my skills in writing, organization, critical thinking, and time management. Thus, I will leave Cornell as a generally more cultivated person with the ability to triumph over challenges as they arise.

# The Complexities of my Character Daniel Gregory Dolgicer

**Describe your intellectual interests, their evolution, and what makes them exciting to you.**

My fascination with foreign affairs can be traced to a series of experiences in my childhood. Coming of age in New York City, I have been privy to many experiences which would have remained foreign to me had I grown up in suburbia. En route to my preschool, I strolled past the United Nations on a regular basis, and I remember being fascinated by the patterns of the world's flags and the vivid native dress of the African delegations.

As a strong-willed first grader, I would consistently plant myself on the classroom bean bag and stare at a map of the political world. The map was beyond my physical reach, and thus I could not see the minutiae representing rural farming villages and Polynesian island nations. However, national capitals were written in a bold and imposing font, and were always marked by a crisply-pointed star. I was soon able to proudly recite the capitals of countless nations from Argentina to Zimbabwe. Amidst the crunching sounds of Count Chocula cereal, I consistently defeated my challengers during snack time geography games.

As a young child, my mother's job at a travel agency allowed me to witness the world firsthand; I was exposed to exotic architecture, cuisine, and lifestyles - from the Grand Place of Brussels to the bewildering, buzzing bazaars of Istanbul. I gained a deep appreciation for other peoples and other nations, and gained a strong desire to expand upon my touristic experience. My family's gatherings have always featured intellectual discussions regarding everything from the Oslo Accords to the long-term ramifications of Reaganomics. My parents grew up in Israel, and thus conversation was often geared towards the Middle East. I was soon browsing through the pages of the Jerusalem Post, and obtained a greater fluency on issues facing Israel.

As a young adult in New York City, it is commonplace for me to discuss the civil unrest in France with a waiter at the corner bistro, and listen to a Pakistani cab driver expound upon the strained relationship between Muslims and Jews. These formative experiences constantly stimulate my desire to further comprehend the intricacies of the geopolitical arena; they have readied me for my future forays in diplomacy, working specifically on behalf of Israel as well as on broader issues affecting the world stage.

# The Sculpting of my Psyche Daniel Gregory Dolgicer

**Describe your intellectual interests, their evolution, and what makes them exciting to you.**

My fascination with foreign affairs can be traced to a series of experiences in my childhood. Coming of age in New York City, I have been privy to many experiences which would have remained foreign to me had I grown up in suburbia. En route to my preschool, I strolled past the United Nations on a regular basis, and I remember being fascinated by the patterns of the world's flags and the vivid native dress of the African delegations.

As a strong-willed first grader, I would consistently plant myself on the classroom bean bag and stare at a map of the political world. The map was beyond my physical reach, thus I could not see the minutiae representing rural farming villages and Polynesian island nations. However, national capitals were written in a bold and imposing font, and were always marked by a crisply-pointed star. I was soon able to proudly recite the capitals of countless nations from Argentina to Zimbabwe. Amidst the crunching sounds of Count Chocula cereal, I consistently defeated my challengers during snack time geography games.

My family life has also cultivated my deep appreciation for other peoples and nations. When I was a yung child, my mother's job at a travel agency allowed me to witness the world firsthand. I saw exotic architecture, cuisine, and lifestyles, from the Grand Place of Brussels to the bewildering, buzzing bazaars of Istanbul, and gained a strong desire to expand upon my touristic experience. Furthermore, my family's gatherings have always featured intellectual discussions regarding everything from the Oslo Accords to the long-term ramifications of Reaganomics. My parents grew up in Israel, and thus conversation was often geared towards the Middle East. I was browsing through the pages of the Jerusalem Post at an early age, and by doing so obtained a greater fluency on issues facing Israel.

As a young adult in New York City, it is commonplace for me to discuss the civil unrest in France with a waiter at the corner bistro or listen to a Pakistani cab driver expound upon the strained relationship between Muslims and Jews. These formative experiences constantly stimulate my desire to further comprehend the intricacies of the geopolitical arena; they have readied me for my future forays in diplomacy, working specifically on behalf of Israel as well as on broader issues affecting the world stage.

# High School Awards Anonymous

**What are some of your most notable awards, honors, or achievements in academic or extracurricular areas? If any is especially important to you, tell us why.**

Throughout my high school career, I have received multiple recognition awards related to my coursework. For example, I was awarded "Outstanding Student" honors in Spanish, math, and chemistry during my high school tenure. I also received a Letter of Commendation for the 2002 National Merit Scholarship program. I was awarded "School Techie" in recognition of my technical expertise and assistance in the school's multimedia lab. Finally, I have consistently earned a place on my school's Honor Roll for each semester during my high school career.

The award that I hold in the highest regard of all is my Certificate of Completion for the High School Student Research Participation Program at Ernesto Orlando Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. The administrators of this internship sought out students who had that special fascination with scientific knowledge; grades alone were not sufficient to guarantee an individual acceptance into that program. This award embodies the challenging summer I spent at the lab and the enormous amount of time I spent preparing for this fellowship. During my tenure, I worked alongside peers with stellar qualifications who pushed me to consistently turn in a high-quality performance on the job. Although the experience was decidedly stressful, I survived, and I view my Certificate of Completion as a sign that I am able to accomplish anything so long as I put my mind to it.

# A New Life Konstantin Drabkin

**Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.**

I still remember it like it was yesterday. After seven days of grueling labor pushing my body to its limits, I was proudly walking - no, strutting. As my clean and pressed uniform held my new ribbons for the world to see, I looked up to the stands to find the people I cared noticed, and there they were, proudly snapping away with their cameras as Captain McClelland announced my name. Earning a spot in Leadership Academy, an NJROTC boot camp, is a privilege; graduating is a life-altering circumstance.

In the first day, the drill instructors broke us down, removing the protective bubble wrap of the individual, leaving behind raw, primal beings. We were then left on our own to fix ourselves. For the next seven days, we would be nothing more than mosquito bait in the blistering sun. Many tacitly accepted the situation, concerned with simply surviving the week; I chose to rise up and use this chance to improve myself. All of life's tedious little lessons I thought I knew began to truly make sense. Suddenly I could not picture myself as anything other than a perfect gentleman, complete with self-discipline and a well-developed code of honor. That was my rebirth.

As I left the stadium following the graduation ceremony, I sped by my new friends, quickly exchanging goodbye's and congratulations. I was a man on a mission. I had to take my family to the restaurant; I owed them a proper meal. As I would do for my guests so many times later, I held the door for my family, waited patiently for them to begin eating prior to enjoying my first real meal of the week. The pangs of hunger gave me strength. It felt great to behave like a gentleman. As I go about my every day life, I take every chance to help someone else. My motivation comes from knowing what is right.

"Act like there is a camera fixed on your face, with your family watching 24/7," my Drill Sergeant, Chief Petty Officer Morales, told me. During Leadership Academy, personal honor was an object that was graded on a daily basis. Thievery, disrespect, and dishonesty were not tolerated, and troublemakers were immediately sent home without the coveted completer's cord. I take personal pride in upholding the highest standards of morality. Though my ideals often face ridicule in the world that widely accepts complete lack of effort and motivation, I stand by my beliefs. The only gratification I need is knowing that I am representing my family, my school, and my country to the best of my ability. This is not to say that such behavior always comes naturally, but I have learned that self-discipline almost always pays off in the end.

According to the United States Army, "Pain is weakness leaving the body." Rigorous discipline is a key factor in nearly everything I accomplish, from fitness to academics. Following my graduation from Leadership Academy, I knew that I was capable of doing anything I set my mind to, and with only four months of training I won my age division in the Paul Bunyan marathon. Upon my return to school I was disappointed to find out I had already completed all of the advanced placement courses I was pre-qualified to take. Rather than face a lack-luster year, I decided to take on an array of new A.P. Courses. Without ever taking a computer class or Spanish III, my A.P. Computer Science and A.P. Spanish courses are an uphill battle, but one I am winning. Though the week I spent at Leadership Academy had a very powerful effect on me, its permanent change comes from the choice I make every day by defining myself as a disciplined, honorable gentleman.

# Engineering Dreams Sikder Samiur Rahman

**Engineers turn ideas (technical, scientific, mathematical) into reality. Tell us about your interest in engineering or an engineering idea you have. Explain how Cornell Engineering can help you further explore this interest or idea.**

When I was just five months old, my father was transferred to the USA to represent Bangladesh as a diplomat. My cousin came along with us, and in the first three years of my life, I became extremely attached to him. When my father was transferred again to Saudi Arabia, my cousin stayed behind in the United States. Fearing that I would miss him too much, my father bought me my first video game system, a Nintendo Entertainment System, to keep me occupied. My interest in technology and all things electronic began then.

Even when I was young, I wondered how videos of real people could be displayed on television screens. As I grew older, my interest in electronics deepened. I started to tinker around with my computer by the age of 10. By the time I was 12, I had made my own website, which received numerous hits every week. After my Playstation 2 died on me, I figured out that its lens was not operating fast enough to decipher the data on the disks. I proceeded to open up the system, and found that I could raise the voltage of the laser to make it run faster. Sure enough, my games ran fine after that.

What interests me most in the field of electronics is the fact that great things can be created through the simple act of manipulating circuits and radio waves. This is what drew me to robotics. After joining the Science Olympiad team at our high school, I began working on the robot event. It required us to pick up various objects in a playing field and place them in a box in as little time as possible. This challenge of building a robot that could perform such a task made me even more interested in robotics.

I wish to pursue Electrical Engineering so that I can further my knowledge of circuitry, computers, and robotics. One day, I also hope to solve the energy shortage problem that is currently present in Bangladesh. An alternative energy source should be environmentally friendly and renewable. In addition, I would like to raise the standard of living for mankind by creating robots that will allow us to have more leisure time and increase productivity.

Cornell University will allow me to pursue all of these dreams. Courses on Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering will enable me to research energy production and fuel cells. And, of course, I plan to join the Cornell Robocup team, firstly because it offers a great opportunity to build autonomous robots, and secondly because soccer is one of my favorite sports. After studying robotics and energy production at Cornell, I can go on to aid mankind.

# "Made in China" Anonymous

**Open-ended**

Nevin peeled off a sticker from his binder and posted it to my forehead. "MADE IN CHINA," it said. I faked a nonchalant laugh, but my blushing face betrayed my feeling of defeat. All that I had strived for seemed to have been futile. What Nevin meant as a harmless joke had wounded me deeply.

The arrival of adolescence coincided with my arrival in America. It was during that crucial time when the standards of cool became meaningful to me. The essence of cool meant the ability to conform. As the only Asian (and only immigrant) in my suburban Michigan middle school, I was anything but a conformist. So I strived to assimilate. Yet with "MADE IN CHINA," seven months after my arrival, I realized people still saw me as different.

I explained to Nevin in broken English that I did not want to be labeled as different, as if I did not belong. "You're not different," Nevin responded lightheartedly. "You're unique!"

"U-nique." I slowly sounded out the word as my sadness turned to curiosity.

"Yeah, unique, like something that's umm...special." Nevin fumbled to explain himself. "Well, I guess it does mean different, but in a good sense..."

Nevin's words stayed with me for weeks. How was I supposed to establish myself in this country if I couldn't Americanize? How can one be cool if she is different from everybody else?

As time went on, I began to realize that there was nothing wrong with being different from my peers. I was touched by the way my friends taught me English by drawing cartoons on my notebook, and liked the fact that I could explain communist society or teach simple Chinese phrases to classes and friends. I slowly learned to take pride in my uniqueness.

The three years of middle school in Michigan were blissful for me. I felt known and appreciated by every friend, classmate, and teacher in the small, tight-knit community - but this feeling of acceptance would not last forever. After several moves between Michigan and Kansas, I finally settled in California during my sophomore year of high school. I was no longer the only Asian in the school. All of a sudden, I felt like a nobody.

But I discovered in California that other characteristics now set me apart. I was from the Midwest now, not just from China. My values, liberal back in Michigan, seemed conservative in Davis. While I dropped most of my foreign accent, I still spoke with a touch of quirkiness that set me apart; my new friends teased me all the time for using the word "pop" when referring to soda. My exuberance led me to athletics, art, and interests

interests in humanities and social sciences. I realized that it is these qualities that make me unique, not my ethnicity.

Looking back on the "MADE IN CHINA" incident, I realize that Nevin gave me more than a label that day. His words will always be my motto: I am unique.

# Financial Engineering Anonymous

**College of Engineering: Engineers turn ideas (technical, scientific, mathematical) into reality. Tell us about your interest in engineering or an engineering idea you have. Explain how Cornell Engineering can help you further explore this interest or idea.**

"An institution where any person can find instruction in any study" This is the vision that Ezra Cornell founded the university on. This quote has inspired me to explore different fields of study. Growing up in a family of engineers, I have always longed to be an engineer myself. Though I was never sure which major I would choose, I had always imagined myself in conventional engineering, such as electrical or mechanical. But through my classes and activities in the last few years, I have gained a different perspective. While I still wanted to major in engineering, I couldn't imagine myself building a robot or piecing together a circuit. It was not until I read the Cornell catalog that I discovered a major that I am truly enthusiastic about: Operational Research and Industrial Engineering. Cornell has one of the best ORIE programs in the countury. Cornell Engineering would enable me to explore my new interest in this field.

For a while, I have been trading foreign currency in simulation accounts. Currency trading has sparked my interest in financial engineering. Every time I look for a pattern in a candlestick chart or calculate the pivot points for a currency pair, I am reminded of how everything in this world revolves around numbers. A few friends and I often get together each week to discuss the interesting developments of trend lines, moving averages, and Fibonacci retracements. We are in awe of the marvels of mathematics and astounded that those graphs and indicators derived from simple arithmetic can predict the market. Yet we can only wonder what more advanced algorithms and computing could accomplish. Currency investment has been insightful, but something seems to be missing. It is the initiative to create an idea that is uniquely my own. I look forward to someday developing my own analytical method through studying ORIE.

Another one of my intellectual curiosities is game theory. When I first heard of the prisoner's dilemma in my history class, I was enthralled at the fact that math can be applied to situations as diverse as this. I did some reading on my own and discovered that game theory can be used in a variety of disciplines, ranging from strategizing the location of a new plant to the programming of artificial intelligence. This year I co-founded the Game Theory Club at our school. Though we have learned many basic concepts about game theory and its use in the real world, I know we have only touched the tip of the iceberg. I would like to explore this subject further in my undergraduate studies.

Cornell offers an unparalleled interdisciplinary experience that I desire to exploit. Your strong liberal arts classes, dedication to research, Entrepreneurship in Engineering Program, and study abroad opportunities all interest me greatly. I find your university truly suits my needs. I know that the versatility of Cornell's ORIE program would prepare me well for both the engineering and the business world.

# The Meaning of Writing Jenny Chung

**What does prose mean to you?**

I wonder sometimes if any author's story is quite like mine. I'm not talking about the stories they write with their pens, or tap out on typewriters or keyboards. I'm talking about the stories they craft with their very lives, their every breath, their every movement.

When some people talk about writing, they give the impression (to me, at least) that it's something they enjoy, something to do, an engaging and enjoyable exercise. When necessary, other things in their lives take the place of their writing. After all, they say, one can't be writing all the time!

I may as well be from Mars.

I can't remember a time when I didn't adore stories. Even before I could read, I would pore over books, gazing at the pictures and imagining the stories they depicted. I had a series of about four cassette tapes that were recorded by two people who said their names were Jennifer and Jason (though whether those were their real names, I'll never know). These two voices told about twenty-four fairy tales in all, changing them from the usually gruesome original form to a humorous, more child-friendly version. I listened to these tapes over and over, till I could recite them in my sleep. To this day, I can still quote word-for-word many scenes from my favorite ones (Cinderella, Rapunzel, Aladdin, etc.). But it wasn't the jokes or the funny voices that attracted me the most to these stories. It was the passionate undercurrent in each and every one.

I taught myself to read. I was four years old, sitting on the couch in the living room, with Dr. Suess' Go, Dog, Go open on my lap. My dad came by and asked me if I was reading it. I said yes. He asked me if I wasn't just reciting it from memory. I said I wasn't. So he sat down next to me, opened to a random page, and asked me what it said. I told him. Then he had me turn to the beginning and read the whole book to him. I did, and he recorded the whole thing. I stumbled several times, but I read it. I don't even know how I learned how to read; I guess it gradually just made sense to me that this letter says that, this word is dog, and so on.

Looking back now, I realize that I began making up stories long before I started writing them down. For several years, I narrated my own life to myself, had an imaginary pet dog named Peter, and imagined myself going through any multitude of heroic circumstances I read about in my books. All these things I kept a close secret; it was a long time before I dared to tell my best friend that I had an imaginary pet. Thankfully, she thought that was fun and joined in my pretend.

It's funny to me to remember a time when I hated writing and spelling, which are now my two strongest points. I'm not sure why I hated them. I think it had something to do with frustration at being unable to write letters the way they were printed. I got especially frustrated with the lowercase 'a' and the number 2, so frustrated I cried and refused to write those at first. In first grade, I had to spell words orally, and this was another frustration. I could see the words in my head, but it took so much effort to transfer them to my lips. I didn't like my English that year, so to make it bearable I told a story to myself with the words I had to write. All I can remember now was that it had something to do with a man and his two sons.

In second grade, my workbook had pictures of coaches that gave the instructions, so I told myself a story about a basketball team (that year, I watched the movie Air Bud quite a bit). In the years that followed, my imagination wandered as usual, and I almost felt as though I was reaching for something. But I didn't know then what it was I was searching for.

Reading was my life, my soul, for the majority of my life. I never stopped reading, even if I'd read the book a dozen times before. Pippi Longstocking became one of my favorites. When grownups asked me what my favorite subject in school was, I would say, "Reading." I think I annoyed my brother a bit; many times he would ask me to come play with him, but I would say, "Not now. I'm reading."

Looking back now, I think I was unconsciously trying to use books to fill some empty place in my heart. As long as I was reading, as long as I could keep my nose in a book and my mind in another world, I was safe. Safe from what, I'm not sure. Safe from the knowledge that I have always been different, perhaps – safe from myself.

There was always something missing in me, and when something is missing you can become a monster. Could I sense this, perhaps, even as a child? Was I afraid of the void in my own heart? Was that what brought about the nightmares where everything started out right, but slowly I realized it was all wrong?

When I was in fourth grade, I had an epiphany. I was reading a book for school, called something like Flames Across the Susquehana. It was a story about two drummer boys in the Civil War, and all I remember of that book was that sometime in the climax, the main character's friend (whose name, I remember clearly, was Jonathan) was killed in battle. Something snapped inside me when I read that. Suddenly, everything clicked into place. I understood. I understood why my mom would cry so often when reading books to me. I understood the emotions that went on inside of her, because those same emotions were unfolding in my own heart. For the first time in my life, I cried because of a book.

I don't think it's anything that can be explained. One simply has to experience it for oneself. That connection the reader has to the characters in the story – once I tasted that, I never forgot.

They say that the only reason you are different is because of the people you meet and the stories you read. A perfect example of this would be the year I was in fifth grade. That year, my teacher had us write a story for every theme we were studying at the time. First, it was ancient Egypt, then adventure stories, pioneers, myths and legends, and so forth. The first couple times, I was completely at a loss. How on earth could I write a story? I scraped stuff together each time, looking to the books I had read for inspiration. It was my third story, an adventure story, that gave me the epiphany. I was typing up my second draft, when suddenly I realized it.

I liked writing.

Not just liked; I loved it.

I was excited. I don't think I quite realized it then, but every time I was given the next story assignment, every time I sat down to figure out what I would write next, every time I worked my way through the writing process and multiple drafts, the hole in myself was filled. None of the stories I wrote that year were very good or coherent at all, but that didn't really matter. As long as I was writing, I was fulfilled.

That year was also the year I discovered that I loved fantasy. When I was six years old, my dad read The Hobbit to my brother and me, and even though I could barely understand it, I loved it to bits. I had virtually no brushes with fantasy in the years that followed, except for fairy tales and The Chronicles of Narnia, until my fateful fifth grade. That was the year the Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter movies came out, and with all the fervor surrounding them, I read both series. I fell in love with both of them, and that has never changed.

Picture this: A girl of eleven with long dark hair and glasses, hunched up in the loud school bus filled with kids of all ages chattering, laughing, finishing up their lunches.... But this girl can't even hear them, because she is engrossed in The Silmarillion. She reads words she can barely understand, because there is something about them that transports her away from this world, and she is safe.

That was me.

I wonder sometimes what I would be now if I had never met the teacher who unwittingly forced me to discover what makes me whole, or if I had somehow not heard of The Fellowship of the Ring or Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. How could I ever have a purpose beyond writing and futilely trying to emulate the stories I love most? When I was younger, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do with my life. For a while, I wanted to be a nurse like my mom, but that was never meant to be my life. It hurts my gut to see blood, and I would never be able to do the many things nurses must do. For a couple years, I wanted to work with animals, though I wasn't sure how. I sometimes entertained the idea of being a librarian, since I loved reading so much.

But when I encountered writing, the entire world paled in comparison to it. I have known for about six years that I am nothing without writing, without stories of my own creation. I have no real talents outside writing, nor do I have the patience or perseverance to obtain any. I gave up my piano lessons, arithmetic makes me cry, and I have never liked physically strenuous activities. Writing is what I was always meant to do. It's as though my entire life had been preparing me for that night at my dad's computer, so when the time came, I embraced writing with open arms.

It's not so much a matter of wanting to write as needing to write.

Writing is my passion. Writing is my soul. Writing is me.

# Safeguarding Memories Rachael Ji Yoon Kim

**Common Application: Topic of Your Choice**

Leaping over crooked crevices in the sidewalk, my childhood self hopped a few yards ahead of my grandfather. As I paused to scrutinize a colorful candy wrapper, the smell of melting sugar drifted from a small blue cart where an old woman flipped flat buns on a pan. Grandpa always bought two buns: one for him and one for me.

Not long before my fourteenth birthday, my grandfather was diagnosed with a severe case of Alzheimer’s, and shortly afterwards, he moved into a nursing home. Upon entering his room, I shouted “Hi Grandpa!”

Grandpa murmured, “Who are you?”

The next day, I bought two of the sweet buns Grandpa and I had enjoyed.

“Grandpa, do you want one of these?”

He paused, then said, “No. Who are you?”

Leaving the buns in the paper bag, I replied, “I’m Rachael, your granddaughter.”

Eyes widening, he gasped, “You have to get out of here; the communists are guarding this place!”

I explained, “No, the Korean War is over! You’re safe in America.” With a small sigh, I returned home for the day.

Now, after more than three years, Grandpa recognizes me when I step into his room. However, he cannot connect the round-faced child beside the bun cart to the person I am today. Once a memory slides past the grip of his mind, it can never return.

This troubling truth has motivated me to preserve the memories of others in my grandfather’s generation through the War Stories Project. A year after joining the volunteer effort, I have become the coordinator of the project. Fellow volunteers and I collect the experiences of World War II witnesses and collaborate with local colleges to produce a documentary and companion anthology for high school students.

While managing the project, I interviewed Holocaust survivor Bruno Bienenfeld, who unraveled the touching story of his childhood. In 1943, his family was taken to the Jasenovic concentration camp, where they were only given one piece of bread a day. But one day, he reached under his threadbare pillow and found another piece of bread. His mother said that it was an answer to his prayers. The young Bruno asked, “Are there Jewish angels?” His mother smiled and said, “There are angels for all people on earth.” Every day, Bruno found an extra bit of bread under his pillow, but after three hard months, his mother died, and the deliveries ceased. He told his father “The angel didn’t put the bread under the pillow tonight.” His father replied, “He was too busy taking Mom to heaven.”

Working with primary sources like Mr. Bienenfeld, I learn about World War II from the people who lived it. I also delegate tasks and teach volunteers how to search for and sort images to be used in the documentary. In addition to the responsibilities of coordinator, I have taken on the position of Fundraising Head for the project. Besides speaking publicly on behalf of the War Stories Project in fundraising efforts, I also burn the midnight oil writing letters to more than 200 corporations and local businesses, looking up addresses, and licking envelopes until my mouth goes dry.

Each year, more and more World War II veterans and Holocaust survivors pass away, and the loss of these valuable witnesses reminds me of the urgency to preserve their life stories. Just as Grandpa forgot eating sugar-filled buns with me, we can fail to remember what our world has endured. Whether the record of our past must serve as a lesson or reminiscence, we must look back at the path of our history before laying the cobblestones of the future.

# Color Guard Rachael Ji Yoon Kim

**Common Application: Please elaborate on one of your activities (extracurricular, personal activities, or work experience)(150 words or fewer).**

I like to play with guns and knives.

It’s not what you think: I’m in color guard. Although events like the Virginia Tech incident have worsened the reputation of weaponry, color guard attempts to transform the traditional connotations of potentially harmful objects into an art form.

I’ve participated in this artistic and athletic manner of multi-tasking for three years, starting with flag and advancing to the weapon lines by mastering both rifle and saber. In the familiar settings of home and school, I’m your typical teenager. But at a guard show, I become a dazzling entertainer, a fluid dancer, a dexterous performer.

Crimson eye-shadow fans out over my lids, and a crown of twisting locks sits proudly on my head. Brilliant lights gush over the football field, our stage. Maneuvering through lines of gleaming instruments, I roll to the ground, quickly pick up a billowing flag, and spread its silk before me over the night sky.

# Poetry Rachael Ji Yoon Kim

**Please elaborate on one of your activities (extracurricular, personal activities, or work experience)**

“Poetry is a packsack of invisible keepsakes.”

~ Carl Sandburg

It is impossible to convey the art of words with more words. Case in point: try to find another word for “salty.” It isn’t bitter; it isn’t sour; it’s salty. Likewise, the terms “diction” and “tone” do not even come close to expressing the actual feel of a poem. It is the inspiration behind the poem, and that only, which drives the very essence of verse.

Just as inspiration can produce poetry, poetry can produce inspiration. Each unforgettable experience during my high school years was made manifest in a poem, and like a little packsack, my poetry harbored my memories. My poetry class trained me to reflect on our world, humankind, and myself. In my backyard, I would often sit cross-legged for hours, absorbing passing autumn breezes and hearing the twitter of sparrows in the sycamores. Homework had never been so enjoyable.

During my junior year, I led the annual winter and Valentine’s poetry seminars. As a veteran of the poetry class, I mentored many of the Poetry I students, urging my “mentees” to maintain open minds. At the end of the year, my fellow students and I held a “Readings and the Redwoods” event, except now we were not only the performers, but also the coordinators. At the start of my senior year, the Poetry Club I had founded became an official school club, which gave me the opportunity to invite several prominent contemporary poets, such as Poet Laureate Robert Hass, to our school. In addition, our club brought what we’d learned to the rest of the community, teaching our area youth about poetry.

Through every success and every disappointment, poetry has recorded my thoughts onto paper. A composer arranging each individual note, poetry has orchestrated my high school experiences into one resonating composition, bringing all of my memories together. When I want to look back at those memories, all I have to do is open my packsack of poetry, and listen.

# The Little Prince Jenny Chung

**"Write a concise essay critically discussing a particular book, a work of art, or a problem that is important to you."**

In The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry champions the perspective of a child. But for the adult reader, the story presents a dilemma: how to reconcile the novel’s characterization of the “grown-up” with one’s adult self; how to achieve the little prince’s naïve wisdom and simplicity of perspective while still being a grown-up.

The little prince sees the world purely and beautifully, and questions the mysteries of the universe. He sets out on a journey to discover more about life. His perception is naïve because he hasn’t narrowed his mind; he hasn’t formed the preconceptions about the world that grown-ups have. Consequently he only sees the most essential truths of the universe. The little prince’s idealistic perspective is the author’s homage to childhood, the stage of life at which the world is new and mysterious and full of questions.

On the other hand, Saint-Exupéry presents the grown-up as a narrow-minded being who thinks in figures, facts and answers. Yet he does not condemn grown-ups for living like they do. It is possible to be grown-up and still live a virtuous life. After encountering the lamplighter, the little prince remarks, “‘Nevertheless he is the only one of them all who does not seem to me ridiculous. Perhaps that is because he is thinking of someone else besides himself’” (p. 51). The other grown-ups the little prince encounters are characteristically narrow-minded. They live on their separate planets without interacting. They are each defined in one word: a king, a conceited man, a tippler, a businessman, and a geographer.

However, The Little Prince assures the reader that being grown-up is not an inevitable destiny. Rather, it is a perspective of life; it is a state of mind. Physically an adult, the narrator still retains characteristics of a child. He lives among grown-ups and behaves like one in their society. Yet as a pilot, both he and the little prince are explorers. The inquisitiveness of the little prince is reflected in the narrator’s exploration in the sky and on the sand.

Our narrator is not like the grown-ups. He sees in a way that the others cannot. He tests the grown-ups he encounters by “showing him my Drawing Number One, which I have always kept. I would try to find out, so, if this was a person of true understanding” (p. 9). Drawing Number One is of a boa constrictor swallowing an elephant, but to grown-ups it looks like a hat. Perhaps he has learned for himself the lesson of the fox: he has the capacity to see with his heart what is essential in life. He can see the elephant inside the boa constrictor. His “true understanding” of what is essential reassures the reader that it is possible to be an adult while retaining a childlike mentality.

Yet the narrator also sometimes doubts his capacity to see naïvely. He remembers, “My friend never explained anything to me. He thought, perhaps, that I was like himself. But I, alas, do not know how to see sheep through the walls of boxes. Perhaps I am a little like the grown-ups. I have had to grow old” (p. 19). Perhaps the little prince never explained anything to him because such explanations are not essential. We learn from the fox that what is essential is really hidden. So the little prince and the facts surrounding his story remain unsaid. Like a child, the little prince beholds the world as a mystery. Unlike the snake, who solves all the riddles he presents, the little prince has a quality of insatiable inquisitiveness. Solving the questions is not as important to him as asking them.

Encountering the little prince brings out the child latent within the narrator. Through the little prince’s persistent questioning about his beloved rose, the narrator comes to realize for himself what is essential: “Of what moment now was my hammer, my bolt, or thirst, or death? On one star, one planet, my planet, the Earth, there was a little prince to be comforted” (p. 28). Likewise, an encounter with The Little Prince can free the child within the closed-minded adult. It is a story that reveals itself to me more deeply every time I read it: only by seeing with your heart may you truly see the world.

# Fairness and Justice Anonymous

**Discuss some issue of personal concern, and its importance to you.**

Fairness is a quality that I try hard to embody, and I admire those who demonstrate the impartiality necessary to be just. But people often mistake impartiality as the defining characteristic of someone who is fair. Empathy is more essential because it is necessary not only to understand but to be invested fully in a situation in order to render a fair judgment.

About a month ago I encountered the first critical situation that required me to question what it meant to be fair. Two of my classmates created and showed a video that poked fun at some of the racial stereotypes affecting minority students. The video sparked deep divisions as students expressed strong opinions judging its content, context, and significance. As co-head of Another Perspective, Dalton’s diversity group dedicated to discussing issues affecting students, I felt an obligation to facilitate constructive dialogue that would allow the various factions to meet. During our first meeting of about one hundred students, I was distraught over how best to be fair. I had my own opinions: that school is not the place to attack peoples’ identities; that the very nature of the film as offensive towards some meant that everyone should feel upset; and that no one has the right to tell someone else that they should or should not be offended. I wanted to side with people who shared my equally “right” views. But I had seen the futile efforts of others as their tried to assert their opinions and explain why they were right. So I held my tongue. Instead, I ran the meeting asking questions and forcing people to consider and explain to others how and why they felt the way they did. Although we did not “fix” anything at that time we began to sort out exactly what our problems were and how we could go about solving them.

What I came to realize was that truly being fair is much harder than illuminating the “right” way of seeing things. It would require me to give up my short-term desire to impart my “right” way of seeing things in favor of mutual understanding, and long-term progress. Fairness means loving and respecting your peers enough to see past the short term. In caring about the well being of a community, which in this case was my school, I had to be objective and put aside my inclination to favor people who shared my view. My responsibility as a leader is to create an environment encouraging participation, and ensuring that the most important factors are addressed and their significance understood. Hopefully with this strategy the group will come to the “right” conclusions. It isn’t about the tendencies that we have to favor one position over another, but the necessity to empathize – and not just sympathize – with both sides. And so unequal treatment becomes unnecessary as you learn to embrace those who hold adversary opinions and begin to understand what makes people think the way they do.

# Sticks and Stones Anonymous

**Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.**

When my younger brother, James, was five years old, Jack Nierman bit him while they were playing in our favorite playground. I was sitting atop the monkey bars when I saw it happen. I swung down and pushed Jack away, then dragged my screaming brother over to our babysitter, Lethia. James didn't want to tell anyone what happened, so I did it for him. Even at the age of eight, I wasn't about to let Jack get away with what he'd done; it wasn't fair.

We spent a lot of time together in the playground. James developed a habit of collecting anything that resembled a weapon; sticks ("swords") were his favorite. I had to employ a great deal of negotiation to convince him to leave his sticks on the sidewalk in front of our apartment building. But I did what I had to, and I was the only one able to persuade him to part with his weapons. I started my distraction even before we rounded the corner. I always promised James that our doorman, Frank, would protect his sticks until we came back outside.

As we got older, and the park was no longer cool enough, James and I spent increasing time together indoors. Though he could be grouchy and shy around other people, James was an entertainer at home. Whenever he was sullen, I'd beg him to imitate Austin Powers or his Australian camp counselor, Rusty. Nothing could keep me from doubling over with laughter whenever he put on a show.

I went to sleep away camp for three years before James joined me. When he first came, I paraded around, introducing him to my favorite kids and counselors, and made sure that he was having fun. Though at first he resented my social meddling, soon he was waving me away from a circle of girls crowded around him. I didn't stop checking on him to make sure that everything was going okay, but I felt happy that he didn't need me anymore to have a good time. I still indulge his shyness every once in a while, especially at Starbucks. James hates ordering his own coffee, and I don't mind doing it for him.

James and I share a room that is divided by a partition. As a result, our homework is done in close quarters, and we can always hear each other. We are very different; James is fidgety and needs a little Jimi Hendrix to settle down, but I like to work without distraction. He also tends to easily become overly-stressed when he doesn't understand something, whereas I try to be methodical when approaching things that are unclear. I love the struggle of learning - I am more successful when things are difficult, and challenge has been the most valuable part of my education. Some nights, it felt like I spent more time helping James with his homework than doing my own. I can't stand seeing him struggle when I know that I can help. Even when my parents try to get me to do my own work, I know that his is more pressing, and I don't mind staying up late.

By far, my favorite place to accompany James is to any clothing store. James absolutely detests shopping, and it is the thing that I am most worried he won't be able to handle when I leave home. The idea of looking in a store for things he likes, then trying them on, and ultimately making decisions about what he needs is intolerable to him. But when he's in the dressing room, furious as I pass more things over the door, I laugh at his silliness, and he laughs at himself, too.

# Value of Diversity Anonymous

**A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.**

There simply was no solution. With tears of frustration in my eyes I went through the options for the hundredth time. I had come face to face with one of life’s many brutal truths: no one can build a sand-castle by herself. About to give up in despair, I spied something that made my heart leap. There, between the little red slide and the big-kid swings, sat another five-year old girl. It did not matter that as a native of the country I was visiting, she only spoke German.

All too soon we were casting long shadows in the fading sunlight, and I had to say goodbye to my architectural partner. I knew nothing but her name, which I have long since forgotten. After all, this was simply one of many such encounters.

By the time I realized how lucky I was to do so, I had traveled to most of Europe and some of Asia. My father’s job dragged our family from country to country. We lived for a few months in Israel one year, a few months in Switzerland the next. If I were to go back to any one of the many countries to which I have traveled, I would naturally be drawn to the famous monuments, historic landmarks, and local museums. But the memories of my international playmates are some of the most valuable souvenirs I could bring home from my travels. With their help, I learned to both respect and appreciate others’ differences.

At times this respect came with difficulty, particularly when the culture in question clashed with my own. When I was twelve my father was invited to teach a class in South Korea, and so off we went. One day we visited a small art museum, where we met the only curator, a small, hospitable woman who spoke no English. I responded politely when she welcomed us to the museum, and then not quite so politely when she started running her hands through my long, curly hair. I stood rooted to the spot by shock and horror as she neatly braided my hair. After a few minutes I was released, and with a great sigh of relief I set off to explore. I had hardly reached the door when, to my dismay, the hair-braider returned – brandishing a comb. Gathering my dignity, I suffered her ministrations. The result was a breathtaking French braid, shaming me for resenting the curator’s lack of respect for my personal space. Never again did I hold other cultures to my own standards.

In Belize, I saw that other cultures have different economic as well as personal standards. My family and I stayed in the small village of Armenia, a town built for refugees from the surrounding countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Most residents made their living as hired hands at the local grapefruit orchards or selling handmade souvenirs to the tourists. The wealthier townspeople owned horses for transportation or pack animals, but most simply walked.

At first I pitied the locals for their poverty. As I spent more time with them, I began to see that they did not consider themselves poor, nor lament their lack of luxury. The concept of wealth meant something completely different in Armenia, something that had less to do with possessions and more to do with family. While I appreciate the comfort in which I live, the Armenians make me thankful for the little things in life, the beautiful days and loyal friends that no amount of money could replace.

To this day I value diversity. Many of my friends speak imperfect English; for most it is their second language. Few are citizens of the United States. As I make the transition from high school to college, I hope to meet students from a variety of different cultures and backgrounds with whom I can share my unique experiences. Though I have traveled in four continents and met people of numerous cultures, I have not yet been to college, and sometimes the thought makes me apprehensive. That said, I know that if I approach my college years with the same open-minded curiosity I learned from my family’s wanderings, I will be amazed.

# Learning to See Anonymous

**Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.**

“Do you see now?” The voice rang in my ears as I shook my head for the umpteenth time. My eyes were tightly shut, trying to hold back the tears of anger and frustration. When I opened them again, the world looked to me as it always did; only now the leaves above seemed to be mocking me as they chuckled in the breeze. Why couldn't I see?

I was nine years old, lying under the tree for the third time that week, with my art teacher, Mr. Hayes, sitting beside me. The exercise was starting to feel useless; I was supposed to be learning how to see. “But I already know how to see!” I cried out desperately, hoping that we would go inside and sketch apples instead.

“The way an artist sees,” my teacher said calmly, “is not the same as everyone else. You must learn to see from a different angle, see what’s behind, see the light.” Not knowing what he meant, I turned over with a groan, thinking that I would never learn to see like an artist.

Yet I found myself under that same tree one afternoon, a few weeks after Mr. Hayes had left me on my own to learn how to see. I was feeling more disheartened than ever, but I refused to believe that I was incapable of the simple task of seeing. My eyes strained so hard that tears were beginning to brim. I closed them for a second, and when I opened them again… the trunk rose majestically, thick and stocky at the bottom but vanishing to a point at its tip. See from a different angle. The leaves melted into a canvas of green as the sky beyond coalesced into splendid shapes of piercing azure. See what’s behind. The canopy above shimmered and glowed in the sun. See the light. Finally I saw. I sat up from the shock. It was all so simple, and a new world stretched before my eyes.

Nothing has looked the same since the day I learned to see, but it was not until years later that I realized the greater significance of what I had discovered. The value of seeing does not just apply to art. It holds true for everything in life. Whether I am sitting in the classroom or reading a newspaper article, I strive to see: see differently, see beyond, see the light. When I find a piece of history that interests me, I search for different accounts of it to see from other perspectives. When I meet someone new, I look past his appearance to see what is hidden beneath the facade. When I study a scientific concept, I not only focus on the technicalities, but also dig deeper to see what else it might reflect. Simply by seeking to see, the wonders I discover in the world multiply right before my eyes.

The moment of clarity I experienced when I first learned to see will remain with me forever, but it was only the first of many such moments. From learning to see as an artist, I had learned to see as an individual. I aspire to nothing more than to see, and through seeing, live a life more intense and more human. “Do you see now?” Those four simple words my art teacher once asked me long ago still resonate within me, and I know that his question is one I will be asking myself for the rest of my life.

# Artist - Me Anonymous

**Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.**

Eyes fixed upon the image in front of her, brows slightly furrowed, the girl appeared to be lost in thought. While the others walked on after stopping briefly before the piece, she stood there with her feet glued to the spot. I watched the girl from behind one of the tall white grids on which dozens of frames were suspended in the cafeteria. My eyes traveled from her face to the painting she was looking at, and finally to the tiny card beside it: Title – Colors of Freedom; Media – watercolor and ink; Artist – me.

There hung the painting I had poured my heart into, my very own masterpiece. Smiling to myself, I couldn’t help but feel immensely proud, not because the piece was featured in the school’s senior art show but because I knew that it was entirely and uniquely my own, that I gave life to it and therefore, no matter where it went, it could never be taken from me.

I have loved art for as long as I can remember. My family’s old furniture and my father’s books were my first canvasses, to which the scribbles that cover these objects still attest. When other children abandoned their coloring books for Barbie dolls and baseball bats, I was the one always sitting inside during recess, letting my imagination run wild onto the pages of my sketchbook. As I grew older, immersing myself in the world of my own creation became the perfect antidote for a bad test score or a fight with a friend. Over the course of my life, art has become irretrievably a part of my identity.

For me, the most exhilarating thing about art is the process of creation. When I sat down to begin what was to become my featured piece in the show, I felt both eager and curious – knowing that the blank sheet before me would soon be transformed into something beautiful, yet not knowing what it would look like. My excitement grew as my pencil danced lightly over the roughness of the paper. Then, a moment of fearlessness, as the first streak of color shattered the pallor of the page. Experimentation ensued; sprinkling salt crystals onto wet paint yielded surprisingly satisfying results. The rest of the brushstrokes were laid down with care, threads of ink offered the finishing touch, and at last – something unlike anything else in the world: a portion of my soul, contained within an 11 by 18 sheet of paper, and on display for all to see.

At that thought, my mind snapped back to reality. To my surprise, another minute must have passed and the girl was still staring at my painting. “Hey, are you alright?” I walked over cautiously and asked.

“Yes,” the girl replied. “Are you the artist?” I nodded and noticed her now smiling mysteriously, not at me but at my painting, as if she knew something that I did not. “Thank you,” she said quietly, turned around and vanished into the crowd.

I was left there in the cafeteria, dumbfounded and speechless, surrounded by a multitude of other students yet feeling quite alone. I didn’t know who she was, if she was in my grade or even went to my school, for I never saw her again. I didn’t know what it was about my painting that had moved her or why she thanked me, for I never had the chance to ask. But what I did learn that day was this: my art wasn’t merely something that fulfilled my own passion; it had the capacity to touch the heart of a complete stranger. Art might begin from within, but it is the connection it makes with the outside world that is perhaps the most beautiful thing of all.

# Grandma's Clothes Anonymous

**Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.**

What a familiar sight, I thought to myself as I subconsciously stopped to stare through the display window. A couple of mannequins were dressed in half-finished garments, surrounded by waves of colourful fabrics cascading down the table. Pools of thread scattered among oddly shaped buttons. And on the right side of the window – an old-fashioned Singer sewing machine. The same intricate golden patterns on the body, the same shiny black finish. Just like Grandma’s.

Grandma loved to sew. Most of all, she loved to make clothes for me, her only grandchild. I used to sit and watch her peddle on the machine for hours, her fingers deftly navigating the fabric under the needle, until I'd fall asleep to the humming lullaby. When I'd open my eyes again, Grandma would be there, smiling, holding up a fresh new skirt or blouse for me. It always fit perfectly, and I would run outside to show my friends my new outfit, proudly telling them that Grandma had made it, just for me.

At least that was how it was before I moved to the city.

I pulled my eyes away from the display. My heels clicked against the pavement as I continued on my way home, thinking back to the time when I was twelve. That was the year of our big move, the year I started middle school, and the year Grandma’s handiworks fell out of my favor. They were different from those my friends wore; the dresses and shirts I used to love made me feel like an outsider. Soon, I began inventing excuses to avoid dressing in the clothes Grandma made me: the winter was never cold enough to wear the striped wool sweater, the summer never hot enough for the flowered silk top. Not long after, Grandma stopped sewing. Not because she wanted to, but because her hands were no longer steady enough to draw the patterns, her eyes no longer sharp enough to thread the needles…

That night, I dragged out a large, dusty suitcase from under my bed. Inside, all the clothes that Grandma had made me lay in neatly folded stacks. I took them out, one by one, cautiously caressing the softness of the fabrics. I was once again filled with the wonder I experienced as a child. But only now did I understand the profoundness of the love that was sewn into each piece that lay before me, in every stitch, every fold, every button. I finally realized how Grandma must had felt when I no longer wanted to receive that love, and later, when she could no longer give it.

How foolish it was of me to not have seen it back then. I was ashamed that it had taken me so long to understand, but now that I finally did I realized not only Grandma’s kindness, but also the nature of love -- namely, that it is meant to be given, not hidden or kept within. Grandma had her way of giving it, and now I had mine. I knew that it was not too late; although Grandma’s clothes no longer fit me, the least I could do was to pass on the love that was in them to someone who would truly appreciate it.

My heart felt a little emptier yet also more full as I walked away from the downtown Salvation Army the next morning. I smiled to myself when I passed the display window with the old-fashioned Singer. Then, I flipped out my cell phone and dialed an almost forgotten number: it had been a long time since I had last talked to Grandma.

# Giving Me the Bricks Anonymous

**Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.**

“Mom, I want to take the SAT.”

My mom lifted her eyes off the newspaper and looked at me suspiciously. “What on earth is the SAT?” I went on to explain it to her as she stared at me with increasing incredulity, as if I were no longer her daughter but an animal escaped from the zoo. After I had finished, she was still struggling to understand how I got the idea of going to an American university instead of attending one of the local Canadian schools.

I chuckled to myself. In many ways, my mom and dad are the very antithesis of typical Asian parenting. While other Asian parents are fretting about their sons and daughters getting accepted to top-tier American universities, mine are aware of what classes I am taking only at report card time. They have never pressured me to learn the piano or the violin, and I ended up the only Asian child I know of who does not play an instrument. I have never had a tutor, nor have I ever taken a single academic lesson outside of school. They have never forced me to take certain classes or participate in certain activities. I was never banned from the television so that I would do my homework. My parents have never sought to dictate my goals. They have never told me to become a doctor or lawyer or engineer.

Yet, somehow, I turned out to be the ideal Asian daughter – at least in the eyes of my parents’ friends. I may be completely tone deaf, but I have developed my own passion for visual art and have gained considerable mastery. I seek help or additional materials when I truly want to, using the resources available to me. Knowing where my interests lie, I am the one who decides what classes to take and what activities I will be passionate about. I manage my time effectively, prioritizing my tasks so that I know to finish my homework before watching television. I, not my parents, set my academic standards; I expect myself to do the best I possibly can.

So how did I become the person I am today? Certainly it was not my parents who made me this way. Or was it? The question came to me that day, a question I had never really asked myself before. But as soon as I began thinking, the answer became apparent: of course it was my parents. By giving me complete freedom to choose my own path, I have had to learn to make choices on my own, choices that reflect my dreams and aspirations. If I hadn't had to work to satiate my own curiosities and to meet my own expectations instead of my parents’, I would never have become the inquisitive, motivated, passionate individual I am today.

At that thought, I smiled a mysterious smile at my mom, enveloped her in a hug, and silently thanked her for giving me the bricks instead of paving my way.

# Most Influential Teacher Anonymous

**Topic: Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.**

She was the toughest; she was the best. She was also the most influential teacher I have ever had. Ms. William, my sixth grade teacher, was never one to settle for second-best. As a demanding teacher, she hadn’t always been popular. In fact, my classmates and I used to grumble frequently about her stringent standards. However, by continually challenging us, Ms. William instilled in us an enduring passion for learning.

I remember my first day in her class. While most teachers started the year with fun activities, Ms. William jumped straight into academics. After taking the attendance, she promptly started our first unit: Forces.

She narrated to us the story of Newton and the apple tree, and asked us why things always fell toward the Earth. She asked us many other questions – questions about natural phenomena that I had never thought about before. “Why do we see lightning before we hear thunder? How can we measure the speed of a falling object?” We learnt never to take things for granted. “Always, always, always question what you see. Do you understand why it happens?”

At first, I had a hard time understanding many of the concepts, and often stayed after class to learn more. Once, when I doubted that objects of different mass fell with the same acceleration, Ms. William and I conducted our own experiment with a pendulum to prove the theory. Throughout the year, whenever there was a concept or theory I did not understand, Ms. William would encourage me to research or carry out an experiment by myself. Under her guidance, I entered In doing so, she not only taught me to become inquisitive about the world, and also gave me the tools to explore it.

Another gift that Ms. William gave me was an appreciation of literature. Before I met her, I had always stubbornly rejected as true literature any book that was not written by Enid Blyton. To me, there was nothing that could be better than the adventures of the Famous Five. But as the list of Enid Blyton “To Read” books grew shorter, I started hunting around for other novels to entertain me. I decided to take a look at the Reading List Ms. William had compiled. I still remember picking up Oliver Twist from the library shelf and looking at it skeptically. Today, I’m glad I had listened to Ms. William, for she not only introduced me to the world of Oliver and Fagin, but also that of Huckleberry Finn, Uncle Tom, the BFG, Lucy, Edmund, Susan and Peter. I remember coming to school early one morning, hardly able to contain my excitement, to tell Ms. William that I had finally finished all the books on her Reading List. She smiled in her usual way, and promptly gave me a second List.

Although it’s been six years since I last saw Ms. William, her legacy lives on even today. Every time I read a particularly interesting book, I’d record it in my Reading List. My hope is to one day visit her, and to show her my new Reading Lists. I want her to know how much she has helped me to grow, and how much she has inspired me.

Canadian poet and essayist Irving Layton wrote in his essay The Role of the Teacher that “It is usually from a gifted teacher that a child catches his first glimpse of harmony or wisdom and gets his first hint of the intellectual adventure which may engage him for the rest of his life.”

Ms. William was that teacher for me.

# Why I Love Debating Anonymous

**Supplementary Topic: Describe an activity of the greatest importance to you**

We are sitting in an empty classroom, two hours after school has ended. Our hands are scribbling furiously across the page, trying to catch up with our torrent of ideas. It is the week before the debate final, and we are doing a dress rehearsal. The topic is child discipline.

“No, no, no. Cut that part out.” Someone suggests, “Give examples. Give alternatives. We must convince the adjudicators that force is unnecessary. That’s our goal.”

We nod in unison. But no, someone disagrees.

“Remember, ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child’. What are our rebuttals for that?”

And so it goes on. We are animated in our discussion, all with different opinions. We sit in a circle, taking turns to speak, trying to keep some semblance of civilization. However, disorder soon sets in as we start conjecturing about the other team’s approach. We are selfish people, all trying to be heard, and all raising our voice until this din becomes unsupportable. But we love the chaos, where ideas, opinions, and counter-opinions intermingle and unite into a product of coherence and clarity. We watch, we listen, we criticize, and we support one another’s arguments. We help our teammates on the finer points of rebuttals, and give feedbacks to their speeches.

I love debating. It gave me my best friend, it introduced me to the works of Raphael, and it instilled in me perceptiveness that I am able to use every day. It has made me realize that there are always many sides to an argument, and that you can never form an opinion without seeing all sides. Debating has also taught me to argue for my own beliefs, but at the same time, to be more receptive to others’ ideas. It has made me work as much as 10 hours a week, slogging through mountains of information and condensing all that into a 6-minute speech. There have been times when I have felt like quitting, when I became so frustrated after countless writings and re-writings that I had just wanted to turn off the lights and go to sleep. There have been times when I was physically exhausted or just mentally worn out. It was during those times that thoughts of defeat crept into my mind. But in the end, I pulled through. I reminded myself of my team and of my love for this activity. I kept going and I’m proud of that.

I look around at my team members. Some look frustrated, some look excited, and some look nervous. Some are arguing, and some are jotting down notes. But in our words and our actions, there is one thing that connects us all: it’s why we are here in this room at five thirty in the afternoon. It’s the passion.

I love my team.

I love debating.

# To Become Something Greater Anonymous

**Please provide a statement (250 words minimum) that addresses your reasons for transferring and the objectives you hope to achieve.**

Cornell University has come to mean something much greater to me than its Ivy League status alone conveys. When I first visited Cornell, I was amazed by the feeling of connectedness the campus emitted. It didn’t seem as though everybody was just there, so to say, but rather that they had a certain relationship with one another which transcended their day-to-day meetings. Indeed, it was fascinating that while everything around me was vast in scale—the campus, the student body, the number of professors—simultaneously everything seemed so limited and intricate. I could not help but want to be a part of this rich academic community. Yet there also appeared another dimension of connectedness which extended beyond this one. Hundreds of clubs, hockey games, and the Greek system, among other things, all brought members of the university even closer. What seemed to emerge was an enormous and diverse community united not just in one, but many modes of life.

At Cornell, I also found many signs that a truly great education was being provided to its students. This was made evident by the highly intellectual atmosphere which pervaded the school even in its most casual settings. Quite frequently, I overheard student conversations with subject matters ranging from astrophysics to psychology. In all cases, it seemed not only that those students I encountered had a passion for learning, but that their passion was complemented and driven by the very real notion that they were learning from the experts of their respective fields.

Of course, there was no dire need to visit Cornell, or to observe with any great attention any of these things, to know that it was one of the finest academic institutions in the world. I could have just as easily picked-up the latest U.S. News college rankings or perused a myriad of websites including Cornell’s, which organized the university’s compelling facts and figures into the columns and rows of finely-ordered tables. But to see exemplified in the everyday functioning of the school that excellence which was previously only an abstraction for me, made Cornell truly remarkable.

C.S. Lewis once wrote: “The next best thing to being wise oneself is to live in a circle of those who are.” Accordingly, what has inspired my application to Cornell is the hope of being counted among the many distinguished Cornell students and teachers whom I hold in such high regard. They form, in my opinion, one of the very best “circles” with which one could hope to surround himself. To become something greater or more evolved than I am—as a student and as a person—is my goal, and I believe Cornell to provide the very best context for its realization.

**Interest in Philosophy Anonymous**

**Tell us what you’d like to major in at Cornell and why, how your past academic or work experience influenced your decision, and how transferring to Cornell would further your academic interests.**

As a young boy, perhaps seven or eight years old, I remember watching a certain episode of Batman after returning home from school. In the episode, Batman finds himself in a dream world created by the Mad Hatter. Consequently, both Batman and the viewer spend much of the episode trying to differentiate what is real from what is feigned. I'm sure that for many children this half-hour viewing was not an event of lifelong consequence; I was apparently an exception. I began wondering what I knew was real in the world. I slowly started to doubt the many things that I had theretofore held as certainties—chiefly those things which had been told to me in the past by a parent or teacher as answers to my questions. Indeed, my questions were given a new rigor and an odd profundity considering their asker. I questioned the existence of God, my own existence, and the existence of the world. I wondered if and how I could ever be certain that the things conveyed to me as right or wrong, true or false, could be affirmed as such. Finally, compelled by the lack of answers I could find in my deliberations, I abandoned these questions altogether.

A couple of years later, I was sitting down at the desk of my room with several baseball cards in front of me. Like many of my friends, I enjoyed collecting baseball cards, and had recently acquired a card I had been seeking for quite a long time. As I sat at my desk, looking at this card in particular with a sort of proud stare, I became aware that it was a source of happiness for me. I started to consider what would become of my relationship to the card as I grew older. I maintained that the card would likely grow in monetary and intrinsic value and would still provide me with happiness. I could even at some point, perhaps, give it to my son as a gift or a sort of heirloom. But as I further envisioned the future, I began to realize that I would at some point die and that all temporal things, such as my card, would cease to provide me with the happiness they once had. And so I inquired into the purpose of these things. As regarded my happiness, I wondered what kind of sufficiency they provided. If these things were only temporal goods, I asked what investment should I or anyone else put into them as a source of happiness. These were the genuine musings of a ten-year-old boy. They, along with the inquiries of years earlier and so many others in between, constituted the origins of my interest in Philosophy.

The ambitious investigations of my early childhood oddly became detached from my awareness as I grew older. Entering college, I was unsure of what I wanted to study, and so decided against picking any specific path. However, in my second semester, I elected to take a course in contemporary Philosophy. It was this choice that ultimately renewed my dedication to what I firmly believe has always been in my nature to pursue. As of this academic year, I have begun my major in Philosophy and it is this same subject that I wish to study at Cornell, if afforded the privilege. At Cornell, I will have the opportunity to learn from top professors in one of the most esteemed and distinguished Philosophy departments in the world. Moreover, the Sage School of Philosophy offers multiple programs to supplement the wealth of information gleaned from the classroom, such as the Norman Kretzman Philosophy Lectures and Research Assistantships. With Cornell’s Logos—the undergraduate journal of Philosophy—I will have the opportunity to continue my participation in an academic journal; one which I of course have a particular interest in, yet which is not offered by my current school. And, as I believe that any truly well-rounded academic experience involves relationship with one’s fellow students, Cornell will enable me to interact with a large, diverse, and highly intellectual student body in formal Philosophy discussion groups, as well as in more informal settings.

# Personal Quotation Essay Anonymous

**Please choose and discuss a quotation or personal motto that reflects your values and beliefs and tells us something about the kind of person you are.**

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” -Socrates

As a Philosophy major, perhaps it is of little surprise that I chose this quotation. Nevertheless, I do believe it conveys better than any other who I am and what I value. If Socrates was at all correct in his assertion, then I vainly suppose my life is quite worth living. In every way, I believe myself to be a philosopher—an odd claim, no doubt, for any college student to make. And yet I think it is not; and I believe those who know me best would agree. For even into the most leisurely settings, I inject my examinations of life and its purpose, of ethics and God. While my roommate plays mix tapes of Lil’ Wayne, I retaliate with audio books of Nietzsche or BBC radio clips of Bertrand Russell (although I do like Lil’ Wayne). My ponderings seem susceptible to no context or setting; neither to breakfast nor dinner, nor the treadmill or my bed before sleep. The very last conversation with my mother was the teleological approach of Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics. And with my father, a lecture on Aquinas’ Summa Theologica. Perhaps it is worth noting that my mother could, only with great difficulty spell ‘Aristotle,’ and as for my father, he would be fortunate to place the life of Aquinas in the correct millennium.

Since childhood, I have been both contemplative and passionate. It was not, however, until my later years of high school that I began to gain a great passion for the art of thinking itself. Perhaps one of the very first instances of this came in my junior year, when my Religious Studies teacher so boldly endeavored to give his own proofs for God’s existence. They were indeed quite horrible. Thereafter, I could not help but reflect on what I considered the egregious lack of reason he employed or on the subject matter itself to which he applied such a dogmatic approach. After many nights of intense thought I constructed my own proof of sorts, with an opposing conclusion—that God in fact did not exist. Although it was both rigorously devised and quite thorough in its premises—its length being around two pages—my purpose lay not in its conclusion. In fact, at that time, my own personal opinion would have led me more to agreement with my teacher than dissent from him. Instead, what I had perceived was a grave threat to the ideal I was beginning to adopt and hold dear: that above all, truth was the greatest thing a person could attain and that proper reasoning was the sole means of its attainment.

The preceding anecdote is just one of many that could relate the kind of person I am. In my Senior year of high school, I would often vacillate from wall to wall in the corridor of my dormitory, reading the original Latin text of Ovid’s Metamorphoses before sleep. When I attended college in New York City, I would ride the subway for hours sometimes on weekend nights, or pace the banks of the East River, considering a particular philosophical topic inspired either by class or conceived of by my own accord. And when I first came to my present school, I took it upon myself to find a replacement for my old sanctuaries of thought—now the austere book stacks of the Philosophy library. But if you would think that I am a recluse, or a hermit of sorts as a result of my intense love for thinking, you could not be more astray from the truth. For like Socrates, with whose words I began this essay, I often seek to reason dialectically; even sometimes with quite unexpected people. There is likely no better example of this than the hour-long conversation on Existentialism I had with a Dell Technical Support agent, just after he helped me with my laptop. A week later, I conversed with one of my roommates, a Neuroscience major attending Harvard Medical School next fall, about the correlation of God’s nature to meta-ethics. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this ended-up more a debate with myself than with him, as he seemed at first lost and then (maybe as a result) indifferent. Nevertheless, all things considered, I think Socrates would be proud.

# Hakuna Matata Dmitriy Pavlyuk

**Talk about somebody who has affected you.**

Russia had never been bad to me. My eleven years there made for a joyful, carefree childhood. I never thought of my life as wanting despite living on my grandma’s miserly pension for three years. During those last three years of my life in Russia, when my mom was in the U.S. and I lived with my grandma, I never once thought of myself as unlucky or lonely or poor. My grandma had crafted a splendid world for me, almost of fairy tale-like qualities: I was sure that love abounded in the world, that everyone was as happy as I was, and I was shielded from knowing that most of the world was immersed in warfare, that most marriages do not end happily, that I barely survived during my first year of life because my mom and grandma had to live on food stamps because of the currency default of 1991.

My grandma was careful not to expose me to these realities before my mindset was ripe enough to understand them. Hence I lived the life of Hakuna Matata—subject to no worries, my only duty being going to school, having everything else provided for me. I took that for granted, as any kid does, and haven’t come to appreciate what my grandma had done for me only until these past few years of my life. Slowly but steadily, my world view has been elucidated and my fairy tale-childhood has finally ground to a halt.

I do not regret that I didn’t appreciate the ease of life during my childhood because my grandma worked to ensure that I didn’t; sometimes, ignorance is truly bliss, and that blissfulness is the defining aspect of all the years of my upbringing. During that upbringing I had naturally come to love my grandma and hold her in high esteem. She has influenced many aspects of my life, most importantly my will to learn: day after day, year after year the idea that doing well in school will pay off in the future was being instilled into me. I value this the most, because it allowed me to come to my own understanding that my future is based on my education. I thus choose to do well in school and no longer have to be forced to.

The future that I plan to create for myself has a hint of grandma as well. Her career as a doctor had a profound impact on me. My own ambition to become a doctor is a direct result of the numerous nights I've spent listening to my grandma tell stories of doing four shifts of surgery or spending night after day on an ambulance. Her love of saving lives, despite being overworked and underpaid, imparted on me a desire to one day have that same amount of satisfaction when looking back on my own life.

I've pondered many a time how I could raise my children and have them respect and trust me as much as I respect and trust my grandma. A few theories involved having the foresight to do what’s best in the long run and not yielding to every demand; or maybe all it takes is respecting and trusting my children enough for them to do the same. I haven’t quite figured it out, but I've gotten the feeling that if I can endow my children with a sense of shelter from world’s realities and imbue an aura of Hakuna Matata into their lives, I’ll be off to a good start.

# Writing With Emily Emily Zhao

**Write about a piece of literature that changed your life./Topic of your choice**

In my naïve middle schools days, I did not think highly of English class. My love was math, with its logical equations, universal numbers, and challenging problems. English was my second language, something that surrounded and engulfed me the second I left the sanctuary of my Chinese-speaking home. English terrified me. I didn’t understand the phrases that my friends used; my essays always seemed childish and simple; and spelling was a constant enigma with its irregular rules. So instead, I hid behind a façade and pretended that English was not important. I tried to convince myself that math awards were the only academic achievements that I needed.

My false fabrications crumbled as soon as I read the first ten pages of Emily of New Moon by L. M. Montgomery. All of sudden, I was mesmerized by the power of words. Montgomery’s vivid descriptions, rich images, and personal style made me feel like I had made a new friend. Soon, I was laughing with the protagonist, Emily Starr, as she made a lopsided pudding cake and crying with her when she was betrayed by a phony friend. Above all, as I read through the trilogy, I felt myself growing with Emily.

With my analytical side, I was, at first, surprised at my book choice. While Emily Starr and I did share the same passionate and determined personality, Emily’s dream was to become a writer. I, on the other hand, was so disheartened by my lack of abilities in English that I was terrified of writing. However, Montgomery had such a way with her diction that she was able to convey her own love of writing through her characters. As a result, her characters were also able to convey that love to the readers. While reading through Emily’s innumerate attempts at finding the perfect lines for her poems and the most articulate ways to write her stories, I found myself looking for those elusive words with her. For the first time in my life, I realized what a series of well-chosen words could accomplish. Words allowed Montgomery’s ideas to travel across the decades; words allowed such lively and realistic people like Emily Starr to be created.

Suddenly, I loved English, and L. M. Montgomery via Emily Starr became my role-model. The trilogy also taught me a lesson: the power of perseverance. I realized that I was not alone in my struggle to write better essays, and my failures did not reflect my intelligence but, instead, my lack of experience and practice. Even though Emily loved words and grew up writing, she still faced years of hard work, constant revisions, and uncountable rejections before she finally tasted the fruit of success. Who was I to expect instant success when I had only been speaking English for a few years at school?

I began to emulate Emily’s determination. I worked my way through thousand-paged English workbooks; I channeled my over-imaginative ideas into stories; I even read under the bed-covers with a flashlight when my grandparents enforced a bedtime. I still received B’s on some of my essays, and my grammar tests still took a dip once in awhile. However, I did not let the disappointments deter me from my goal. Just like Emily, I simply stored away the bad news and worked harder.

Then one day, my perseverance paid off. I could not believe it at first, but there it was, my little fictional piece, proudly claiming a whole page spread in our school’s literary journal. After I jumped onto my bed with joy, I reached into my bedside drawer to pull out my faithful yet worn copy of Emily of New Moon. I reread the part where Emily had her first poem published. I wanted to celebrate my first success with Emily.

# Love of Language Anonymous

**Consider the academic programs in the School/ College you indicated above. How will you utilize them to further explore your intended major or general interests if you’re undecided?**

The College of Arts and Sciences’ flexible opportunities allow me to best pursue all my interests. For example, by integrating physical and information science into biological science, Computational Biology allows me core training in biology without neglecting computer science. With my newfound passion for the brain’s behavior, Psychology of Language (PSYCH 215) also assimilates my passion for languages into cognitive studies. Diverse programs with strong biological content at CAS draw connections between my many interests.

The Language House Program, however, is my major reason for choosing CAS. My past two years in America proved that complete immersion in a foreign language is the best way to acquire proficiency. The Language House Program offers the precise setting where one has to be almost hexalingual to understand all that is going on, which will be a catalyst to the mastering of my fourth language, Japanese. The Japanese FALCON and Japan Abroad IES Program at Chubu University will be equally helpful in attaining superb fluency.

My interests are unlimited. With no intended major, the extraordinary breadth across CAS’s curriculum permits me to explore as broad a field as possible. One-third of the required units being electives allow unlimited experimentation; sampling the Nature of Universe (ASTRO 101) or delving into the Foundations of Artificial Intelligence (COM S 472) will be mind-opening experiences. With CAS’ extensive and innovative programs, my hope of simultaneously pursuing science and a foreign tongue, yet still exploring other aspects of life, is no longer just a dream.

# About Me Anonymous

**Describe yourself.**

My middle school was a mess. Not in the sense that we had students crying, teachers screaming or chalk flying everywhere, but rampant homework copying and dozing in class raged all over the campus. It was just a place where learning was not cool. Students sick of spoon-fed lectures lived just for the moment when the dismissal bell rang - and I was part of that.

Then I came to Exeter. It was the turning point of my life. I came here for Japanese, and I found so much more. I discovered that I am not the only one on earth who will go as far as reading a particularly engrossing chapter in the shower. I made friends who regard a 45-minute walk to a supermarket on a snowy Sunday morning as a good topic for an English paper. Exonians are so genuinely passionate about learning that they stimulate my buried hunger for it. Put three Exonians together on a Saturday night and you get a parametric Mickey Mouse on your TI-89; we actually had fun refining the curves of its tail. Wearing a neon-green Chemistry 319 T-shirt might sound nerdy at first, but definitely not after a Harkness discussion with original ideas pouring forth, when the pieces start to fall into place. Nowhere else do I get the chance to debate about Brave New World with my English teacher, a PhD from one of the most renowned colleges in the world. I once e-mailed my history teacher about my essay’s structural problem at two in the morning, and he left me a voice mail by five. It was quite amazing.

And this experience extends outside the classrooms; when friends seek my advice in the dining hall, when a black, a white and an Asian snuggle under the same blanket for yet another late-night talk that bears a strange resemblance to an essay on Existentialism, or just the moment when I realize the tremendous opportunities to be constantly discovering at so many levels, my passion cannot help but unfold vigorously, like proteins in an inorganic solution.

Exeter is learning anytime, anywhere. As a senior, I am still grateful that I took that huge leap three years ago into an environment that unleashed my passion for knowledge. As I take another uncertain stride toward college, I thirst for a summit where there is no shame in being sincerely engaged in learning, a place where everyone is allowed to savor every moment. But even in this light of uncertainty, I would be running towards whatever else life would have in store for me, and hopefully not tripping on the way.

# Teriyaki to Chitterlings Marisa Louise Okano

**Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.**

Like every other year, a spectrum of color surrounds me on the first day of 2009. My January 1st mornings have always been shared with Grandma, a 91-year-old woman who still manages to scurry through the kitchen preparing the brunch that stares at me from the center of the table—literally. One crimson lobster's eyes dare me to snap one of its feelers, but to Grandma, ruining the little guy before it's time to devour him is bad luck. After everyone chimes their glasses, it's time for homemade sushi, complete with pink Japanese radishes and zesty horseradish paste of nearly glowing chartreuse. As usual, I spread a bit more on my rice than I can handle—but feeling my eyes tear up is part of the wasabi experience.

Noontime arrives, and with it, even more food. It's off to Nana's house—where aromas can be smelled from the driveway, where everyone seems to be my cousin, and where you don't touch the orange, marshmallow-covered candied yams on the stove before they're ready. The earthy tones of collard greens, sauce-lathered barbecued ribs and black eyed peas line the kitchen counter waiting to be consumed, but not before everyone joins hands in prayer around the perpetually plastic-covered dining room table.

I've never given much thought about the uniqueness of my family's traditions or composition. To many, my Japanese and African-American heritage is fascinating. I've been inundated with puzzled questions. "If you're Asian, why aren't you good at math?" "Aren't Black people supposed to be good dancers?" "Oh my God, we should do your hair in an afro, and call it a JapaFro!" And, the most frequent, "What are you?" When this question is asked, I respond that my father is Japanese and my mother is African-American. Occasionally, I am tempted to play with the open-ended nature of the question and respond, "A friend. A writer. A Judd Apatow film addict."

There are so many facets to my identity that my racial background has never been an especially integral part of how I define myself. People have always tried to place me in a category, though I've never felt the need to categorize myself or anyone else. I have acquired my core values from very different "categories": my Japanese Grandma and my African-American Nana. Despite differences in their appearances and life experiences, they have both taught me the importance of perseverance.

Grandma, who spent the years of WWII in Osaka, Japan away from her husband interned at Manzanar Concentration Camp, returned to Los Angeles to find him terminally ill. After nursing him until his death, she was left to raise three children alone, which she did without an ounce of self-pity. Her ability to persevere while maintaining optimism translates into many arenas. As a Los Angeles native, she has managed to stay true to her beloved Dodgers by means of an AM radio or a ticket to Bobblehead Day.

Nana's life story is worlds apart from Grandma's; however, her experiences have taught me a similar lesson. She once recalled that as a girl living in the segregated town of Emory, Texas, she visited the State Fair—on the single designated day for Black patrons. Amazingly, Nana viewed the experience objectively, and recalled only the fun that she and her sisters shared after weeks of picking cotton in the sun on the family farm. My grandmothers' dedication and eternal optimism in the midst of hardship have modeled the resolute strength that I have applied when facing adversity.

Moreover, my grandmothers have demonstrated the importance of tolerance. Each Thanksgiving, when my father recites grace at the dinner table, I glance over at Grandma— whose past I know did not include very much spirituality—bow her head in appreciation. In spite of Nana’s unwavering Christian faith, I watched her accept an incense offering process at the Buddhist funeral wake of Grandma’s sister. Through the patience that they have exemplified out of pure devotion to our family, I have increased my willingness to see the beliefs of those whom I may not agree with in a more accepting light.

Although a New Year’s Day during which one could eat teriyaki chicken and chitterlings within hours of each other might seem unusual to most, it’s all I’ve ever known. Only recently have I noticed that my ability to be colorblind has been possible due to my colorful background. The important values of perseverance and tolerance that I have acquired come from two racially contrasting, yet similarly wise women—my Grandma and my Nana.

# Jan the Troubadour Anonymous

**It responds to the quote:"Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved." -William Jennings BryanDo you agree with this quote? What experiences have you had that seem to reinforce the above (or render it completely false)?**

Three months into my exchange year in Germany, my friend called me, a little dejected. She wanted to go downtown, and it was clear why. There was still something incredibly rousing, mysterious, and exciting about the European city that had recently become our home. Even as the weather cooled and the throng of people thinned, something drew us to its center, Schlossplatz (Castle Square), our thinking being that the myriad of as yet unseen faces and the layering of voices might call us out of a slightly less exciting day-to-day existence and present us with some small adventure. Kafka once wrote in his diary, “Life’s splendor forever lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled from view, deep down, invisible, far off… If you summon it by the right word, by its right name, it will come.” Going to the city was our clumsy way of tugging at the veil, or maybe it was the hope that the right word would be whispered to us there.

On that night we were lucky. We met someone we believed had pulled off that veil. His name was Jan; he was perched on a stone between two buildings, singing his heart out. It was fascinating. Of course, street singers were nothing new—but usually their profession was a last resort, and it showed. Jan was different; he was talented, spirited, well-dressed, clean. His eye wasn’t glued to his guitar-case, which was glittering with more than just a few two-Euro pieces. People gathered around him, wide-eyed, smiling. He was an under-cover pop star and the tickets were free. Soon he announced that he’d had enough and it was time for a coffee. The audience had dwindled to my friend and I, and some old man babbling about Hollywood. We landed in “Café du Théatre” and waited for exotic anecdotes. Jan told us about his life and what had brought him to the city. He’d followed love there but lost it soon after. Why did he sing in the streets at night? Because he was a poet born in the wrong century. We didn’t think to ask what he did during daylight, how he lived, and where. He was a real renegade. Soon the last trains were leaving. The three of us skipped through the wide, empty street, singing with an abandon that one doesn’t find in the suburbs, “Que sera, sera.”

At the train station, no promises were made, no numbers exchanged, no plans for next week emerged. My friend and I headed back to our side of town, pleased and exhilarated with the tiny adventure just given us by the generous gods of youth. We soaked up enchanting personalities, added them to our database entitled “The Richness of Life” and clicked the “save” button. We didn’t expect to see Jan again.

My exchange year continued in monotone. Winter brought on bouts of a certain pervasive drabness, periods in which I would measure the progress my heart had made on the continuum of time. I wanted change, but I didn’t know how to entice it. There was a foggy desire for a catalyst, an explosive event that would change me, that would mark the dazzling appearance of “real life.”

One day, passing Schlossplatz, I spotted a small crowd of people and, floating above it, was the vigorous voice of Jan. The gods of youth had dropped him in my lap again. With him were three punks, a business man, and a Turkish man who, though unable to understand the lyrics of his music, was dazzled, and rocked, eyes closed, from side to side in front of the singer.

It seemed as if the universe placed Jan in my path just at the moment I most needed him. Jan was less a person than a symbol for me, a sign from the stars that “the real” wasn’t far away. Singing in the streets with him was a strange sort of communion. I was getting closer. I was dreaming of a beautiful youth, filled with brilliant anomalies and bursts of light.

Nearing the end of the year, I returned to have a look at the city where I had spent so much time, the city that housed so many moods and revelations for me. I also wanted to bid Jan farewell, but he was nowhere to be found. I hardly understood it. Jan had to be there; it simply couldn’t be otherwise. Didn’t he realize that it was a fateful day, that this really was the last time we would see each other? And then it hit me, poignantly, something I’d been learning the duration of my exchange year—if I wanted something to happen, I would have to take responsibility for it. This was the border between childhood and adulthood, between a magical view of the world, filled with faith and expectation, and an adult one. Of course Jan wasn’t there. I hadn’t called him: I didn’t even have his number. Fate wasn’t watching over me, sending me everything I needed and the cues to search for the rest. The age of troubadours was over.

I suddenly remembered the other part of the story that Jan had told that first night at the Café du Théatre—that he was far from reaching his dreams; in the evening, he sang his heart out, but in the daytime, he was a mechanic, dirtying his musician’s hands with grime, oil and tears.

Recalling Kafka, I understood something: Life’s splendor was still attainable, but I could no longer naively rely on circumstance. Indeed, I had to become “the summoner.” I had to begin to perceive my freedom as responsibility.

# Setting Sail Anonymous

**Consider the books you have read in the last year or two either for school or for leisure. Please discuss the way in which one of them changed your understanding of the world, other people, or yourself.**

I am a traveler, continually guided and inspired by the Homeric hero Odysseus while leading a life marked by departures and subsequent beginnings. The first journey began on November 9th, 2000, when my family and I left China in pursuit of bountiful opportunities in the “beautiful country,” the direct translation of “America.” Though eight years have passed by, the emotions imparted by the departure still resonate within me. Like Odysseus, whose goodbyes with Greece filled him with apprehension, as a young child, I too was doubtful about the life ahead after the initial excitement had subsided. Gradually, through overcoming minor struggles, such as joining in a game of Four Square instead of collecting pebbles in solitude at recess, to more significant ones including presenting my first oral book report in front of my fifth grade classmates, I now realize that my farewell has instilled in me an eagerness to embrace opportunities and a more enthusiastic and courageous attitude towards new experiences.

Odysseus’ parting with his homeland is comparable to my own, yet it is the Achaean’s persevering character that truly inspires me. Despite conflicting forces that beleaguer Odysseus, the hero triumphs at last. Circe’s and Calypso’s seductions fail to erase the familial devotion of Odysseus, who is ultimately disillusioned and continues his journey. Equally admirably, the hero gives Elpenor, a young man who dies after falling off of Circe’s roof, a proper burial to relieve him from afterlife sufferings. Odysseus’ loyal and dutiful temperament has impacted me in ways I did not anticipate: seven years after the initial journey, departure, accompanied by arrival, once again steered me away from the constancy of life. In the summer of 2007, my father relocated to another state. Several months later, my sister, the Telemachus of our family, was born. With responsibility and strong will, I have learned to successfully balance personal pursuits and familial duties, equally significant and meaningful aspects of my life. Although both my father’s relocation and my sister’s birth were unanticipated events, I have gained valuable perspective from them. Through these experiences, I have come to realize that the beauty of life lies in unforeseen events; which if treated with an open-mind, are not obstacles but rather opportunities for maturity and growth.

Interestingly, much of Odysseus’ impact on me also derives from other characters’ actions in Homer’s epic. Though the hero’s own capabilities are undeniable, his ultimate homecoming cannot be attributed to his brilliance and fortitude alone. A myriad of other characters, including the goddess Athena, the god Hermes, and King Alcinous of the Phaeacians, come to Odysseus’ aid throughout his journey. Moreover, the faithful Eumaeus, a shepherd, Eurycleia, a servant, and Argos, Odysseus’ dog, remain unchanged for twenty years, anticipating Odysseus’ return despite rumors of his death. Although these supporting characters are not gloriously portrayed, their roles in the hero’s homecoming are no less significant than that of his own. Due to this awareness, I am more appreciative of the support and encouragement of family, teachers, and friends and try to provide others the same assistance. In certain ways, we are all Odysseus; we are all his helpers. Throughout his eventful and at times misfortunate travels, the protagonist evolves from a man of hubris to one of more humility. Odysseus’ transformation epitomizes my fundamental belief in the duality of man’s strength and fragility and demonstrates the essentiality of both self-reliance and interdependence.

As the sea wind awakens from its hibernation and the tranquil tides evolve into charged waters, I look forward to the future. But unlike the fated odyssey of the Achaean hero, which ended twenty years after his departure from Ithaca, my own is a continuum because life’s kaleidoscopic endeavors are endless. Wherever the next journey may lead, I will embrace opportunities, as did Odysseus, with the same intellectual and thoughtful fervor essential to the attainment of wisdom. A zealous voyager in ceaseless pursuit of knowledge, insight, and growth, I am, once again, ready to set sail.

# Setting Sail Anonymous

**Consider the books you have read in the last year or two either for school or for leisure. Please discuss the way in which one of them changed your understanding of the world, other people, or yourself.**

I am a traveler, continually guided and inspired by the Homeric hero Odysseus while leading a life marked by departures and subsequent beginnings. The first journey began on November 9th, 2000, when my family and I left China in pursuit of bountiful opportunities in the “beautiful country,” the direct translation of “America.” Though eight years have passed by, the emotions imparted by the departure still resonate within me. Like Odysseus, whose goodbyes with Greece filled him with apprehension, as a young child, I too was doubtful about the life ahead after the initial excitement had subsided. Gradually, through overcoming minor struggles, such as joining in a game of Four Square instead of collecting pebbles in solitude at recess, to more significant ones including presenting my first oral book report in front of my fifth grade classmates, I now realize that my farewell has instilled in me an eagerness to embrace opportunities and a more enthusiastic and courageous attitude towards new experiences.

Odysseus’ parting with his homeland is comparable to my own, yet it is the Achaean’s persevering character that truly inspires me. Despite conflicting forces that beleaguer Odysseus, the hero triumphs at last. Circe’s and Calypso’s seductions fail to erase the familial devotion of Odysseus, who is ultimately disillusioned and continues his journey. Equally admirably, the hero gives Elpenor, a young man who dies after falling off of Circe’s roof, a proper burial to relieve him from afterlife sufferings. Odysseus’ loyal and dutiful temperament has impacted me in ways I did not anticipate: seven years after the initial journey, departure, accompanied by arrival, once again steered me away from the constancy of life. In the summer of 2007, my father relocated to another state. Several months later, my sister, the Telemachus of our family, was born. With responsibility and strong will, I have learned to successfully balance personal pursuits and familial duties, equally significant and meaningful aspects of my life. Although both my father’s relocation and my sister’s birth were unanticipated events, I have gained valuable perspective from them. Through these experiences, I have come to realize that the beauty of life lies in unforeseen events; which if treated with an open-mind, are not obstacles but rather opportunities for maturity and growth.

Interestingly, much of Odysseus’ impact on me also derives from other characters’ actions in Homer’s epic. Though the hero’s own capabilities are undeniable, his ultimate homecoming cannot be attributed to his brilliance and fortitude alone. A myriad of other characters, including the goddess Athena, the god Hermes, and King Alcinous of the Phaeacians, come to Odysseus’ aid throughout his journey. Moreover, the faithful Eumaeus, a shepherd, Eurycleia, a servant, and Argos, Odysseus’ dog, remain unchanged for twenty years, anticipating Odysseus’ return despite rumors of his death. Although these supporting characters are not gloriously portrayed, their roles in the hero’s homecoming are no less significant than that of his own. Due to this awareness, I am more appreciative of the support and encouragement of family, teachers, and friends and try to provide others the same assistance. In certain ways, we are all Odysseus; we are all his helpers. Throughout his eventful and at times misfortunate travels, the protagonist evolves from a man of hubris to one of more humility. Odysseus’ transformation epitomizes my fundamental belief in the duality of man’s strength and fragility and demonstrates the essentiality of both self-reliance and interdependence.

As the sea wind awakens from its hibernation and the tranquil tides evolve into charged waters, I look forward to the future. But unlike the fated odyssey of the Achaean hero, which ended twenty years after his departure from Ithaca, my own is a continuum because life’s kaleidoscopic endeavors are endless. Wherever the next journey may lead, I will embrace opportunities, as did Odysseus, with the same intellectual and thoughtful fervor essential to the attainment of wisdom. A zealous voyager in ceaseless pursuit of knowledge, insight, and growth, I am, once again, ready to set sail.

# To Think Yelena Kulik

**Describe your intellectual interests, their evolution, and what makes them exciting to you. Tell us how you will utilize the academic programs in the College of Arts and Sciences to further explore your interests, intended major, or field of study.**

It began with a book. A simple title: “The Story of Philosophy”. I’m not quite sure how or why I came into possession of it, but one day I decided to take a peek into its well-worn pages. What is philosophy? I wondered. This was the first of a long string of questions that followed.

From Plato to Descartes and Kant to Hume, the thoughts of great men long past were laid out before me. I was surprised to find many correlations between the ideas of the great philosophers and my own musings. It’s comforting to know that I am not the only one to feel infinitesimally small in this vast, impartial universe, or to have spent sleepless nights wondering “Who am I? What am I doing here? What is ‘here’?” Emulating Socrates, I used to pop open-ended questions into every conversation: "What is love? What is life? What is intelligence?" A few friends and teachers have been truly encouraging of my quest to know and have provided me with conversation (and sometimes quite heated debates) along with literature recommendations.

My search for answers has resulted in quite a library. Volumes of books line the shelves in my room; some of them are tattered from frequent reference while others still possess that crisp new-book smell. While taking classes in philosophy and psychology at Vassar College this summer, I became ill and had to be quarantined for some time with nothing but the books I brought with me. Steven Hawking’s Brief History of Time provided a great distraction to my stomach flu pains and introduced me to cosmology, a rational approach to the questions that bother me. I was intrigued to say the least. Frustrated by philosophy, which comes up with excellent questions but few answers, I discovered a solid start to understanding the nature of reality in modern physics. I went on to read the rest of Hawking’s books when I got home and am currently working my way through Feynman’s lectures. One friend and I have organized a two-person scientific book club that discusses all subjects ranging from branes to brains.

I envy those who are working on the scientific frontier today, breaking knowledge barriers and exploring workings of the vast universe. I hope to one day be able to contribute to our collection of knowledge. In the meantime, I wish to take full advantage of the range of different classes offered at Cornell. For the next four years, more than anything, I would like to study physics, astronomy, and psychology. I want to be immersed in a community of people who care as deeply and are as inquisitive about the world as I am. I want to learn from the top professors and build relationships with students from a variety of backgrounds. I want to solve problems and move humanity forward. I want to research, experiment, explore, create, and debate. And above all, I want to think.

# The Circle Game Yelena Kulik

**Please write an essay (250 words minimum) on a topic of your choice.**

“If your house was on fire and you could save only one object, what would it be?” Juan answers, “My iPod.” Mary answers, “My flute.” Then it is my turn. We are rattling along a country road, playing the circle game to pass the time. The members of Venture Crew twist in their car seats, waiting somewhat impatiently for my answer. What would I save? My quilt? A book? My vintage records? I fumble with the zipper of my bag and pry into its pocket, searching for a piece of gum. And then it hits me. Quite literally, as my hand bumps into its corner. Grasping its metallic spine, I run my thumb along its soft, worn edges. “My sketchbook,” I respond. Colin nods approvingly while Mary notes, “Good choice”. They all think it’s a simple collection of my drawings. But it is more than that.

My sketchbook is a rough definition of my persona. For starters, it is composed of recycled paper. The cover is a little streaked with dirt, giving it character. Upon its sheets sprawl the best climbing trees in Austin, five-second sketches of grasshoppers (often unfinished, as grasshoppers tend to be very unreliable models), and studies of carnivorous plants. I bring it with me on all my escapades. An instructor from the UT Academy of Architecture once told me, “After you draw something, you’ll never forget it.” Since then, I’ve started to almost obsessively document everything that is dear to me. Places, faces, moments and motions. Flipping back through its pages, I can go back in time. There’s the gorgeous leaf I found at summer camp, forever emblazoned on a thick, creamy page. There’s Al the jellyfish from the New England Aquarium, weaving through a mess of facts. There’s documentation of my best friend’s top five silliest faces, reminding me of the euphoric days of summer. My drawings are not always accurate representations of the people and places I love; that is what photographs are for. In my human art, I capture impressions of personality.

My sketchbook doubles as a somewhat chaotic agenda for my somewhat chaotic life. Or better yet, a collection of lists. Books to read, movies to watch, terms to Google. Creative gifts for friends and family. Ideas for practical jokes. Some pages contain journal entries that praise the brilliance of the world around me, while others are wrinkled from salty plops of tears. A few are the rants of an environmentalist, often followed by schedules of volunteering events.

Quotes hug the edges of my sketches, wrap around corners, and run into the narrow bridges between the sturdy coils. Themes range from profound to absurd, and include the sayings of men from Richard Feynman to Chuang-Tzu. Some are in French, others are in Russian. Some sections are speckled with fragments of thoughts such as “dancing robots” and “origami crab”. Many are dense with questions. Why do humans feel the need to create? Why does music affect us so much? Why do we dance? Why do we laugh? Why do we love? On my more contemplative days, I go back and reread old thoughts of mine and build upon them, adding bits of my conversation with people and facts from books I read.

I’m running out of space, for every day brings new insight and new experiences that need to be documented. I’ve got but five pages left before I need to head over to Jerry’s Artarama for a new companion. Perhaps it would be more efficient to separate my drawings, quotes, and notes into different pads, but the unruliness of my sketchbook pleases me. Its contents are so diverse, revealing the many sides of Yelena Kulik, while at the same time centering on my reason for living- to learn.

The circle game resumes. It is my turn, so I ask, “If you had a super-power, what would it be?” Flying, mind-reading, and controlling an army of gnomes by power of flute are all mentioned by my fellow travelers. It comes around to me. And suddenly I know what the focus of my last sketchbook entry will be. “To know everything.”

# The Power of Exposure Anonymous

**Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.**

It’s 107 degrees and the sun’s hot rays are beating down on a family trekking through the busy streets of Dhaka. People, rickshaws, and goats alike are all rushing off to reach their respective destinations. As the parents of the family encourage their two daughters through the maze of bodies, the younger of the two whines for an ice cold mango lassee to alleviate the unbearable heat. They finally reach the car, breathing a sigh of relief as they enter the refreshingly cool vehicle, and as they begin to talk about their plans for the day, a traffic jam forms ahead of them. But of course, being in Bangladesh on vacation, this is no ordinary traffic jam; it starts because a rickshaw swerves into a jeep in order to avoid hitting a family of chickens crossing the road. With the entire street covered in debris from the crash, people impatiently honk from their cars to get an ambulance there faster. Half an hour passes by and it still has not arrived, and the little girl is still craving a mango lassee. Begrudgingly, her father agrees to go buy her one. They leave the car and the mother is left with her older daughter. As they sit in the car, the girl begins to drift off to sleep…when she is suddenly startled by a rapping knock on her window. Her head snaps around, and her jaw drops at the sight outside of the car.

Seeing that I was only ten years old, it is understandable that I screamed when I saw what stood outside my window that day in Bangladesh. Immediately, just from looking at them, I knew that the two men standing there begging for spare change were unlike every other person I had ever seen doing the same thing. For starters, one was perched on the others shoulders; strange, but at second glance, I realized that it was because he had no legs. The other man? He had no arms. Both were wearing ragged clothing and were truly all skin and bones, with their shoulder bones sharply jutting out of their bodies.

I leaped into my mother’s arms and instantly felt guilty, for the looks of utter misery on the men’s faces drooped even lower. Never had I ever felt a stronger need to give a person some sort of compensation, because it was in plain sight that these people truly needed it. Begging my mother for permission to give them some spare change, she allowed me to do so. I opened my tiny clasp purse my grandmother had made me and looked into my modest collection of Bangladeshi coins I had collected thus far on our vacation. At that point in my life, I had been collecting foreign coins for many years, and coveted every single one that went into my collection. I thought hard about what was more important; expanding my already extensive assortment of coins, or giving these men a few dollars to buy themselves some source of strongly needed nourishment.

When we returned back home to America later that summer and I told my best friend all about my vacation, she was astounded that I had decided to give my coins to two complete strangers. My other friends agreed, that they would have just kept it for themselves, and told the men to ask someone else. They all asked why I had made such a decision, and at the time, I told them that I simply felt it was the right thing to do. However, it was the plain fact that I had physically encountered poverty, right in front of my face, that had driven me to make that choice.

In my life, I constantly hear of impoverished people from third world countries who go hungry for days, live in scant housing, and are more prone to disease than any average person living in America. I’ve seen programs on television that show such people who are much less fortunate than me, and naturally, it saddens me to know that they will never have the opportunities that I am privileged to have in my own life. However, despite the fact that I know that these kinds of situations exist in the world, it never really hit me until that day that was I on vacation with my family in Bangladesh, at the young age of ten. I knew, when we first arrived in the Dhaka airport, that this would not be like any other vacation we had been on.

My family has traveled quite a bit in the past, and Bangladesh was unlike any of the other countries we've been to, because the extremes were plainly manifested right in front of our eyes. We visited the villages, where sheep and cows roamed the streets, and the thick air smelled of ghee and straw bales. And we spent time in the city, in which the crowded, pebbly streets were occupied by people walking, bustling along in rickshaws, and rumbling by in cars. In both of these parts of the country, the poor were everywhere. It was impossible to not encounter a beggar on the side of the street every five minutes, and it was equally impossible to not be shocked at the extreme poverty-stricken conditions that you saw them living in. Children with enormous tumors protruding from their bodies played on the streets, people missing limbs – like the two men – made their way around with no assistance from passersby, and elderly citizens took their time limping through the maze of bodies in the packed, sweltering city. I had always known that poverty existed, and I knew that it was awful; but to see it right in front of my very eyes? That really hit home. And it made me realize just how terrible some people have it, making me feel guilty for all of the blessings that I have in my own life. Constant running water, food, shelter, clothes. All of these things that I had taken for granted my entire life, suddenly became privileges that other people would give anything to have in the smallest amounts.

That day, I rolled down my window slowly and reached my tiny, plump hand out to the man perched on the other’s shoulders. He spread out his bony, wrinkled fingers with his palm out, and in it I placed one, two, three shiny dollars coins. I looked up to him and when our eyes finally met, his thin lips curled into a grin I would never have imagined would have fit on his thin, hollowed out face. Giving both men a genuine smile in return, it was ironic that the emptiness in my little purse was the complete opposite of the gratifying feeling that was growing inside of me, expanding until I couldn’t stop smiling.

Since that experience, I have been a strong believer of the idea that being physically exposed to a concept is far more effective than simply being told of it, or watching it on the other side of a television screen. I’ve incorporated this philosophy into all aspects of my life; when I work in the summers at a day camp on a local farm, I constantly use animal and plant encounters as learning opportunities for the children, instead of simply having discussions about them or reading a book. I now stop and appreciate moments that make me love the life I’ve been given, instead of disregarding them as nothing special. I’ve learned to appreciate life as it comes, because I now realize that once-in-a-lifetime experiences are given to us a lot more often than we think they do.

# My Dad's Hands Danqing Zheng

**Personal Statement - Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence**

My father is a self-employed street artist. His work begins when he sets up his easel and paper on Fifth Avenue. Throughout the night, he sits patiently and draws portraits for people. No matter the weather, he is out on the streets. With his parents and siblings back in China and a family here to support, he forces himself to get up every day and drag his little dollie into the lonely streets of the bustling city. He operates on a different schedule from most people, sleeping during the day and working at night. Moreover, there are certainly no vacation days or holidays. Rather, the holidays and weekends are his busiest days.

Two thousand and one: My mom and I touchdown in New York City to join my father in the land of opportunities. Leaving my relatives and friends in China, I started from scratch and began my long trek to assimilate into the American culture. Even though my mom aided me in my studies and progress, I lacked a vital component to my growth: The fatherly bond. When I returned from school, my father was always sleeping. The only brief glimpse and interaction I would have with him would be at dinner, where he ate hastily and left for work. When I went to the park on weekends, I often saw kids playing basketball or football with their dads. I often looked at them with a bit of envy and sadness. Where was my dad? Mom noticed this and tried to compensate for his absence and also fill his shoes – but it was not the same. He was never there.

During my rebellious middle school years, I distanced myself from my dad and often grew angry with him. Never seeing him around the house, coupled with years of grief and envy had amounted in me. I convinced myself that he did not love me. If he did, surely he would spend time with me on the weekends or even during the holidays. If he did, surely he would help me with my homework after school. If he did, then surely he would attend my school concerts and award ceremonies. One late night, after my mom had gone to bed, I stopped my dad before he trotted out to work. I asked him these confusing questions and demanded answers. He looked at me and said in his somber voice, “Son, the Great Wall didn’t build itself” and left. Disappointed, I gave up and went to bed.

As high school began and the workload increased, I devoted more and more time to studying and the interaction with my dad declined even further. One cold winter afternoon when he picked me up from a track meet, I saw him applying chapstick to his hands. Puzzled, I laughed and asked him what he was doing. He showed me his dry and peeling fingers and simply stated, “Son, work takes its toll.” During that car ride, I sat in silence. Dissecting and rearranging those simple words, I finally figured out what he meant. Years of holding charcoal and manually taping glass paper to the rough cardboard frames had taken its toll – so much so that the layer of skin on his fingertips began to deteriorate. With winter underway, the skin had dried up and exposed his hands to the freezing snow. I had never realized the full extent of his efforts and why he worked so tirelessly. Now I knew. It was all for me. As I was getting closer to going off to college, he was leaving for Manhattan earlier and coming back later – just to earn a few extra bucks to save up for my education, even at the cost of severely damaging his fingers.

Yet, since I was eight years old, I had convinced myself and assumed that he did not care. Of course, he wanted to attend my school concerts and award ceremonies, but he would be sacrificing the precious time he could be working. Despite this misunderstanding, I respected him and now knew he still loved me, just as he did, nine years ago. My father only had one request of me – that I study hard so my life would be more comfortable than his. Underneath it all, the concept and philosophy was a very simple one: education is the great equalizer. This would provide the subtle yet intense motivation for me on the days when I was feeling languid. As for me, it was almost as if the concept had been an egg – cared for and passed down by my dad. He simply wanted me to do what he never finished.

# David Anonymous

**Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you and describe that influence.**

On my eighth birthday, my parents forcefully stripped me from my native China, forsaking the familiar, overcrowded landscape of towering skyscrapers and chaotic traffic in order to venture into a peculiar and alien territory known as Vancouver. There, the streets lay devoid of people. The skyscrapers I had once known were now transformed into a scattering of dwarf-like dwellings. The orderly array of traffic implausibly yielded to pedestrians.

But the most profound and devastating transformation concerned that mysterious gibberish that everyone spoke -- everyone, that is, but me. Forlorn in a bleak land with no knowledge of English, I felt like an infinitesimal particle, lost and dejected. Though my parents had made the enormous sacrifices necessary to emigrate for my sake, I still felt betrayed. I entered grade three with that sense of betrayal deeply ingrained, and only further augmented by the fact that I was no longer within the safe reach of my parents. At school I was truly alone. My despondency and my communication difficulties had disastrous consequences regarding my education. As my worried parents watched my grades plummet, they began to wonder whether the move might have been a horrible mistake. Their loss of confidence did not help my situation; my sense of security was shattered.

It was then that David stepped into my life. David, whose hair was black like mine and whose Chinese was as fluent as his English, quickly became my solace, my savior, my friend. His presence filled me with a comforting sense of familiarity. We filled our weekends by heroically massacring virtual monsters, acting out gloriously perilous sword fights with thin tree branches, and attempting to produce music with our newly acquired recorders. Everything we could think of, we did -- or at least tried to do. We even managed to complete our English homework, an endeavor that usually involved an exchange of my pestering questions for his patient answers.

Because of David’s friendship, my parents’ sacrifices did not go in vain. As David introduced me to my classmates and helped me learn to communicate, my self-confidence improved, as did my academic work. My grades finally improved, much to my parents’ relief and elation. With David’s help, I finally adapted to my new environment. I no longer felt like a homeless soul wandering in foreign territory, but rather a member of an amiable community in a country I now called home.

My accomplishments in life are closely related to David’s example. I, too, aspire to contribute my own expertise to the community, an urge that escalates with every achievement and milestone in life. Today, I am a tutor, a teaching assistant, and a volunteer at a summer camp for international students studying English. Whenever a tutee declares that I have helped him achieve one of his standards, I joyfully tell myself, “I, like David, have made a difference!”

# Monopoly: A Life Lesson Anonymous

**Describe your intellectual interests, their evolution, and what makes them exciting to you. Tell us how you will utilize the academic programs in the College of Arts and Sciences to further explore your interests, intended major, or field of study.**

When the dice directed me to yet another vacant property on the Monopoly board, I recklessly continued to invest. Young and naïve, I thought this was a foolproof tactic for winning easily. It was a strategy that I even attempted to conceal from my friends for fear of losing my “secret weapon.” Although my parents told me that this was no way to excel, I disregarded their opinion; whenever they bested me in a family game, I always convinced myself that my defeat was attributable only to bad luck. I firmly believed that their tactic of selective yet minimum expenditures was vastly inferior to mine.

My mania for marching my silver game piece across the Monopoly board ended by first grade, but the economic strategies embodied by board games continued to fascinate me. I sought out increasingly complex economic games, which required me to come up with strategies for everything from financing armies to buying real estate. Ironically, however, my strategy remained as unenlightened as before, disguised only by my greater sophistication and maturity.

It was not until grade six that I saw the flaw in my thinking. At Simon Fraser University’s Mini-University Summer Camp, a program aimed at introducing middle school students to popular university courses, my perspective on economics was revolutionized. One of the most memorable activities during the camp was a mock investment program. During the course of ten days, we bought, kept, or sold our hypothetical shares based on their reported values. I, of course, saw this as another chance to practice my strategy. Immediately, my entire capital of fifty thousand dollars was converted into myriad stocks and bonds. I believed that the majority of my companies would grow, but to my horror, after two days of experimentation, seventy percent of my investments had failed, cutting my funds by almost half.

It was then that I learned a hard life lesson: reality does not always revolve around my ideals. That is a lesson that I have had to relearn throughout life; as an analytical and scientific individual who is attracted to a theoretical understanding of the world, I have to fight my disappointment when an experiment does not go as planned or when a theory proves untrue. As I have matured, however, I have come to recognize that these unexpected “failures” actually represent opportunities to gain new insights. In the case of my investment strategies, I bit the bullet and abided by my parents’ advice to invest in only a few prominent companies. Only then did my portfolio begin to brighten.

Monopoly provided my first exposure to the strategic and analytical thinking involved in economics. Today, I burn with questions about this baffling yet intriguing field. I long to understand the mechanisms behind its impact on politics, culture, society, and my own daily life. Through Cornell’s College of Arts and Sciences, I plan to gain the necessary resources to truly understand the complexities of the world economy.

# Engineering and Ambition Anonymous

**Engineers turn ideas (technical, scientific, mathematical) into reality. Tell us about an engineering idea you have or your interest in engineering. Explain how Cornell Engineering can help you further explore this idea or interest.**

“This year,” Mr. Stelfox exclaimed confidently as he addressed the room of eighth-grade students, “I will uncover your innate love of science and technology.” By exposing us to the practical side of science, he did just that. Every morning we futilely attempted to predict his lessons, and every morning we were surprised: we built Rube Goldberg machines, conducted dissections, and even designed a multitude of experiments independently.

Though Mr. Stelfox kindled my enthusiasm for technology, it was my demanding and rewarding high school life that fueled my newfound passion. I took every Advanced Placement science and mathematics class available, and I also became a devoted participant in science-related clubs and competitions. In my junior year, however, my passion was transformed into anxiety when I suddenly realized that my interests were too broad. I was lost when confronted with the enormous array of possible career paths.

By a stroke of fate, my participation in Carleton University’s Shad Valley Program, a prestigious four-week summer science enrichment course, made my path clear. Each year the program brings together top math and science students to attend numerous environment- and technology-related lectures and workshops in preparation for a final project. The announcement of our assignment came somewhat unexpectedly from the program director at the end of the second week: “In teams of 13, you must call upon your technological and physical understanding to devise the design of a ‘waste-reducing’ product, of which a panel must approve before you may construct a presentable prototype.” We all groaned at the immensity of the workload ahead of us even before the final words: “You have only two weeks.”

My twelve teammates and I spent countless hours over the next two weeks on research and design, sustaining ourselves on little sleep and too much coffee. We pored over volumes of physics and mathematics reference books and surveyed companies to understand the marketing potential of our ideas. We held brainstorming sessions, argued our points, and suggested countless design improvements. Despite our genuine efforts and limited hours, the panel heartlessly rejected our ideas twice because of miniscule flaws. Fortunately, our product drastically improved each time. When we finished, I experienced true satisfaction for the first time: I knew that each aspect of our prototype, from economical to technological, had been optimized.

My ambition is now to become an engineer/physicist. The flexibility of this career will allow me to address environmental issues, an imperative that I feel strongly after my education at Shad. More importantly, I crave the challenge and satisfaction of completing one of the most strenuous paths in engineering. It is for precisely that reason that I yearn to attend Cornell’s Engineering program. Not only is it at the forefront of scientific research on environmental control and clean energy, but it will also guarantee the satisfaction that I will receive only from a highly demanding and academically rigorous program.

# A Dream Benjamin Gordon

**Topic of your choice.**

I had a dream last night that my most revered mentors came together to weave their unique threads into the fabric that ultimately became my Common Application essay.

Kurt Vonnegut, my favorite novelist, was in charge of the introduction to this reverie:

“Call him Benjamin. His parents did, or nearly did. His mom initially called him Buddha Boy because of his great chubbiness as a baby. Ben -- Buddha -- if he had been called John, he would have been a Ben still. But that is neither here nor there.

“Listen:

“When I was a younger man -- three presidents ago, two wars ago, 250,000 cigarettes ago…

“When I was a much younger man, I came across this young individual named Ben. I was on a plane to Germany to revisit Dresden. He was on his way to visit his terminally ill grandmother. I couldn’t help but stare as he wrote a poem about her during the entire journey. He metaphorically compared her to a beautiful star that was burning out.

“I felt a great sense of happiness. There is nothing better than art: to create something, to look at it, and to know that you have just made a contribution to the world. Ben did this as he wrote guitar songs, published poetry and short stories, and presented his works in front of his community.”

Then, Richard Dawkins took over. As an English evolutionary biologist, he was sure to write from a different perspective than Vonnegut:

“I first met Benjamin on a sabbatical from Oxford. We were wearing identical Darwin shirts, except for their colours. I thought in my head, ‘Finally, our youth is becoming interested in evolutionary biology.’ To my dismay, however, Benjamin informed me that this was not the case.

“‘Almost everyone,’ he said, ‘is either unacquainted with or just apathetic to the field.’ Fortunately, Benjamin has a passion (as do I) to make an impact on those around him. This desire most likely explains his aspiration to become a university professor. When I visited his American high school, I read his influential school newspaper articles, attended his lecture on why the study of natural selection is important to the field of medicine, and observed him talking to his friends about evolutionary biology during cross-country practice. In fact, he was showing them an article about the newly found fossil Darwinius masillae.”

My grandfather was obviously included in this dream. After all, he has always taken me on memorable vacations, and he was the last person I talked to before I went to bed:

“Of course Ben was sitting in the window seat. He would have it no other way! I am surprised to this day that his nose was not permanently damaged from the countless hours he sat with it pressed against the circular Plexiglas. The passengers surrounding us were absolutely perplexed as to how I could possibly answer, let alone listen to, every question that came my way. I would be halfway through explaining the aerodynamics of the plane we were on when Ben would interrupt me and ask ‘Why is the sky blue?’ or ‘Why is each cloud different?’ or ‘How much higher do we have to go to reach outer space?’

“Ben’s life has always been backboned by his curiosity about the natural world. Ever since he was a little child, he loved going to the Franklin Institute or grabbing a science book from my bookshelf. The sense of awe he gets when staring in the face of complexity gives him motivation to seek answers.”

Finally, what better way is there to end an essay than to have Benjamin Franklin, my American hero, write the conclusion?

“Kind Reader,

“The first degree of folly is not to open thine eyes; the second is not to open thy book; the third is not to spread knowledge to the entirety of thy community. Benjamin, alas! He is of the same great name and never contributes to said follies!

“I in Philadelphia and Benjamin in Toms River do not rob ourselves of true learning: the ability to practice what we acquire. Yes, we both love our books, but we go beyond the paper. The founding of the Library Company of Philadelphia is what makes education worthwhile to me. Dear Benjamin undoubtedly concurs, as he regularly donates his time to the Ocean County Library and other community establishments. We don’t confine ourselves to the western side of the Atlantic, either. I in France and he in Israel have done work abroad. What pleasure he had working with displaced Ethiopian refugees in absorption centers and planting trees in the desert!

“His evolution from artistic articulation to scientific quest was not a sudden transformation. Rather, it was a slow accumulation and maturation of previously established inquisitive impulses. You can always find young Benjamin with a pencil in his hand, or a microscope before his eyes, with a determination propagated by his countenance.”

# Wine is Culture Anonymous

**Describe how your interests and related experiences have influenced your selection of major and how CALS will prepare you to be a leader in your chosen field.**

When I was sixteen, my parents handed me an itinerary and said, “Make sure you don’t speak English.” I arrived in Bordeaux by myself, with just four years of classroom French, and waited for my cousin to pick me up from the airport.

I have visited countless châteaux and tasted history through red, white, and pink too many times to remember. Much of my family lives in the wine capital of the world, where they work at the oldest brokerage house in Bordeaux. Spending my summers with them served as a natural catalyst for my eventual choice of major.

When I studied at Cornell Summer College, wine once again found its way into my summer break. Working at a vineyard in Trumansburg proved to be an excellent time for reflection and discussion with Cornell alumni Kim and Debra Bermingham, who provided significant insight into their experiences at the college.

My past, however, is certainly not the only factor in my decision to study in the College of Agriculture. Viticulture and Enology is a field that attracts me for much more profound reasons.

I am an artist, an intellectual, and a scientist. I am introspective, constantly seeking truth and meaning. In a similar perspective, I see wine as an expression and product of culture no different from music or literature. Furthermore, the chemistry and agriculture of winemaking is not only a creative process, but also one that requires a high degree of scientific understanding and intellect. I am excited to study a process as old as Classical Greece.

Armed with a degree from Cornell, I plan to use my experiences in environmental activism as well as my work in green product design to establish more sustainable techniques in the realm of my major.

I can’t wait.

# The Science of Life Anonymous

**Describe your intellectual interests, their evolution, and what makes them exciting to you. Tell us how you will utilize the academic programs in the College of Arts and Sciences to further explore your interests, intended major, or field of study.**

The small, fluffy bundle of feathers quivered in the palms of my hands. I brought the tiny budgerigar up to my face, my almond-shaped eyes meeting his bright, beady ones. My 6-year-old self marveled at his vibrant plumage: a brilliant green that stretched across his wings, fading into a soft baby yellow. From the gentle curve of his beak to his long swishy tail – he was flawless. Only the warmth radiating from his body and his thumping heartbeat against my skin could convince me that this perfect little creation was indeed alive. As I gazed at my new pet, I was awe-struck, brimming with curiosity. Seized with the desire to learn anything and everything about the little bird, it was at that particular moment that my love for biology surfaced for the first time. Although that initial wonder I felt could be interpreted as the simple naiveté of a young child, it quickly blossomed into a full-blown obsession with the science of life.

As a child, I always had an endless supply of questions, and eagerly sought out the answers in whatever I could get my chubby hands on. I grew up with anatomy coloring books, picture encyclopedias, and countless episodes of PBS. For my tenth birthday, I was presented with my very own toy microscope. Made of cheap glossy plastic, it magnified by no more than x10. However, I still spent hours examining self-prepared slides of translucent onion skin, hoping for a peek at the building blocks of nature. As I grew older, PBS was replaced by Discovery Channel, and my encyclopedias by monthly issues of National Geographic. From engineering E.Coli bacteria to glow in the dark by injecting them with pGLO jellyfish plasmids to performing a fetal pig dissection, I had also brought my insatiable curiosity as a child to my high school biology courses.

For me, the most intriguing aspect about the study of biology has always been the vast realm of the unknown, the millions of unanswered questions. Biology is forever growing, evolving, and the reality is that we may never truly be able to fully explain all of life’s mysteries. While this concept may be unsettling to some, I find it incredibly exciting. The knowledge that there will always be room for the further pursuit of answers fuels my passion for the study of biology. At Cornell, the College of Arts and Sciences presents the ideal environment for my intended major in Biological Sciences. The extensive selection of biology courses offered, reinforced by a strong liberal arts education, promise a rich and balanced academic experience. Then Honors Program in biological sciences would allow me to work closely with Cornell faculty in pursuing an individual research project, allowing me to further explore the unanswered questions in the world of biology. Enrolling as a student at Cornell would give me the opportunity to satisfy my curiosity while also pursuing my ultimate passion.

# More Than Books Anonymous

**Evaluate a signiﬁcant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.**

My childhood dreams were built beside a bookshelf. Sitting cross-legged on the library floor immersed in science fiction, I dreamt of time-traveling tesseracts, of machines intelligent enough to raise families, of lunar colonies equipped with modern plumbing capabilities. It’s been over seven years since then, but I still pass the hours beside a bookshelf, although this time, I’m the one filling it, one newly labeled book at a time.

Or at least that’s what I’m supposed to do. At times, the pressing urge to read overcomes common sense. My library “Volunteer” badge safely hidden in my pocket, I relive my childhood, desperately catching words as they leap off the pages only to materialize in my imagination as physical objects.

Fridays always carry the musty scent of worn book covers. Books silently cry out my name as I search for them, armed only with a hierarchy of dots and digits I’ve written in my heart. 100 for Plato, 200 for Islam, 300 for Odysseus… Fingers grown adept at handling fragility, I gently flip through the yellowing pages, scanning for signs of damage. A minute passes. Then another. Seeing no evident need for book repair, I cross out “TESSARO, KATHLEEN” off the inventory list with a Sharpie. The sharp odor of the marker jars me from the peaceful lull of work. Yet, a certain feeling of serenity remains.

Sometimes, when I'm working behind the circulation desk, I see the return flap open, a rush of sunlight, a book drop into the return tray, the briefest appearance of someone peering into the slit. The worried face of a mother. The weary face of a retiree. The stern face of a lawyer. Excited, I take a guess before looking at what was returned. A guide to parenting? A guide to gardening? Sherlock Holmes? And although I'm rarely right, I can at least smile at the fact that I'm not the only one with overdue fines.

When gray clouds gather, I love lying there alone on the sofa beside the window, watching the orchard trees bend in the wind, listening to the drizzling rain beat their quirky rhythms on the rooftop. The library is my shield against Thursday thunderstorms and Monday melancholies, and I can always find refuge when I seek it. Not surprisingly, I know all the librarians by face; when they wake me from my nap in the armchair behind the Mystery Section, their smiles are the first things I see.

In the clarity of such moments, I realize how I’ve lived the last four years of my life in a blur, rushing from orchestra rehearsals to debate tournaments, from English class to math club meetings. I’ve made good judgments, and I’ve made poor ones. I’ve experienced success, and I’ve also endured setbacks that almost convinced me to give it all up. But never, until this year, have I learned to slow down, to stop, to listen, to appreciate the small details in everyday life.

My early time spent with books deeply shaped my love of reading, and in some ways, I’m still the same ten-year-old kid who finishes a new novel overnight, who renews a hold just to reread a favorite book for the fifth time. Yet, after a year of volunteering at the library, I've never felt more attentive, more at peace, more alive. Those quiet moments alone, among both written and unwritten stories, have brought balance to my life and taught me to treasure every moment of it, especially as the last days of high school slowly slip away. After all, the stories that speak loudest to us sometimes don’t speak at all.

# Art as Sanctuary Brita Olmstead

**Topic of your choice**

Each morning when I entered my preschool classroom, I would cling to my mother, peering out from behind her legs where I would try to make myself invisible. It was only when guided to the children’s table and given some crayons and paper that I could detach myself. Sitting and starting to color, slowly, I would begin to feel comfortable. By the end of the day, I would be like every other kid, laughing and playing with my friends. All of my previous anxiety had evaporated.

At my preschool’s open house I found, curiously, a large display that was unique to my art alone. They told me I had so many creations in comparison to my classmates that they made a separate section in order to showcase them all. I remember feeling embarrassed, but rather proud, too.

Art has always been an extension of my mind in which I can meditate. A sanctuary. Even now, though I’m no longer quite as shy, sketching and hearing the gentle scratch of graphite against paper soothes me. Some teachers scolded me for the doodles that covered my assignments, but my pencil moved on, creating swirls that blended into eyes that flowed out into the sky. Art is essential to my being.

However, art is not what defines me. Among other things, I love to read. To write. To analyze. My favorite class this year has been an English course focused on pure discussion. What is this character’s identity? How are they isolating themselves? How is society isolating them? The human condition. How does their mindset and method of isolation compare to my use of art as a safe haven? That’s what I love to talk about - not my art.

Art has always been an internal aspect of my life, something intensely personal. I’m hesitant to share it with my friends and family, afraid of letting them see parts of me that I keep safely hidden. Drawing was at first a way of letting myself open up to others, but now I’m able to do that on my own. I’m experiencing the world around me.

I’ve come far from those preschool days of attempted invisibility, but leaving my parents for college will still be hard. Will detaching myself, not just from my mother’s legs but from my home, friends, and community, leave me a bit anxious? Of course! But, just as in that classroom long ago, I’ll be able to open up and make friends and, hopefully, do even better than the timid girl of my past. Despite the unfamiliar and daunting world that will surround me, I know my art will always be there for me.

# Artist Megan Zhu

**Please briefly elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities or work experiences in the space below (1000 character maximum).**

The fan is chugging away overhead, desperately fighting off the heat that Jinhua’s summers are infamous for.

But I am oblivious: I’m finishing my drawing of Mickey Mouse. With pencil in hand, markers sprawled about, and a new book of cartoon pictures, the last thing on my mind is the weather. Nothing can stir me—I am in my element.

Over the past twelve years, I’ve learned to command my tools. As the artist, I am powerful: I act as both a creator and a mediator, imbuing each painting with a distinct impression. The variation, uniqueness, and uncertainty underlying each step of the process—these make up the essence of art which I strive for.

But I have discovered that true passion doesn’t reserve itself. From using my talent in student government to applying that same creativity in my patents, I’ve happily seen art penetrate all other areas of my life. Genuine passion brings joy to everyone—not just the pursuer.

# My Grandmother's Influence Megan Zhu

**Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence. (500 Words Maximum)**

Zhu Qin, a peasant girl who had been isolated from civilization her entire life, knew nothing of the world that existed beyond the mountains. Not a single person in her family had had any prior education whatsoever; nobody was able to even write his or her own name. The youngest of nine children, Zhu Qin was determined to alter this. She started her formal education at age ten, and, with the odds very much against her, worked through high school and college, eventually becoming a reputable doctor.

I’ve heard my grandmother’s story once a year, every year since I immigrated to the States at age four. But I never get tired of it—her determination, hard work, and astounding accomplishments leave me in awe each time. Her daughter, my mother, became extraordinary as well: she attended Stanford on a full scholarship and succeeded in her subsequent entrepreneurial pursuits.

My grandmother’s whole-hearted persistence, ambition, patience, and, most of all, grace, are traits that I intend to mimic in my own life. She had only a slim chance of succeeding in her endeavors—but was never discouraged. Instead, she pushed herself even harder, focused on disproving the odds.

This brief yet meaningful family history has humbled me, making me realize that I am only where I am today because of the efforts invested by those before me. My grandmother’s determination, sacrifice, and unrelenting drive to achieve her goals regardless of all obstacles are traits I have come to hold in highest regard. She’s taught me a lesson that will be crucial to my future: if I yearn for success, I must work for it.

Over the past thirteen years, I’ve increasingly familiarized myself with this concept. From my cartoon drawings to my paintings hung in city hall, from my first debate tournament to my 2nd-place finish at the state championship, I’ve tested this truth for myself.

My grandmother has demonstrated that with effort and dedication, I can accomplish anything and everything I set my mind to. With my life just starting and so much ahead of me, there are guaranteed to be sleepless nights, stressful days, and moments when I’m ready to quit. But seeing how my grandmother ignored all hurdles and continued, I, too, will press forward. The family history I’ve heard many times has done well for me: it has inspired me, driven me, and most of all, made me eager to take on the challenges of leading an exceptional life.

Not too long ago, I was told by a distant relative that the women in our family tend to run strong.

I smiled.

Why?

I’m about to be living proof.

# The Will to Win Jared Edward Gurba

**Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.**

Confucius once stated, “The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential... these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence.” This quotation has inspired me to strive for and accomplish all the goals to which I set my mind. My continual endeavor to attain my fullest potential, better my life, and stretch the possibilities of my future has led me to accomplish one of my greatest feats, one that helped transition me from a naive child into a mature adult.

Since the age of three, I have participated in Taekwondo. This martial art has been a large part of shaping and forming the person I am today. Taekwondo has taught me valuable life lessons, ranging from the respect I show for others to the dedication and self-discipline I use to succeed. One of the most influential moments in my life was my competition in Korea. After years of experience in local, state, and national competitions, and months of intense training, I competed in the 5th World Taekwondo Culture Expo, an international tournament taking place in Korea. At the age of fourteen, I sparred in the seventeen to twenty-five year old black belt division. In the end, I defeated a twenty-two year old Korean master and achieved first place in the competition.

My triumph in Korea was not only significant to me because of the tremendous adversity I faced, but also because I chose to be in that division, rather than sparring in a subordinate grouping. I had the choice of competing in my regular division, where I would be sparring against someone from my own Taekwondo school (defeating the purpose of flying overseas to participate in the event), competing in a division of a lower rank, or competing in an older age division. I figured that I would rather compete in the more challenging division and lose than spar in a lower division and win, simply because I would feel accomplished by having tried the more difficult competition. This feat helped me to realize my potential and was one of the first times I recognized that I could accomplish anything with hard work and a dedicated mindset. With this in mind, I then went on to earn my Fourth Dan Black Belt and Master Certification in Taekwondo.

Throughout high school I have used the mature outlook that I learned from my experiences in Taekwondo and applied them to my academic life. I have consistently pushed myself to achieve more and stretch my potential by challenging myself with rigorous schedules and courses. As the years went on, I took more advanced placement courses, continued to improve upon my grades, and raised my standards beyond what I have already achieved. I worked hard and dedicated myself to school by setting schoolwork as a priority in my life.

In Taekwondo I also learned the value of sharing my knowledge with others and aiding those who need it most. I have contributed to my community by sharing and expressing the principles I find valuable to success. By volunteering my time in the South Shore of Long Island after the immense emotional and physical burdens caused by Hurricane Sandy, I attempted to show the victims that the hard work of people rushing to aid those in need will make the healing process much easier for them, hopefully inspiring those people to do good deeds themselves. I also take part in my high school’s Peer Leadership Program, where I encourage struggling students to dedicate themselves to doing well in school, along with aiding their studies and providing friendship through their tough transitions.

In my physical, intellectual and community pursuits, I am always keeping Confucius’ words in mind.

# Expansion of Knowledge Jared Edward Gurba

**Describe two or three of your current intellectual interests and why they are exciting to you. Why will Cornell's College of Arts and Sciences be the right environment in which to pursue your interests?**

From an early age, I have always questioned what surrounds me and yearned to further comprehend my understanding of life’s bountiful mysteries. As I grew older and my educational opportunities arose, I took advantage of what I was given and have sought to expand my knowledge as much as possible. The fields of science and mathematics have had a particular impact on my aspirations. I feel that my ever-expanding desire to gain more knowledge in these subjects, along with many other academic interests of mine, will be satisfied by attending the College of Arts and Sciences

Science has become a passion of mine. It has provided me with many of the answers about life that I have desired, and is the reason I hold the subject so near and dear to my heart. Ranging from the processes by which our bodies produce energy to the initial velocity required to launch an object over one hundred feet into the air, science can offer a solution to nearly anything. Along with supplying these essential answers that many hanker to know, science is also an outlet for inspirational thinking and motivation to move forward. Scientific thinking is also a culture and a way of life. It encourages an interrogative mentality, pushing people to search for a deeper meaning and greater understanding, and granting the world with a greater knowledge. Without this philosophy and way of thinking we would not see the world like we see it today. Science has opened many doors of opportunity in the past and will surely be a large part of shaping our future.

The subject of mathematics has inspired my way of thinking and completely altered my path in life. Many may believe that mathematics is a subject confined by concrete values and methods; however, as one may observe in higher-level courses, math requires a form of abstract thinking. Rather than viewing things in a straightforward manner, courses such as calculus promote thinking “outside the box”. Math is simply an enigma, sparking the mind to stretch beyond limits one could not possibly imagine. This mind-set has allowed me to flourish in all subjects that I come across, and is a major reason behind my scholastic success.

I believe that the College of Arts and Sciences within Cornell University will provide the perfect environment for me to pursue my interests. Although science and mathematics are my primary academic interests, I am also fascinated with a broad spectrum of subjects such as those found within history and linguistics. They allow you to travel, explore, and discover the values and customs of different societies throughout the world. Cornell’s College of Arts and Sciences will permit me a mixture of majors and minors that fulfill my desires to attain a vast understanding of life. It will allow me to not only receive a magnificent education from professors at the utmost position in their field, but it will also give me the college experience that an eager young mind deserves. As educator John Dewey has stated, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”

# Performing the Heart Michelle Kang

**Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**

The piano groaned in dismay as my fingers struck the wrong chords. My wrists were stiff, my shoulders hunched forward, and my gaze was expressionless—but I continued to play, unconcerned, as this broken Chopin spiraled downward into a crumbling mess.

As I landed the last dissonant chord with an ironic flair, I looked at my mom expectantly. She sat at the dining room table, listening to me practice with her fingers curled around a coffee cup, a perturbed grimace expressing exactly how she felt about my performance.

“I really hate piano,” I explained, as if it really needed to be said.

I had been telling her this for months: I was not a piano player. There was too much technicality in this lifeless instrument; not enough smoothnessin which I could express myself. It was simply impossible for my wild mind to sit in one spot for hours like this, staring at nothing but black and white, black and white, black and white all day.

“Violin!” she exclaimed suddenly. She slammed down her cup. “Michelle, don’t you want to try violin?”

I blinked at her. Violin? It did sound oddly appealing: Violin. Violin. Violin…

A week later, I stepped off the school bus into the cool November weather. My mother stood waiting for me, car keys in hand.

“Today,” she declared, “is your first violin lesson. We’re going to your new teacher’s house to meet her!”

It was all too sudden and unexpected. The car was suddenly too hot, the seats too hard; and as I sat, unnaturally still, each bump in the road launched a new fear into my head. But at the same time, there was an eagerness I’d never experienced before—foreign, in the most delightful way.

We finally pulled up to a small home painted warm brown and surrounded by thick woods. The front door greeted me with a loud, squeaky creak, and the house smelled of pine needles and was filled with color—not black and white, not black and white.

She stood inside, waiting with a smile. It thrilled me that she looked just as excited as I felt. “Hello,” she said. “I’m Barbara.”

I could hardly sit still. It was all so much to take in—the worn, colorful rug that filled the whole room, the huge window that invited the sunlight in to warm the chairs, the bookshelf filled with hundreds of music sheets and books. Would I someday know how to play all of those pieces?

“Do you have any questions, Michelle?” Barbara asked me then. “Anything you’re wondering?”

I smiled. “Could you… play for me?”

I still remember that beautiful sound, filling up the small room—warming my ears and my skin and reverberating through my body, the notes dancing and twirling around themselves in the air before fading away. My fingers itched to try.

On the car ride home, I began imagining a future Michelle, performing on a big stage for thousands of wildly applauding people. I imagined my mom and dad and sister and Barbara, watching me proudly from the front row.

I still have that image in mind every time I pick up my violin, feeling the steel strings vibrating under my fingers—but what I truly learned from violin is not the notes, but the realization of the power of my own passion. I fell in love with violin because I wanted to do it, and because it was who I was; because it was where my zeal had found a home. Every time I interrogate a witness at a Mock Trial tournament; every time I smash a tennis ball into my opponent’s court; every time I pick up a pen and write a research paper, I imagine what this utter love can do, and how far it can take me.

I imagine, take a deep breath, and perform my heart.

# The Recipe for Potential Michelle Kang

**Tell us about your intellectual interests, how they sprang from your course, service, work or life experiences, and what makes them exciting to you. Describe how these interests may be realized and linked to the ILR curriculum. (Please limit your response to 650 words.)**

In high school, writing a research paper is synonymous with baking your own mini-textbook. You crack open a few statistics, sprinkle in a few quotes, and add a pinch of SAT vocabulary. Mix well until blended, and voila—a hot, piping thesis (though it may taste a bit dry)!

I used this same recipe for much of my educational career. I hated researching history just as much as any academically jaded teenager would: “When am I going to need this information?” I would wail piteously, slamming my head against my history textbook. “No one is ever going to ask me about the circumstances of the inauguration of the seventeenth president!”

And sure enough—no one ever did. But the first year I entered the National History Day research competition, the unimaginable happened: history became interesting to me. It did not matter whether or not someone would ask about it; what mattered was fulfilling my own curiosity. It became clear that studying the past was a science not only of the end result, but also of context and change—the present and the future.

I felt as if I had discovered some long-buried secret to enjoying work. As long as I was excited to look, I could always find the story in history! In my fourth NHD project, I realized that the Cuban Missile Crisis was more a desperate maintenance of the country’s reputation than actual negotiation. In my fifth, I saw that there could be thousands of potential environmental pollution sites in America like the one at Love Canal due to the secrecy of government policy and control. Each year, I recognized that history was not just a massive amalgamation of events—but a living universe, expanding with each minute.

By my sixth project, I had touched the battlefield, the presidency, the environment, and the labor force—all topics in which I had at least a visceral interest. As a junior, however, I chose to tackle a subject I had long avoided: the economy. It was a topic I had circumvented the same way I shunned Brussels sprouts and liver: I’d never actually experienced it firsthand, but it seemed like a bad idea. That January, however, I found myself in a quiet room at the FDR Library in Hyde Park, elbows-deep in Box 27 of “Letters to the President, October 1933.” And that January, I found myself completely and utterly invested in its implications.

History is both a science and an art; one must combine careful analysis of evidence with compelling storytelling. For six years, each NHD competition brought such skills to my academic palate. But rather than an improvement in vocabulary or writing ability, my sixth and final project unearthed a passion that I had never found in myself before. The last sentence of my research paper left me once again with more questions than I had started with, but this time, I felt compelled to answer them on my own: How can we change? How should we change? Is there an answer?

The emphasis that the ILR places on human nature in the workplace provides the ideal environment for me to answer those questions. I believe that emphasis and my determination to mold the working world into one that accepts and aids the poor and needy can work hand in hand and help me carve new possibilities for the future. Since I one day plan to pursue a legal career, building a stringent safeguard against the potential abuses and excesses in the financial market, I believe that ILR’s stress on understanding how organizations work and fit into the economy is a perfect fit for me.

By surrounding myself with those who adhere to the ILR philosophy just as strongly as I do, I am ready to challenge myself to become a greater person who can help those in need.

# Travels Anonymous

**Tell us about yourself.**

I ask a man for directions, only to be rewarded with awkward silence and a mildly bemused, uncomprehending stare. I try other passersby and get the same discomforting stare, sometimes coupled with an apologetic, “Sorry, no English”. The one woman who does seem to understand me offers a dazzling smile and replies, “Stew to rum migi ni mawatte, zutto stun kono flailing chicken. (Stew and rum turn right, and ever stun this flailing chicken),” then turns and briskly walks away. Each conversation leaves me more confused, but the harder I try, the more frustrated I get. I walk through crowds with a sinking stomach, fists balled by my sides, thinking, “This wasn’t the way it was supposed to be.”

When my mother offered me a solo trip to Harajuku, Japan, I was thrilled. I researched tourist attractions deep into the night, amassed huge piles of maps and brochures, created the perfect packing plan, and scheduled everything down to the last minute. I was going to traipse boldly through new territories, easily navigate streets and read maps and signs with translations underneath, and confidently order meals from servers who spoke coherent English. The trip was going to be a fun, doable challenge.

My naivety astounds me.

Everything has me bewildered – there is a man flaunting zebra prints layered with tiger stripes under faux fur; a loli-goth girl in a lacy Victorian dress stands next to a man wearing nothing but a loincloth and socks; the city is a labyrinth; conversation leaves me tangled in an incomprehensible, rapid-fire blur of Japanese and English; and even the toilets stupefy me with their twenty-something buttons.

As I am forced to accept how truly lost I am, I surprise myself and smile. The mounting panic steadily subsides, and I am left with a strange mixture of mild dismay and exhilaration. I am lost, yes. But I am also in the middle of Harajuku, the fashion center of Japan – a cultural center of the world. Looking up, I see that what I had moments before perceived simply as an unknown area is now a whirlpool of diversity, pulsing with an excited, high-tension atmosphere. The clothing and styles are unfamiliar, the signs around me flash neon symbols I cannot decipher, and the garbled speech of passerby sounds like life played at two-times speed.

I spend the rest of the evening wandering through storefronts, watching blurs of sailor uniforms mix with business suits and yukatas, exploring streets filled with takoyaki vendors and rotating sushi bars and maid cafes, understanding absolutely nothing, having nothing understood, and loving every second of it.

Three summers later, I hold a map somewhere in the streets of Bangkok, Thailand. I can’t speak; I can’t understand; I can’t read. I have no plan, I am alone and lost in a distant, unfamiliar country, and I am entirely enjoying myself.

# Common App Essay- Central Story Anonymous

**Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**

It happened out of sheer stubbornness. Seemingly overnight, I went from being a cross country runner to the girl on crutches. I thought it was just a cramp. All runners have them from time to time, no big deal, right? I stopped running, stretched (big mistake), and ran through it (bigger mistake). The day after, I took my time warming up. My coach, noticing my discomfort, approached me, but I shrugged it off. Still, the discomfort persisted. I paced myself and repeated “keep going, the pain is in your head” as a mantra to myself. The next day I couldn’t even make it past the first mile. I had ignored my coach’s suggestion to take it easy; I was fine, why give up? I didn’t want to seem weak, and I didn’t want to be the first one to stop running. I was pigheadedly intent on finishing my 3 miles.

A few X-Rays and MRI scans later proved that the pain was not in my head after all. A torn tendon and several fissures in my femur were the cause for my discomfort—cue the crutches. My Hispanic and ever hyperbolizing mother enforced the doctor’s orders to the letter: no physical effort, no activity. To complain about meals in bed, full nights of sleep, and less time spent in school-related activities seems odd for a teenager. When those things also mean being confined to the parameters of an 11 x 13 ft. room on a bed for the greater part of every day, however, those complaints start to make sense. My routine was totally thrown off, and I felt as though my life was thrown in disarray. From 3 to 5 PM every day I could no longer attend club meetings or practice with my teammates. Instead, I either went home or to the doctor’s office for physical therapy. I asked the club sponsors to fill me in via e-mail about what happened at the meetings, but it wasn’t the same as actively participating. Most of them told me not to worry, to take it easy and then get back to being involved when I was well. I missed the feeling of being useful and quickly became frustrated with my newfound idleness.

Helping out with my family's garden restoration project was no longer going to be possible, because there would be too much heavy lifting and moving around involved. Our usual monthly beach cleanups were out of the question, too. Most of the events that I am involved in involve physical activity, which was precisely what I could no longer do. I did not want to “take it easy;" I wanted to do something. I was bent on being engaged and participating in something, so I started to do some research and found an organization, DoSomething.org, made up of 2.4 million young people. The organization has a series of campaigns that run at all times simultaneously, many of which are creative and possible to plan and carry out in the confines of an 11 x 13 foot room (with a little help).

I signed up online, talked to a club sponsor, and launched a chapter in my high school via our Key Club. The other members of Key Club quickly became excited about the campaign and the service drive ideas that I shared with them. My personal favorite was a school-wide awareness campaign I co-headed to inform people about the dangers of distracted driving, complete with police officers as guest speakers and info-graphics designed by me. In the past year, we have collected over 200 cell phones to be refurbished for victims of domestic abuse, designed 5 boxes full of birthday cards for homeless teens, and been a part of the largest ever national peanut butter drive to fight hunger. My stubbornness put me in crutches, but that same persistence to not “take it easy” helped spur me to make a difference in peoples' lives. I know that this same persistence will motivate me to find my next cause and have a much greater impact in the future, in college and beyond.

# Wrestling with Literature Anonymous

**Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?**

Out of breath and hurting all over, I drip with sweat in the midst of a six-minute wrestling bout with my friend, James. While fighting on the bottom and gasping for air, I am reminded of Einstein’s words: “When you are courting a nice girl an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder a second seems like an hour.” When I read “The Aeneid” the hours pass in what seems like mere minutes, but when I am locked in James’s agonizing corkscrew for the third time, leaving me in a position too vulgar to describe, minutes feel like an eternity. Sensing my pain, our coach mercifully calls us off the mat. With a sigh, we slump down against the wall. Through strained breaths, James and I take our minds off the mat and discuss our recent literature in-class essay. As vehemently as we struggled on the mat we argued over the concept of free will on the Pequod; Melville’s epic distracts us from pain in the most uncomfortable of places. Whether our dialogue brings us to Orwell’s Airstrip One or Fitzgerald’s West Egg, literature gives us respite from the stresses of ankle picks and hip tosses.

In sports I experience pure euphoria, the physical manifestation of triumph. But I feel most comfortable with a book in my hand sitting on our back porch. I feel engaged, stimulated, and at times inexplicable happiness, perhaps not a visceral joy but a deeper sense of satisfaction. Although most literature can be enjoyed without intense scrutiny, some authors such as Faulkner and Hawthorne require an intellectual pause to decipher their convoluted sentences. Indeed, Latin requires even more effort. Authors from Apuleius to Ovid require a pencil in hand just to distinguish a subject, verb, and direct object. The unregulated and open sentence structure makes an afternoon of Latin reading a bit more work than simple pleasure. I developed a cipher to guide myself: a geometric code in which the circles delineate subjects, the underlines single out verbs, and the boxes take note of infinitives and gerunds. When these notes scribbled into the margins take shape, I feel exhilarated. I finally see the artistry of Latin in chiasmus or the ululating nature of hexameter, the true majesty of Latin.

The artistry of Latin is not only limited to aesthetics but also includes the values of loyalty and family that resonate with me. In literature we follow the exploits of heroes and villains, learning by proxy from their successes and foibles. I sometimes find myself wishing that I could carry my family on my back out of a burning city, like Aeneas fleeing Troy. Instead, too young to make an impact, I watched my sister suffer from the consequences of a teen pregnancy. She never completed community college and for many years she hid the fact that she was living in section 8 housing with no running water, adding two more children in five years. Similarly facing difficult circumstances, my father suffered bouts of unemployment and underemployment because he did not finish college. His ordeal of moving from job to job during the great recession convinced me not only to pursue higher education because I truly love it but also because of the security that hopefully comes with it; I will be the first of my siblings to attend college.

Just as I must think diligently when I read, so too must I stop thinking when I step on the wrestling mat or on the football field. Not a thought can cross my mind; everything I do is for my teammates. As much as I like this camaraderie, I too like the camaraderie of characters. Achilles, Icarus, and Billy Pilgrim comprise my literary team. Together we assemble against Vercingetorix and Smaug. Although I relish the feeling of Friday Night Lights shining on the field, I feel most content spending an evening with Plato.

# Personal Statement Yu-Chieh Chung

**Tell us about your intellectual interests, how they sprang from your course, service, work or life experiences, and what makes them exciting to you. Describe how these interests may be realized and linked to the ILR curriculum.**

During my sophomore year, I took an elective history course, “Rediscovering the Lives of Women.” Learning about prominent female figures in history, as well as how society perceived and affected them, prompted me to reflect on how gender shapes my identity and personality. As a woman, I’ve often been told to be sweet and smile more often -- and told not to overreact or be so emotional. I always considered these expectations false and unfair; still, I truly am an emotional person, and this is especially true in regards to women’s issues. My heart ached when I read that at least one of every three women globally will be beaten, raped, or otherwise abused during her lifetime. I worry about the 140 million girls and women who are currently living with the consequences of female genital mutilation. The fact that women perform 66% of the world’s work, produce 50% of the food, but earn only 10% of the income and own only 1% of the property is simply overwhelming. These statistics rattle me because, if I had been born in a different corner of the world, I would be the one who is suffering.

I realize that having a pair of X chromosomes means not only having to overcome inequalities -- it means taking on more responsibilities. Since we girls and women are those who know best who we really are, we have to take the initiative. I expect to emerge as a mature and accomplished female leader upon college graduation, working with international organizations to make the world a better place for women. I believe that the ILR’s interdisciplinary curriculum could afford me the education that matches my interests perfectly, and could help me grow as a problem solver capable of viewing social issues in all their different aspects.

In the ILR School, all students are pursuing the same major, but no two students will have identical experiences. The ILR requirements would guide me to explore various fields such as labor history, sociology, public policy, economics, and organizational behavior, all of which are relevant to my career goals and crucial to nurturing a well-rounded perspective. In addition to the rigorous training, I would have the freedom to shape my own academic endeavors to fit my specific aspirations. In particular, I am deeply attracted to courses that focus on non-profit organizations, gender issues, and international human rights, since I hope to delve deeper into these topics.

I also appreciate that the ILR School gives great support to its students by offering an abundance of opportunities in research, internships, international programs, and career services. The Freshman Externship Program would enable me to start exploring my prospective career fields early on and to become familiar with workplace etiquette and protocol. The India SVYM Global Service Learning program fascinates me, mainly because I would like the chance to be immersed in a different culture and have a positive impact on global communities. I believe it would be a wonderful experience to learn about Indian culture from within, develop non-profit leadership, and gain greater knowledge of gender issues in the context of aiding local women.

To realize my career goal of working with international organizations to improve women’s lives around the world, I must acquire broad knowledge in various fields and learn how to best apply my expertise in practical circumstances. In these respects, the ILR School has the richest resources and opportunities possible. I am positive that an ILR education would make it possible for me to dramatically improve the lives of women, wherever in the world they reside.

# The Environmental Science Major Mallika Khanna

**How have your interests and related experiences influenced the major you have selected in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences?**

At the age of twelve, I wasn't much of an ornithologist, but even I could tell that there was something wrong with the Okhla Bird Sanctuary. The park itself was beautiful, with artistically carved bushes, an overflowing lake, and rolling grasses as far as the eye could see. The question that arose, though, was where were the birds?

Maybe these magnificent creatures turned up their noses at the artificial beautification of their natural home. Maybe they just craved the city life. Either way, their quest for something better should have led them to the Delhi ridge, just 10 miles away, renowned for its surprisingly thick thorn forest -- an ideal place for birds to nest. Why, then, were there no birds here either? Just last year, 4000 km away, the mighty Beirut River transformed itself into a 'river of blood.' At the same time, Jaws sprang to life with the sighting of a bloody shark in a bustling New York subway. Farther away, the Galápagos Islands mourned the loss of 'lonesome George,' a symbol of the need for conservation and the last tortoise of his kind. What in the world is happening? From the exotic species of Madagascar to the birds of Delhi, animals are changing their migration patterns, altering their eating habits, or -- far worse -- going extinct. Freak storms and typhoons are leading to some of the largest natural disasters chronicled in history. Are these events connected, in some sort of bizarre, roundabout way? Could these be the Earth's strategy for reclaiming her property?

A curiously profound phrase in my geography textbook -- "The world is developing economically, but regressing environmentally" -- establishes such a connection. With lofty developmental projects acting as triggers, Mother Earth is emitting mighty sneezes, attempting to expel the harm we have caused. When you realize that entire species have been wiped off the face of the Earth in your own lifetime, you begin to wonder: who is to say that the next species won't be us? Pushed around like rag dolls by the sheer force of Nature's anger, we cannot keep fighting her at every turn or forcing her to do as we wish: our endeavors to 'better human lifestyles' must incorporate a more adaptive and accepting approach to development.

As a resident of a country where 'environment' and 'economics' have not yet learned to coexist peacefully, where misguided food security policies have led to the chemical poisoning of the soils of Punjab, where cows eating plastic bags is a part of 'urban life,' I was ecstatic to find a major that so seamlessly blends the human and the natural. Take the idea of 'sulfur spraying' the Earth (one of my absolute favorite ideas, even if exists only in theory). The thought behind this practice is that sulfur would considerably reduce the temperature of the Earth, in turn reducing the effect of global warming. While a brilliantly weird idea in itself, its economic non-viability prevents sulfur spraying from being implemented. Yet quite contrary to the act-now, care-later individualism that pop culture often preaches, each must live for the other to survive. Economic growth and environmental conservation have to become synonymous, and fast. While I am not Malthusian in my pessimism, with seven billion people inhabiting a planet already teeming with other forms of life, there has to be a tipping point -- a point that, for the lost birds of Delhi, for the potential victims of typhoons and earthquakes and floods, for the already dangerously overextended human race, we need to find a way to prevent. With its emphasis on conscientious environmentalism and effective resource management, the environmental science and sustainability major that I will pursue is the beginning of that answer.

# Of Talking Ravens and Curious CinephilesVikram Kejariwal

**Topic of your choice.**

“Surrealism is embedded in the everyday, in the daily experience” -- Katharine Conley

It seems fitting for me to transform every moment or thought into a film screened inside my head. Cinema is my life, and guides me beyond my life. I rise from reality and I’m cast into a limitless world of my own creation. Here I am the humble king, the anxious father, or the tortured slave, the only conscious inhabitant of an otherworldly domain. Rocks don’t fall back to Earth, and instead morph into winged beavers as men in suits walk past me backwards. I leap across Norwegian fjords and land on a vibrant golden beach, but suddenly the sky cries: “Vikram, your lunch is getting cold!” Who dares to interrupt me? My canvas is left incomplete as my imagination is broken by my mother. My soul condenses and settles into reality again.

I often recite to my cousins the bittersweet tale of a boy called Vincent, who is depicted in a short film by Tim Burton. Vincent is a seven year-old who imagines himself living in a world of his own creation. In this infinite realm, he reads the poetry of Edgar Allen Poe -- finding himself particularly drawn to “The Raven” -- and practices scientific feats far ahead of a child’s intellect. Unfortunately, as he matures, he grows out of his thoughts and forgets his beloved world. My disposition feels much like a parallel of Vincent’s. My love of cinema developed because film transported me into a surreal state between the abstract and the real. It became a state of perception where I could reflect on the most intricate ideas and be elevated from the daily notions of maintaining the ideal “eight-pack” figure or tweeting about a Justin Bieber song. Without realizing it, I was soon growing alongside the classics and blockbusters of world cinema. My television became a teacher and the dingy local movie-hall became my classroom. Now, every film I begin to view sets me on a journey of deep research, exploration, and wonder.

The moment the final credits roll, I am provoked to learn what influenced the producer to couple an accurately biographical scene with a completely fabricated one, or to analyze the pioneering camerawork employed. An indirect fruit of my cinematic curiosity is the ability to investigate a subject and dissect it into its core components; I find myself using these very skills to disprove my opposition’s arguments in parliamentary debate. I have morphed from being shy to being able to connect with a variety of different people simply through everyday discussion of films and plays. As I feel the tears well during a third screening of *Philadelphia*, I realize that I have grown more sensitive and reflective. Often I gaze at a director’s long endeavour to perfect a production and find myself inspired to commit to challenging projects with the same rigor and perseverance.

The imaginary world of cinema has given me permission to aspire to peaks of perception that many would proclaim impossible. Perhaps I am just like Vincent, a boy who perceives dreamlike notions as his source of individuality and joy. As I grow older, I finally hear the sweet answer to an inevitable question: “When will I mature and exit my own surreal reality?” Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

# Why Dyson Business? Anonymous

**College of Agriculture and Life Sciences: How have your interests and related experiences influenced the major you have selected in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences? [/650 words]**

My interest in economics and finance sprouted during my childhood. Back then, I followed my mom while she explored real estate for her business and visited her financial advisor. However, it wasn’t until I started Cosh(ex), my calculator programming business, that I discovered what I truly wanted as my own field: management and entrepreneurship in technology.

After months of almost frantic programming, I began distributing calculator programs to my friends. I quickly realized that many students wanted my programs and decided to make it a business, targeting students who couldn’t write their own programs. The night I designed the entire website for my business, working into the early morning hours, I finally understood the quote, “Entrepreneurs don’t need sleep.”

My experience with Cosh(ex) confirmed my interest in management and technological entrepreneurship, but I was troubled by the prospect that this potential career path would alienate some of my passions. I love economics, business management, computer science, philosophy, and neurology; however, I am most passionate about helping the physically disabled, especially veterans. I found a compromise upon waking up from an exciting dream. It was of a futuristic tech facility: strictly white and translucent, simplistic in design. I was running around, making sure all the parts of artificial limbs came together properly. My company was making more than just artificial limbs—they were mind-controlled artificial limbs!

Building a company dedicated to designing and improving neuroprosthetics would mobilize all of my interests, and simultaneously address my passion for helping the physically disabled as well as my goal of making a difference through social entrepreneurship. Cornell’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences allows me to study Applied Economics and Management and possibly double major or minor in Biological Engineering. Through completing the core requirements for Dyson’s AEM major, I will have a strong foundation in management, applied economics, and quantitative analysis, while choosing to concentrate in Entrepreneurship opens me up to classes that best suit my aspiration to build a neuroprosthetics company, such as AEM 3380: Social Entrepreneurs, Innovators, and Solvers and AEM 4380: Entrepreneurial Strategy For Technology Ventures. By focusing on the biological material and biotechnology fields within the Biological Engineering major, I can develop the academic expertise to oversee my hopes of further improving the currently very mechanical mind-controlled artificial arm through biological imitation. CALS enables me to access this powerful combination of all my passions and goals.

Dyson’s hands-on approach stands out to me. For example, the Cornell Social Business Consulting Group gives me the opportunity to learn more about social entrepreneurship through corresponding with real social businesses across the globe, preparing me for when I start my own social business. Similarly, formalized research with Dyson under the Honors Research Program offers both a rare opportunity and a stimulating challenge. I would like to work with Professor Aija Leiponen on her interdisciplinary research about technology, economics, and innovation. Ultimately, my studies would empower me to pursue my life goal of improving society by becoming a social entrepreneur, the entrepreneur who refines the artificial limb industry. What was once a dream, and may still seem like a science fiction vision, can become a reality.

# I'm Glad I Failed Anonymous

**The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

Sitting in the auditorium of Cherry Creek High School, I felt a sudden apprehension in the pit of my stomach. After a long and tumultuous journey, I was here at last. I, along with two of my friends and teammates, had spent the better part of the year preparing for the ACSL National Computer Science Competition, and we were about to learn how we fared.

As the contest organizer started announcing the placement of the teams, I squirmed in my seat. For my team and me, this was more than just getting a shiny medal to hang on our walls; this was about proving to our school administration that we were capable of running a computer science club. Indeed the administration seemed to have a certain petulant attitude towards the topic, and try as we might, they were adamant in their beliefs that we were naïve and inexperienced; we hoped to prove them wrong. As the names rolled by, I closed my eyes. There were shouts of vivacious joy, cries of indignant frustration, until. "[redacted], 30 points."

My eyes shot open. *30 POINTS! No, that can't be; there must have been a mistake.* I sank slowly into my seat as the realization that we had come in second to last washed over me. Never in my entire life had I felt like such a loser; at that moment, the feelings of frustration, anger, guilt, and disbelief all coalesced into an inexplicit soup - a soup of failure. *Perhaps the school administrators were right. Maybe we are incapable of programming.* I thought back to all of the time I spent studying, all the countless hours I spent coding and debugging my programs. Heck, I even wasted away my Memorial Day weekend, and for what? We were crushed so badly it was almost embarrassing.

The feeling was further compounded when our chaperone turned towards us and said, "Well, I hope this was worth it." The acerbic tone wasn't lost on me. The contrition I felt knowing I had let both him and my team down was inexplicable. But it was during this nadir of my life, lost in introspection, that my mouth suddenly curved into a smile. I realized that I had lost sight of the bigger picture: it was never supposed to be about proving ourselves to the school; it was about helping to fill the gap that our school curriculum had in computer science. It was about helping to guide those who had an interest in programming but were unable to teach themselves. It was about seeing the smiles on their faces when they executed their first "Hello World" program.

The more I thought about it, the more excited I became. Together, my team and I decided to offer free, private tutoring at the local library. During the summer, I set aside every Sunday to host a small introductory programming course. As word spread about its success, individuals of all ages, even parents, started attending.

Even though the school administration viewed us as incompetent, I would be damned if I let that stand in my way.

While I never got a shiny medal to hang on my wall, I did get something much more important: a new perspective. The lessons learned from failure can be infinitely more rewarding than the brief happiness gleaned from success. By failing in the competition, I realized that somewhere along the way, I had been led astray from my original intentions. Seven months and a successful club boasting more than 30 new members later, I stared at my (former) chaperone dead in the eye and replied, "I'm glad I failed."

# Doodling Flowers Weiying (Annie) Zhang

**Common App Essay: Tell us more about yourself.**

Whenever I’m taking notes in English, answering questions on a history test, or listening to a class discussion, I doodle flowers. Yes, flowers. You might imagine that a high school senior in AP classes would be too busy absorbing PowerPoint slides and wringing out essays to doodle. And to an extent, you are correct. Nevertheless, no matter how taxing the class, I always find time to sketch a few blossoms on my papers. Although I’ve done this since middle school, I still don’t understand why. Whatever the reason, the flowers are my personality stamp.

Maybe it’s because the flowers are symmetrical: a circle surrounded by five petals, attached to a two-leafed curvy stem. I’m a fan of symmetry and balance -- perhaps it’s the obsessive side of me. Regardless, scattering my signature flowers on schoolwork relaxes me. Likewise, the yin-yang balance in my life enriches everything I do. While I’m the science nerd who spent one summer synthesizing nanoparticles in WashU’s lab, I’m also the art junkie who makes watercolors of her backyard forest on the weekends. While I’m the stereotypical Asian scholar in class, after school, I’m the most non-competitive mini-tennis player on the JV court.

Maybe my flowers represent the exhilaration I feel when I’m coming up with a solution to a problem. I remember doodling on graph paper while trying to design a Science Olympiad project. Every time I scrapped a new idea, I defaulted to doodled flowers. Then finally, Eureka! I had sketched a viable model of the lightest tower that would hold the greatest amount of sand. Even though the tower fell apart after only two scoops of sand, I was thrilled to have figured out how to apply engineering principles to my project.

Maybe my perky little flowers represent my optimism. While I’m not the “Energizer Bunny,” people generally describe me as enthusiastic. Other people’s doubts often inspire and motivate me to solve difficult problems. A few months ago, my friends and I started talking about how great it would be to travel through Europe after graduation. Although we were joking at the time, I latched onto the idea. I knew the trip would cost a ton, but the idea of hanging out on the Riviera spurred me to work hard to earn money. Immediately, I launched into overdrive making bracelets for my online Etsy store: I made new listings, bought supplies, and dedicated weekends to weaving. My friends teased, “You’ll never earn enough for a three-week Europe trip.” Fortunately, my business plan is working well, my profits have doubled, and I’m nearing my goal.

Maybe my ever-present flowers represent my creativity. Not every student garnishes assignments with daisies! No matter what I’m doing, I’m happiest when I’m imaginative: adding ears to a tea kettle painting; wearing plastic foot ornaments and wooden clog boots to school; making up songs on the piano; designing a C++ Go Fish program; and writing a Space Elevator policy debate plan.

Or maybe I doodle just because I like flowers.

# Sound of...Music? Anonymous

**Write about a time you faced difficulty and overcame it. (Common Application)**

I wake up an hour before the stampede towards the shower begins in my summer camp residence hall. Quietly, I close my dorm door so as to not startle my week-long roommate awake--I had to be alone. My clothes and towel hang on the stall as I brace for the cold water to tickle my face. But first, I peek outside to reassure myself I’m the only one. I begin softly, hesitant to allow the words to escape my mouth. I become more comfortable, allowing my irreparable voice box to squeak what little lyrics my memory salvaged of the Bob Marley song I had heard the night before. Finally, after a week on campus, I can sing in the shower. A suppressed chuckle makes its way from outside the stall. Immediately I stop, pitying whatever poor soul had to endure my paltry tribute to the Reggae legend. “Somebody call American Idol,” the voice mocks. I would be leaving the campus the following morning. Surely to the dismay of my one-man audience, I unloaded my broken version of the tune once more.

Now, I cannot sing--actually, I do sing, but it would be to disgrace anybody with actual talent to qualify it as that. No matter how hard I try or have tried, the extent of my musical ability is comparable to the stutter of a car before it starts: disjointed, erratic, and undesirable. Nonetheless, I had discovered my voice, just through a different outlet.

It was the week after I was cut from the Men’s Freshman choir: a truly ambitious endeavor that not even the most optimistic would have expected to come to fruition. Forced to scout another activity to occupy myself with, I found myself in front of a pair of judges for my debate team tryout, seemingly a cliche undertaking. (Become a debater, become the next president! Yeah, right.) But I soon fell in love, and developed an infatuation with public speaking. The exhilaration behind being able to manipulate the emotions of my audience--not by the melody or harmony of my voice, but through my ability to effectively articulate and present my ideas--was a foreign yet incomparable thrill. Learning to control and calculate my body language and tone to not only captivate and seize my listeners, but also to craft my content added an entirely new dimension to the way I communicated. No longer was I held to the standard of my dysfunctional larynx; I could alto as far as my ideas allowed me to go.

My love affair with the notion of public speaking expanded as I came to discover its extensions far beyond the debate circuit. Practicing diplomacy at regional conferences and learning to structure my arguments in the courtroom setting helped me further tailor my speaking abilities in a direction I hadn’t been previously exposed to. I soon took advantage of opportunities where I could hone these skills outside the academic realm, delving into the phone centers and door-to-door operations of a senate campaign.

It would still be a blatant lie to tell you I no longer sing. The consistent glares on long car rides, the irritated pleas, the shouts and violent knocks on the door as I belt out the latest hits in the shower serve as constant reminders of my lackluster ability to assemble anything relatively close to a rhythm. But it doesn’t matter--I’ve already found my voice.

# The Accident Anonymous

**Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**

"This is a nightmare," I thought. Sean was on the ground wincing in pain and blood was slowly leaking through his spandex. A million things raced through my mind but I stopped, took a deep breath, collected my thoughts and got to work. Sean had been thrown off his bike by a sharp, concealed rock. It was the first time something had gone terribly wrong while I was mountain biking. I called 911, made a sling out of my shirt to support his broken arm and carried him to the road. To my relief paramedics were already there.

The trails I ride have long winding turns and portions that are extremely technical. Multiple fast-paced sections require me to make split-second judgments. Every right decision bolsters my confidence and motivates me to try more challenging terrains. Failure to make the correct decision often leads to injury, as happened with my friend Sean.

Mountain biking is by no means a solo sport; it helps foster relationships between groups of people. It trains people to be dependent on and look out for each other. When a friend falls down or takes a wrong turn everybody stops. This extends to the surroundings as well. As we take care of each other we also work together to take care of the trails on which we ride. Leaves are raked, trees are replanted, and garbage is removed.

Perhaps, the best word to describe the view while riding a trail is, simply, a blur. Racing in 15th gear, I can only make out the biggest obstacles. Like a vision tracking algorithm, my brain sorts out objects and maps out a safe path for me to take almost instantly. On the trail, the occasional bug flies into my mouth but my full-face helmet does a good job of mitigating this - at the cost of my face burning up. The backsplash of riders in front of me always seems to spray thick mud in my visor. My muscles constantly scream to give up but the adrenaline rush of steep drops and tight maneuvers pushes me onward. I know I will need this determination to face the all-nighters that college will inevitably throw at me.

My mother continuously reminds me of the awe she saw in my eyes when I received my first bike as a birthday gift. I would not get off it until I had explored every corner of my neighborhood. I believe that the spirit of mountain biking embodies itself not only in the precision and technicality required, but also in the curious and exploratory nature of the rider. Although I start on a conventional trail, taking the left turn that leads nowhere is a choice I often make. Following my instincts has brought me to abandoned campsites, undiscovered springs and places that I go to get away from it all. I am no longer afraid of the unknown; if I have not defined my own path, then I do not feel my ride was a success.

A truly multidimensional activity, mountain-biking encompasses all my interests and more. My passion to innovate, to constantly improve, is reflected in minor tweaks I consistently make to my bike. Long nights in the garage shaving down unnecessary 6061 aluminum finally paid off when I made an unofficial track record on a local trail. Greasing gears, tuning suspensions and barreling down a rocky path on a mountain bike help me escape from the sometimes overwhelming world of microprocessors and LED displays - a world with which I find myself more and more intertwined, until I hit the trail.

# Mothering Daughter Anonymous

**Describe the world you come from.**

“So you want to go to med school. Is it for the money or to appease your parents?” Neither, because money isn’t worth the sacrifice of dealing with insanity and I have only one parent, who cannot be appeased by my attending med school. This was the answer I couldn’t vocalize to my counselor when I went to request a letter of recommendation. I didn’t want to be registered as the precocious child with a cynical outlook or the pitiful, unofficial head-of-the-household who has to cope with a manic-depressive mother. So I smile wryly, then slide her the ribbon-wrapped KitKat bar and a thank-you letter before heading out.

Of course, my counselor meant no harm with the joke, but I could never return those jokes with a frivolous comment, because I cannot think of one good enough to diminish the weight of my reality. Just like my response, my reason for pursuing a profession in the medical field, specifically in psychiatrics, is heavy and dry: I need to see my mother as a patient and a human being in need of my help, not as someone who should have been my caretaker. It was the day of my mom’s psychotherapy session, so I left school early to give her a ride. On our way back home, she gently took my right hand with both of hers and asked if I wanted to eat anything. She wanted to cook for me. We got home after dropping by the grocery market, and I sat on the dining table.

While watching her cook, I remembered going over to a friend’s house in seventh grade and watching my friend and her mom make Keish. It smelled delicious and looked exotic, but my eyes were fixed on their jubilant faces. When I returned home on that seventh-grade day, I asked my mom if we could cook quesadillas together for dinner. She got up from bed, walked past me, went in and out of the restroom with a bottle of pills, and slipped back into her blanket. “Turn off the light when you leave.” I turned off the light and stood by the door for a few more seconds before going out. I took out Hot Pockets and the Costco salad that my aunt had stocked in the fridge and sat down on the six-seat dining table, but I couldn’t eat. I threw them in the trashcan and rushed back to my mom’s room. I stood before her closed bedroom door and tried to figure out a way to express what I felt, but in the end I just decided to head back to my own room.

That was the first time I felt bitter towards my mom. Now I understand that the bitterness was towards my mom’s illness. I learned not to make those kinds of requests anymore, but that day, after I left my counselor, my mom voluntarily wanted to do something for me. I watched her fumble through the groceries and stagger back and forth from the fridge to the cutting board. She could not finish cutting one full carrot before jumping to the next step. Executive and procedural dysfunction in bipolar disorder--the first thing I register in my head and then the second thought comes out as tears. As I watch my mother trying to play the role of the caretaker, but the other part of her getting in the way, I loathe myself for the times I held her to my expectations of a parent, the times I called myself unlucky and imagined living with my friends' parents, and the times I pretended to be asleep while she groaned and sobbed. At first, I couldn’t view her as something other than a mother, and once I began to see that she is unable to fulfill the duties of motherhood, she became a hollow, incomprehensible creature that only drains and hinders me.

I say to myself that my unfulfilled desire for a caretaker figure is behind me, but when I hear jokes like the one that my counselor tosses out, I still see the seventh grade kid standing before her mother’s door in me. I cannot say that I am free of the deficiencies I experienced in my childhood, but I understand how to build other layers of character to amend the flaws. I can relieve my mother of her agony, the cold stares and the suppressed disdain. Endeavoring to become a medical professional would be the only way of getting closer to understanding her as she is with the illness and taking care of her without feeling any entitlement to compensation.

# Coming of Age While Solving for ‘X’ Lauren Swenson

**Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.**

With bright tangerine walls, meticulously hung alphabet charts, and “remember to wash your hands” posters, Kumon Learning Center is not the place I would have expected to find my maturity. As I stand in the Center now, though, I look back and see how far I have come in my short time here.

I’m not sure if it was my love for math and English, or my reluctance to work in the fast-food industry that drew me to this part-time job. Either way, I arrived on the first day with an air of nervous excitement. Right away, my boss sat me down at a private instruction table, where new or struggling students sat to receive assistance. Without training or even spoken instructions, I was expected to help kids with their classwork for the day—from long division to writing the letters of the alphabet. Not used to having to *really*figure things out on my own, with no directions to follow for one of the first times in my life, the pressure terrified me. That first day passed in a blur of whispered questions to my fellow staff members and fumbling attempts at explaining mathematical concepts to preschoolers.

Fast-forward a month, through trial and error and dedicated observations of veteran employees. I was better prepared. Now Tenzin—a seven-year-old regular at Kumon—sat down at my table. Unable to sit still for more than one addition problem at a time and a notorious crier, Tenzin presented a unique challenge. When not giving me a loud discourse on her weekend, which only quieted with my incessant reminders to use our “whisper voices”, or attempting a break for the door to avoid her classwork, she needed my help with math. Armed with my personal addition strategies and faded memories of my mom’s peace-making tactics, I determinedly set out to help Tenzin learn.

By the end of our hour together, she could add ones through fours. I had managed to convince her to sit quietly and finish her work, *before*giving me a detailed description of her unicorn Pillow-Pet. I was finally figuring the job out and living up to my responsibilities. Before Tenzin went home and the next kid took her place, she wrote me a note saying, “I love you teacher.” She wrote it on my desk in permanent marker, but it was the thought that counted. In Tenzin’s mind, I was a grown-up, and a successful one at that. Looking at myself from this new perspective, I realized that I *had* grown up.

My first day at Kumon, I was unsure of myself, and unaware of how to really take charge and teach kids when I was still a kid myself. But by throwing myself into the deep end, and jumping into a difficult job with little instruction, the initial panic and confusion gave way to rapid personal growth. Within a month, my confidence in my actions had grown exponentially.

The transformation into adulthood comes when it has to, and for me, this was when students looked to me for help. I was now the one giving the answers, not receiving them. No longer an adolescent, I began to make my own decisions and leave my own mark on the world. Kumon gave me the opportunity to make an impact on young minds and lead as an authority figure, fully stepping into my role as a productive member of my community. When walking through the local grocery store now, I run into kids and parents I know from Kumon. The kids hug me, and the parents stop to chat. They don’t see me as some annoying teenager, but a respectable person who teaches their children. We talk, not as an adult to a child, but as equals.

# Cornell's FSAD Program Anonymous

**Why are you interested in Cornell's FSAD program?**

Riding the elevator down into the aquarium, with the azure shadows refracting off my body, I had never been so alive. Immersed in the aura of the thousands upon millions species of fish, I felt like I was staring right into my own soul and beyond it, until my own being was suffused with the creatures swarming behind glass. All this I’d record in my sketchbook, letting the ideas build and collide, emerge and fade. The thoughts, through time and imagination, become my illustrations. From this oceanic trip emerged a translucent turquoise dress design, made of fish bones and mirror pieces.

Sometimes a friend would ask, *what was your inspiration?*I’m not really sure how to answer. To be honest, I don’t often find conceptual disparity between visual art and poetry. Like a never-ending dialogue, each dimension influences and informs the other. My urge to create, or express, is exhaling all that is within me. And by designing garments, I crystallize that exhalation and consolidate it into emotion. I’m constantly intrigued by visual art with the power to tell poignant tales, like cohesive fashion collections or graphic novels. Equally fascinated with form, with the profoundly infinite architecture of human visual-art, I desperately strive to bridge the gap between story-telling and design. I want to create apparel that can communicate the intangible dialogues between people and places, like how I felt in the aquarium. I know that this vision for my future garments is ambitious; I must reach a higher level of creative capacity. Thus, through the FSAD program, I’m willing to take on all the quantitative and scientific aspects of design as well as the artistic component. Here in Cornell’s FSAD program, I see the integrated fiber and marketing curriculum as my route towards a more telescopic worldview of the fashion realm.

Walking through Shanghai’s urban ecosystem, I notice that designs engulf us, unconsciously altering our existence. When did kitsch trends start dominating the aesthetics of my generation? I was passionately discussing this with a friend from Cornell’s art program when she said, that with the intensity in which I like to observe contemporary patterns, I’d enjoy Cornell’s more innovative approach to design. After two campus visits and extensive research, I found that many of the cutting-edge courses in Cornell’s Apparel Design program resonated with my current interests. I began to dream that, as an undergrad, I could take *Aesthetics and Meaning in World Dress*and look into how the designer’s role has changed through globalization. However, what I find most appealing is that Cornell's program doesn’t just focus on artistic theory like so many of the pre-professional art majors elsewhere. Instead, as a freshman in FSAD’s balanced curriculum of both practical application and philosophical theory, I could dive right into learning how to actually apply my designs in the real world while taking classes like*Contemporary Moral Issues,* combining my academic interests in art and philosophy.

I’m not just here to make clothes—I could learn that anywhere. I’m here to absorb all there is to offer in the FSAD curriculum: to learn how to incorporate sustainability into my designs, how to dress the modern human to express an inner world, how to establish my own line (tentative name: Subterranean Labyrinth!) A garment is alive like a human being. Its integrity is to follow its own truth, its one single theme. The purpose, the body, the material determine the shape. And as its maker, I must give it the soul and every trim, element and silhouette to articulate. I know this higher mind-space can be reached: immersing in FSAD’s academics and the Paris exchange program with L’école Nationale des Arts Décoratifs, I’m ready to express the vision welling up inside me. Here I’ll be able to fully connect with an audience which has yet to take its seat in my fashion show, and perhaps become a part of how I re-imagine the world.

# The Balcony Anonymous

**Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?**

This is the balcony that extends into infinite dimensions. Inside: paintings and the smell of dusk. Lined against the tiled walls are canvases both void and filled. A soft light overhead. There is something extremely calming about occupying this platform, transforming it into surreal dimensions. In the studio I am expanding both into my mind space and the concrete space of my artwork.

Very often, a friend would read my poetry, view my paintings, and ask:*what was your inspiration? What draws it all together?*

I am never really sure how to answer. To be honest, I have never found any conceptual disparity between visual art and the written form. My urge to create, or express, is like letting out a breath of air. And by creating art, I am able to crystallize that exhalation and preserve it forever. When I paint, language and brushstrokes coalesce into the same motive: to translate my cognitive abstractions into concrete expressions. To tentatively let you into my mind space, this is the trance-like state I fall into when creating: the sky is a stretch of watercolor spreading into little streams, telegraph poles streamlining my ideas into electric currents, reverberating into houses; electric wires gone loose. And beside the overarching landscape, materializes the side portrait of my mother. The silhouette of a slender arm, then the shoulder's precise curvature.

Some people say that art is cathartic. That statement is only half-true. In the very beginning, creating each artwork is like wrestling forever with an unknown contender who seems to come from the realm of artistic perfection. Even when my artwork is finally polished and displayed under the glowing light of art exhibitions, I am not lost in the applause. Interlaced with each brushstroke and each nuance of color is the memory of a self-limitation I've been able to conquer. Thus, out of all the artworks I've ever made, the ones I value the most are not necessarily the most aesthetically successful, but are the ones in which, like a war hero, I battled through to claim victory. In those rare, precious moments, when transfixed by the wild waltz of my imagination, I would feel as if I've reached the apex of divinity. Existing in between the initial concept and the unclaimed, unchartered space of the blank canvas, I've never stopped believing that a secret awaits--perhaps the truth to the wholeness of life, the interconnected beauty of the entire cosmos.

The balcony door opens: I step away from its light, covered in paint. But I do not hurry to wash the colors off my skin. Instead, I let these chaotic remnants of my arduous creations stay, because after hours upon hours inching towards an artistic ideal, my body becomes at one with these brushstrokes, and I am no longer alone.

# Wandering Feet Anonymous

**Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that helped to shape your indentity or understanding of the world.**

It’s been three years. The edges of the photo are soft now, and the colors have dimmed. It has been worn thin and fragile, and there is a deepening crease down its center from the years it spent folded between my fingers. I don't usually keep photos. But there’s something which lies beneath the scratches of this one that has settled into a spot in my soul. There’s something about the fading horizon that reminds me of what was ignited in me the day I stood with my face against the wind, hand in hand with a person who would come to reveal my own horizon.

The two of us stood tall, leaning heavily into the shoulders of each other as we combated exhaustion. She was blind. I was slowly emerging from my own darkness after eleven months of concussive recovery. And there we stood, on the summit of Mount Katahdin, having completed the most infamously grueling hike of the Appalachian Trail. Alongside us lay a red-tipped cane, and some Advil. But below us lay all of Maine, from the rivers which soared with an echoing vitality to the valleys which tumbled into spacious green expanses. The fall colors created a mosaic of orange, yellow, and red: a fire on the hills which leaked into our souls. We were a couple of deficient madmen with a passion for adventure. And we’d made our way to the top of the world.

“What’s it like,” I remember Charlotte asking. Tears ran along the wrinkles on her face, weathered by fifty summers that she had never seen. I wondered if beauty meant anything to her at all. I wondered how that fire could have reached her soul without her there to witness it. But there was a certain radiance in her eyes, one that left me wonderstruck. Then I understood.

Charlotte, in her dark abode, had learned to capture that beauty within herself. She found it not in the summit, but in the journey to the top. She found it in each of the pebbles that tripped her aging bones, and in the unforgiving wind which whipped through the creases of her skin. Most importantly, Charlotte found that beauty in her passions and the opportunities she created for herself in a world that told her she could not. With it, she accomplished feats which many of us never will.

Charlotte passed away two months ago, having lived a life of numerous colorful summits. In the short time that I knew her, Charlotte guided my wandering feet, both on the trail behind me, and on the trail before me. I understand the role of my own deficiencies not as impeding my journey, but as creating new journeys. I suppose that this is why I hold that photograph so dear. For me, it marks the beginning of a journey that I have just begun to undertake. It marks the base of a mountain of endless opportunities. And I’m glad I have a lot of time left, because I definitely have a lot of summits left to reach, a lot of beauty left to find.

# Shadows Beneath the Sun Anonymous

**Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**

If at any given moment there is not at least one child screaming, one dog barking, any variation of an alarm sounding and/or someone "practicing" an instrument they don't actually know how to play, something is awry in my house. Generally, any kind of silence indicates either that irreparable destruction is in the process of being concealed, or that something is being plotted between recently forged alliances of siblings. On a consistent basis, my house can be accurately characterized as both a war zone and an insane asylum. Growing up alongside four younger siblings, a few animals, and the occasional unlucky wanderer who ended up the midst of our free-for-all, I have grown accustomed to a consistent state of unpredictability and chaos. I am a Slowe.

Over the years, my last name has adopted a certain infamy in our small town. Attendance on the first day of school is characterized by the calling of my name (an incorrect pronunciation of Elsie as Elise), and then "Oh! A Slowe!" My response to this has varied over the years, but I can clearly remember one in particular, sixth grade, when I think I tried to deny that relation. That morning, my two youngest siblings, twins and three-years-old at the time, had taken it upon themselves to leave the house at 5AM for a "stroll," as they would later identify it. Among a frantic search by the entire town police station, they were found at a local park, playing on the swings. Completely naked. But hey, it was hot outside. Who could be bothered with clothing? Certainly not them. My teacher, through tears of laughter, was careful to convey this in detail to my class. It was my first year of middle school, where my primary priority was to be "cool." I found myself less than thrilled to be a Slowe that morning. I blamed them, in a fit of rage, for destroying my reputation. It was tough being a sixth grader.

I now recognize that memory with a smile as one that will follow me well into adulthood. Many days in our house come with memories like that, and with the passing years, each one has enhanced the love and pride I hold for my little band of misfits. Even if we're not particularly "cool" all the time. Evidently, each summer has given way to a new story about my family on the first day of school, even as we moved through three different towns. I'm realizing now that this was my last year of that, and what a bittersweet realization that is. It's the end of an era.

Growing up as a Slowe, a fact beyond my choosing, has left a permanent legacy on my heart and a spot in my soul. As the oldest sibling, the idol, the protector, and the sometimes unfortunate leader of chaos, I will trace my own legacy in the stories that are yet to come, especially in those that will be told to my brother and sister's classes when they enter middle school themselves next year, and I am gone.

Despite the number of times that I swore to have disowned my family, I would trade nothing for each of the memories, ludicrous as they are. This is who I am. It's who I'll always be, and I am thrilled to carry into the world the same thirst for adventure, the same love of the absurdities that shape us, and the same excitement in finding myself a few steps off of the beaten path. My family has left me with a special way of embracing the world around me, despite its imperfections. Although I will at times feel lost without them next year, I will find my way after navigating eighteen years, and many to come, as a Slowe.

# What I Learned from Synchronized SwimmingAnonymous

**Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**

When I was ten months old, I grabbed onto the coffee table and hauled myself up, arms shaking, fists clenched, knees wobbling; ten minutes later, much to my parents’ dismay, I was sprinting around the house, choppy bangs flapping in the wind like sails. When I was 17 months old, my grandmother wondered how such a short and round child could invariably evade her grasp. And when I was three years old, I decided that my toddler brother would become my (somewhat limp) wrestling partner. It then dawned on my parents that I had both too much energy and a predisposition to trip over nothing, a dangerous combination under any circumstances. Apparently, I needed some way to expel my extra vigor while also not becoming a safety liability. And so, at the age of six, I joined my local synchronized swimming team.

The first few years in the sport were uncomfortable, as I seemed to have no rhythm or natural understanding of how to contort my body into any graceful positions. Were it not for my logic-defying natural buoyancy, I would have been even more of a safety hazard. I was shy and awkward, and I couldn’t seem to understand what I needed to convey to the judges. My lack of emotional connectivity was so rigid that my teammates had to resort to screaming the word “underwear” at me in an attempt to get me to smile. For years, my struggles against any show of vulnerability persisted both in and out of the pool, with teachers and coaches alike commenting “good work, but would love to see more engagement.”

In synchronized swimming, engagement with the audience is the heart of the sport. It represents the pursuit towards finally convincing others that no, my lungs are not on fire, no, I can’t feel the sixty-seven bobby pins stuck straight into my scalp, and yes, I’m perfectly fine, thank you very much. It is the art of displaying all the complexities of movement of any gymnast or dancer while also actively trying not to drown. Bit by bit, the intricacies of the sport started to break down this emotional wall I had built up. The sensation of music flowing around me, the feeling of cool water against my skin, the sight of my teammates’ faces, all helped me realize the full extent of my perseverance and emotion. Looking back on my years of training, I realize that the important things about synchronized swimming for me were not just the sport itself. It became the lens through which I now see the world, and the basis for my continued maturation.

Growing up with the sport as such an intrinsic part of my development, I learned to apply the lessons from each practice to my life outside the pool. My permanent bruises from getting kicked in the shins by my teammates cultivated my ability to work with others. Pushing myself to kick a little harder and reach a little farther on every lap taught me about the importance of determination. My desire to help others developed through mentoring the younger girls on the team, and later presented itself in my volunteering and community service work. Placing 11th at a competition that selected the top 10 girls for the U.S. National Team taught me how to handle failure, and how to turn a devastating situation into a poignant and educational one. The next year, hearing the lushness of the national anthem as we won gold for the U.S., I realized that my earlier heartbreak had actually motivated me to work harder towards my dreams. For me, synchronized swimming isn’t about the glittery swimsuits and dramatic makeup. It’s about the lifelong friendships formed, the resolution and drive that are enriched from each practice, and, when the going gets tough, the ability to grit your teeth and smile in the face of everything else.

# Epigenetics: How It Affects Our Future Anonymous

**Describe the scientific concept (e.g. plate tectonics, quantum mechanics) most important to your world view and explain why it is so critical to your outlook.**

For decades, the classic dispute of “nature vs. nurture” in regards to our maturation has dominated the debate about how children develop. Does a specific gene passed on from your parents predispose you to a life of crime? Are children more likely to develop high blood pressure because of their genetic composition, or from their exposure to an unhealthy diet? The world is fascinated with finding the answers to these questions, as they have dramatic implications as to how much free will each of us can hope to maintain. Like many people, I thought that the issue of development boiled down to these two competing forces: the unchangeable traits bestowed upon you by your parents, and the effect of your environment on the person you would become. So for me, the concept of a possible third option, known as epigenetics, was both confusing and strangely exciting.

Epigenetics refers to the modification of an organism’s genetic expression; in other words, it embodies the control over which genes in the genome are actually expressed. Studies performed with older identical twins have shown that even when two people share the exact same genetic sequence, their epigenetic markers, when built up over time, can lead to drastic differences in their predispositions to certain diseases. What is significant, though, is that these markers are only temporary and can be changed due to certain environmental factors. Most importantly, it means that the effects of the genome on the person’s traits are no longer set in stone, and that something we once thought was rigid and fixed may be more within our control than we thought.

The concept of epigenetics did more than revolutionize the way we think about genetics and its role in development; it raised new questions as to how accountable we must be for our actions. Epigenetic studies have shown that the choices we make can not only affect our lives, but also affect our children’s lives as well. What if the fact that I didn’t exercise enough predisposed my child towards contracting a certain disease? What if the fact that I didn’t eat healthily enough meant that my child wouldn’t be able to handle stress? Now, it seems that my actions won’t just affect me anymore, and as such, this mentality dictates much of my life.

The implications of epigenetics encompass the way we think about the future and our sense of familial responsibility. Personally, I feel inspired to live a more complete, healthy, and balanced life, not just for my personal fulfillment, but as a sort of stepping stone for the health of my children. As such, I have an increased appreciation for my own actions and choices, and it is the concept of epigenetics that guides the way I think about the future.

# Passing the Torch Nannette Boakye

**Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.**

“It is your turn” were the four words that I, at age 12, feared would be uttered from my mother’s lips. I knew that is was only a matter of time until my mother would send me off to the Dome Market, my local market in Ghana, to purchase the “foodstuffs” that were needed for our household. It was only a matter of time before I would enter womanhood.

I paced back and forth on the vast area of land where the market would be held on Sunday to prepare myself for my “test.” The terrain seemed endless when vacated of the thousands of merchants who carried metal basins filled with goods on their heads to their tables, where they loudly bargained and bartered with the townspeople. I looked down at the ground and found thousands of different shoe imprints, all left from the thousands of people who had gathered here last weekend, but luckily I had memorized my mother’s steps from years of following her through the market every Sunday.

I paid close attention to the way she always inspected the “foodstuffs” at each table before proceeding the bargain with the vendor to get a better deal. It was enthralling to watch my mother never go over budget each week and sometimes return home with more money than she had the previous week. In Ghanaian society, this skill made a woman a woman.

On Sunday, she passed me the torch as she handed me a list of items and a wallet with the grocery money. With my mother’s blessing, I anxiously headed off to the market, knowing that I must return with all the items on the list and some change. When I finally reached the edge of the market, I could not turn back, and my inability to succumb to fear overpowered my doubts. I made my way to my mother’s most loyal market sellers and was commended for shopping on my own at such a young age. My mission was completed in two hours, but my mother would be the judge of whether I had passed my “test.”

Although the bags I lifted home were heavy, I walked with ease, not only because I had met the goal, but also because I had found confidence in myself. In my own way, I had found what it meant to be a woman. Being a woman was more than being a good bargainer at the market; it was about the ability to take on a new challenge, and to find the inner confidence and resilience to meet the task at hand. To be strong, independent, and risk-taking for the sake of yourself, or even for your household, was to become a woman.

When I got home, my mother congratulated me on successfully completing my “test.” I had not only proven to her, but also to myself that I was ready to embark on my journey of maturity.

# Containing Multitudes Serina Lee

**Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.**

A scrawny boy in beat-up velcro sneakers ran past. Our tour guide Mohammed sighed heavily, “Angel Park is probably the only place where a young boy could be young. Outside, he's probably the head of the family, working three jobs to secure meals for his sisters, because his parents are in jail or killed.” I thought of my twin brother slouching comfortably on the sofa holding an Xbox controller, and knowing that mom is cooking steak for dinner.

Honestly, when I signed up for the Social Justice Academy at the University of Pennsylvania, I was anticipating lectures on broad topics like racism and feminism and probably a few interesting reads. So I was really nervous when we toured Eastern State Penitentiary. One former inmate, Jesse Krimes, informed us of how the government inflated his crime on the records to pressure him to snitch. He also showed us the intricate, slightly faded landscape on his prison wall, made by years of gathering magazine pieces and pasting them to form a design, partly to avoid losing himself in solitary confinement.

The amount of shame I experienced was unspeakable, because the night before I imagined the inmates as insane men; I had plotted to wear baggy clothes and hide my phone from them, all because of my own prejudice and ignorance. I realized that many of them are normal people with soft spots in their hearts, who will always be judged by one crime committed when they were young and headstrong. Is it fair? “Don’t fight fire with fire, fight fire with water,” as the play *Hello! Sadness* puts it. If we are fighting criminals by harming them psychologically with isolation and prejudice, we are essentially forcing them to remain criminals. There must be a less divisive way, one that encourages reform.

On the way back, I conversed with Professor Tony Montiero about the racism in the criminal system, the injustice of solitary confinement, and the idea that progress under new laws is a mere illusion if nothing within the culture changes. I’m beginning to grasp that these issues are interconnected, and I can’t consider, for example, sexism without pondering its similarity to racism.

These thoughtful conversations, with professors and friends, were the fuel of my growth. I cherish these conversations, because they made me reflect, intensely. They made me more aware of how fortunate I am and of the responsibility that comes with growing up privileged.

During the last hours of the academy, some friends and I gathered for the usual goodbye. But there was more. I mentioned that I would incorporate elements of other injustices like sexism and racism into the homelessness project I started last year and foster the open and non-judgmental community we found at academy. Hannah will start a Feminism Club in her Quaker school. Stephen shared ideas on starting a gay rights rally in his school. As more of us shared, power and mutual support were built. I left with the weight of my newfound sense of responsibility and thirst for thought-provoking conversations. I am forever grateful for this summer that, as Walt Whitman writes, “contains multitudes,” because I learned to connect with people, connect with their knowledge and problems, and connect with their kindness. I gained the maturity to utilize these connections not just for myself, but to impact people in need.

# Inspired by The River Runs Black Serina Lee

**Why are you drawn to studying the major you have selected? Please discuss how your interests and related experiences have influenced your choice. Specifically, how will an education from the College of Agriculture and Life Science (CALS) and Cornell University help you achieve your academic goals?**

"Wealth without virtue is no harmless neighbor." -Sappho

How businesses and corporations balance the virtue of giving back and profit-seeking is one of my greatest fascinations. For example, the American company Tom's donates a pair of shoes for each pair sold. Other companies with less socially responsible business models, according to Elizabeth C. Economy's *The River Runs Black,*led to environmental degradation in China, public health issues, social unrest, economic loss, and eventually the environmental protection of economically important regions and damages in others. How do companies strategize, allocate resources, and analyze consumer behavior to benefit both the company and the community? How do managers in regulatory economies balance profit and damage to the environment and company reputation? I am interested in exploring the opportunities and pitfalls of sustainable business and learning about the complexity and linkage among business functions and the community. Therefore, I am interested in the Applied Economics and Management major, with an Applied Economics or Strategy concentration, and possibly a minor in Development Sociology.

My interest in management solidified when I started my own Food for Hire community service project for DECA, an international association of marketing students. Heading up communications and operations, I contacted different shelters and smaller grocers to join the system of transportation of produce I created. During the start-up phase of the project, I researched and analyzed each company's unique profit standing and structure to estimate its level of participation. I coordinated with numerous organizations, developed a system for training volunteers, and maintained communication with my school's administration, volunteers, and all the organizations involved. Through this extremely hands-on business experience, I was able to apply foundational concepts to analyze business situations and problems. I began to establish a more critical stance towards management and ethical principles associated with business.

I learn best with examples and participation. I am excited to evaluate publicly traded corporations and conduct case study analysis to master foundational business concepts in the Business Management and Organization course. Drawing cases from small business scenarios, the public policy area, and the corporate settings, these labs and applied practices will allow me to become a more well-rounded corporate manager who moves the company to benefit the cash-flow, the shareholders, and the community.

In my hometown in Taiwan and other parts of China, numerous areas have to bear the horrendous consequences of greedy companies that have no concern for public health or the environment. This past August, sodium cyanide explosions in Tianjin exposed 700 tons of highly toxic substances, killed 114 people, and damaged 17,000 homes. The consequences are horrifying enough without considering the long-term environmental and health issues. Often enraged at these ridiculously irresponsible companies, I hope to take my knowledge from my adventure at Cornell and integrate it with my own or other companies, creating socially aware business management plans.

One of the things I cherish most is a thoughtful conversation – with teammates, friends, strangers, family, professors, and anyone with experience or expertise. Since the AEM major has fewer than 100 freshmen every year, I am excited to work closely with passionate peers to gain knowledge and develop mutual respect. We could talk about foreign privatization and its relation to emerging markets, international transmission of U.S. monetary policy, and countless topics I am eager to explore. I want to be part of these conversations and apply the knowledge to my research.

In the AEM major, the unique case studies and computer labs, the applied and hands-on business experience, the availability of research opportunities, the community of open-minded people eager to learn, and the loaded conversations with friends, business experts, and professors will empower me as a well-rounded businesswomen and social worker. I hope to take advantage of these opportunities, and many others that I may encounter, and balance the virtue of giving back and making profit in the future.

# The Power of Film Anonymous

**What is your Passion?**

I grabbed my first camera in sixth grade. I would grasp the handle of the silver Sony camcorder like slipping on a comfortable glove, and glide my thumb over the intricate aluminum buttons, finally putting it to rest on top of the big red dot labelled “REC". My father had been especially reluctant to give it to me, since it was fragile, but my incessant begging to make my own stop-motion LEGO movies made him happy to help.

I would sit in my room for hours on end, painstakingly taking picture after picture of two tiny Star Wars figures dueling with lightsabers. Anakin’s jab was parried swiftly, but he followed up with a lunge that burned a scathing hole in Darth Vader’s cape. The whole fiasco ended with a spectacular explosion, with Darth Vader emerging victorious since I was in control of the ending. The credits would roll up from the bottom, with my name in big bold letters, a crowning glory of the little skit I had created.

Since then, I saved up to buy my own camera, began watching tutorials on YouTube, and learned essential cinematic skills like framing, directing, and editing. A couple friends and I even decided to launch our own YouTube channel, inspired by the online comedians and singers that made up the majority of my web-browsing. Needless to say, we did not become celebrities — but we had a lot of fun.

Over time, a hobby that started as just a childhood dream of transforming into a YouTube celebrity grew into a more profound appreciation for the world around me. Watching through the eyes of a camera is probably the closest thing to truly seeing life in another person's perspective. The cinema explores every alternate universe in existence — just like my own depiction of Star Wars — and allows it to flourish in the imaginative minds of the millions of individuals.

In the end, when all the cameras are turned off and a production is finished, I sit back and watch my own creation. A window I've created, all on my own. But regardless of how many windows I make, they are what they are: just windows. An ideal reality is an oxymoron – a paradox that cannot possibly exist. I can never climb through them, or jump into any of the worlds I created myself. But deep inside, I'm okay with that; the truly ideal reality isn't out there, where what's perfect is already set in stone. It's here, where my pursuit of perfection carves away my imperfections, bit by bit, turning me into who I am today. So I'm okay with not being in an ideal world that perfectly replicates what I have seen on film.

Because I'm living in one right now.

# Unclouded Eyes Wendy Zhang

**The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

"My six year old could do that," a woman behind me remarks. I feel a twinge of irritation, but I don't blame her; a few years ago, I would’ve agreed. To the average eye, Grace Hartigan's work of Abstract Expressionism, *The Gallow Ball*, appears to be a splotchy mess of dripping colors.

I grew up belittling the work of world-renowned contemporary artists, baffled at their lofty prices. I believed that art should be beautiful or meaningful, and never understood how indecipherable images fit either description. Creating abstract art myself was out of the question—until last year, when a painting caught my eye as I was browsing online for inspiration for my AP Art portfolio. It was a painting that I normally would've dismissed as child's work, but the longer I looked at it, the more captivated I became. I marveled at how a simple composition could evoke such strong emotions within me, and yearned to create something that could affect others as much as this painting had affected me.

My first attempt was acrylic on canvas. I did my research—spent days studying paintings and reading about the history, practice, and techniques of modern art. As I dipped my brush in paint and raised it to the canvas, I tried to imitate the techniques that I'd seen. Neither the process nor the result was enjoyable; I struggled constantly, and my product was a hot mess that lacked direction. Two hours and several canvases later, I bitterly vowed to never pick up a brush again.

The brush was back in my hand within an hour. I’d judged abstract artists for the seemingly minimal thought and effort that they put into their work, but now I’d learned the hard way that creating abstract art isn’t as simple as it seems. This time, instead of letting preconceived ideals limit me, I let my emotions take over. When I finally stepped back from the easel, I felt a sense of satisfaction. My work was far from a masterpiece, but I knew that the experience was a success because I’d learned about both art and myself. I'd always thought of myself as adventurous and open-minded for my love of traveling and trying new foods, and with art, I'd enjoyed experimenting with different mediums and styles. But I realized that everything I’d tried was within my comfort zone, and that there's more to being open-minded than merely doing new things. True acceptance comes from the genuine desire to learn and understand.

Today, Contemporary Art Daily is one of my most visited sites, and I make a beeline for the modern exhibitions at art museums. Art is no longer confined to my original ideals of representational beauty. Although I still can't claim to be a master of abstract art, I am a much more receptive person than I was before. I can now visit any contemporary art museum and thoughtfully stroke my chin while discussing work with critics. But even further, I can meet strangers with different backgrounds and perspectives and not only get to know them, but consider why they think as they do. My initial failure to appreciate abstract art taught me not to judge before I attempt to understand, and to respect even what I may never understand.

Now, as I stand in my local art museum, I fully appreciate *The Gallow Ball*. That lady may have seen a meaningless mess of colors, but I see lively movement and energy portrayed through bold brushstrokes backed with emotion. I see the details and layering as I clearly distinguish Hartigan's techniques in each deliberate mark. Now I see through unclouded eyes.

# The American Flag Lionel M. Gumireddy

**Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**

“Please rise for the national anthem and the presentation of the colors.” Immediately, the thousands of people attending this Memorial Day program rise in reverent silence. It’s 9:30 in morning, the sun illuminates the Star-Spangled Banner, and the wind lifts Her gently for all to see. It’s go time.

“Guard, A-ten-HUT!” The energy that has built up in my diaphragm unleashes as my voice breaks the stillness. All eyes turn to the cadets that comprise the color guard: to the Pennsylvania flag-bearer on my left; to the two flanking riflemen; and to the American flag rippling brightly, anchored to my arm.

“Carry, COLORS!” The Pennsylvania flag-bearer and I hoist our flags up, and the riflemen lift their weapons to their shoulders, all in perfect synchronization.

“Forward, MARCH!” Together, we step off, shoulder to shoulder. We march as a team, relying on each other’s pace to stay in step as we maneuver towards the audience’s front and center.

“Guard, HALT! Present, COLORS!” We immediately stop. The Pennsylvania Flag dips to a precise 45 degree angle, the rifles move crisply to the saluting position, and the American Flag stands proudly in all Her glory. I hear the snare drums roll, and I feel a tingle down my spine, as the band begins to play.

The National Anthem concludes, and we head out. I dismiss the guard, and immediately a “SIR, YES, SIR” erupts from the other three cadets and resounds across the field. We pack our equipment, and I commend them on a job superbly done. This ceremony was the two riflemen’s first, and I think how far they have come since I taught them the basics at their first practice several months prior.

My thoughts turn to my own first year in AFJROTC when I learned that, in addition to other services, our unit provided color guards for different events around the community. I was sold--I wanted the honor of carrying the American flag during the Presentation Ceremony.

The first drill practice came around; that day, I learned how to stand at attention, how to execute different facing movements, how to salute. The next week: how to march, bear the flags, and carry a rifle. Weeks of training accumulated into months of commitment, and under the commanders’ seemingly contradictory combination of patience and strictness, my knowledge of drill flourished. At last, I could participate in color guards at various functions, award ceremonies, and football games; over time, I grew more and more experienced.

The next year, I joined Advanced Drill, commanded an Armed Regulation team, and voluntarily helped teach the first-years. It was at this point that I began to advance my leadership skills, as well as to develop an appreciation for helping others learn and for passing on my abilities to the following generations. When I was appointed Color Guard Commander, my roles as teacher and leader increased, and my skills continued to evolve. I have since learned how to work with others, how to give orders without sounding bossy, and most importantly, how to direct a team to accomplish a goal. My confidence, in both myself and my cadets, has strengthened. In turn, I have earned their trust and that of my superiors.

This year, my instructors appointed me Unit Commander, and they expected me to step down from Color Guard Commander. In response, I explained that I would rather forego command of the unit. (Fortunately, it did not reach that point.) To me, there is no greater honor than carrying the American flag, and I will continue to do so as long as possible.

# Why Politics? Anonymous

**Describe the world you come from - for example, your family, community or school - and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations."**

I want to change the cynical, bitter stigma attached to politics. Many only see corruption and greedy lobbying, but politics is my outlet to solve the growing problems of our modern world. Nothing else has the potential to affect the lives of every single human being.

Walking into Senator Bob Wieckowski’s district office on my first day, I had read *California Legislature Vol. 4*cover to cover and researched every nuance of the senator’s political agenda. My greatest fear was boring intern work. Thankfully, from the moment I was given my own office and government profile, I knew I wouldn’t be delivering decafs.

I was tasked with resolving voters’ personal concerns while leading a team to organize community events. I will never forget my phone call with Mrs. Torres. She could no longer afford the rent after her husband passed away. Her sobbing turned to joy as I explained Wieckowski’s Senate Bill 501, which lowered wage garnishment for low income workers. I sent my notes of our conversation to the senator, who used them in committee to show the bill’s potential impact. Mrs. Torres retained her home after the bill passed.

Having direct, meaningful impact on people in my community was truly a dream come true. A small taste of real responsibility was all it took to light a fire within me. I began pursuing more influential tasks, such as writing drafts for the Senator’s speeches and representing him at ceremonial events. However, I learned the most when I watched him in action.

“Get the bill through committee today, or you’re dead to me!” he screamed.

Senator Wieckowski’s voice boomed through the halls and filled my ears with delight. It was the sound of progress. He put his whole heart behind each of his bills, even crossing partisan lines to get them passed. Senator Wieckowski embodies what many elected officials have forgotten: politics is the governing of PEOPLE. He isn’t just the type of politician I hope to become, but rather the type of person I strive to be.

I stared at my boss from the Senate Chamber balcony. I couldn’t help but imagine myself in his seat. As the committee meeting began, Senator Wieckowski turned toward me.

“I’d like to acknowledge my summer intern, Preston Liu, for his service to District 10…,” he announced.

As he explained my service, I rose over the smiles and applause of every California Senator. I knew I belonged in that room.

# Labor Relations and Me Anonymous

**Tell us about your intellectual interests, how they sprung from your course, service, work or life experiences, and what makes them exciting to you. Describe how Cornell ILR is the right school for you to pursue these interests.**

Consumed by exhaustion, agony, and stress, my dad silently plods toward his old recliner and sinks into it. His delivery route had seen five extensions in the past year, and the USPS management was attempting to enforce a sixth. Severe gout and back complications distorted his gait into an unbalanced half limp. This situation developed into my first experience with labor relations, but it certainly wasn’t my last. The American Postal Workers Union tirelessly fought for my dad’s physical and mental well-being to great success. Not only was the sixth route extension dismissed, but his normal route distance was also reduced by five miles. The overwhelming change in my dad’s spirits echoed throughout our family and inspired me to incorporate workplace relations into my passion for government policy.

Simply put, I love working with and learning about human interactions. I am fascinated by the various relationships between our desires, needs, and reality in both the law-making process and in everyday business practice. As an intern for Senator Bob Wieckowski, I expanded and applied my understanding of public policy’s impact on the workplace, as well as how problems in the workplace shape legislation.

My primary task was to resolve voters’ personal concerns. Since Senator Wieckowski’s political platform highlights a distinct focus on aiding the everyday blue-collar worker, the vast majority of incoming phone calls were complaints regarding unfair treatment in the workplace, or direct issues with employers and salary. I learned to apply my knowledge of our government’s powers and limitations to unique situations and provide coherent guidance and solutions. Meanwhile, I constantly gained insight into issues that plague the average worker.

I will never forget one phone call in particular - my conversation with Mrs. Torres, a single mother who could no longer afford her rent after her husband passed away. Her desolate sobbing slowly turned to excitement as I explained Senator Wieckowski’s pending Senate Bill 501, which reformed wage garnishment limits for low income workers. The bill would enable the working poor to retain more of their paycheck, helping struggling families make daily ends meet. After the phone call, I focused specifically on Senate Bill 501, compiling research and data on its potential communal impact. After two long weeks, I presented my findings to the senator. Pleased, he used my report during a Senate floor hearing to ultimately help pass Senate Bill 501 into law as part of his Economic Equity and Financial Stability Initiative. As a result of our legislative success, I achieved my personal goal: Mrs. Torres was able to retain her home. My momentary satisfaction gradually transitioned into perpetual curiosity surrounding the intersection between legislation and labor.

With interests spanning the entire spectrum of social sciences, there isn’t a more perfect fit for my academic future than Cornell’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Utilizing the only work-oriented interdisciplinary program as an undergraduate would empower my exploration of a broad understanding in human interactions. The flexibility to advance my ambitions in both public policy and workplace relations, while simultaneously exploring my interests in the managerial and union perspectives of labor, is simply exclusive to the ILR experience.

Outside of the classroom, I aspire to take advantage of ILR’s unique connections to real world work experience through applicable internships. I look forward to both short term opportunities in the Freshman Externship and Winter Intersession Programs, as well as more comprehensive commitments to undertake a Credit Internship or even to spend a semester in Dublin.

To some extent, I felt as though I had helped Mrs. Torres in the same way the American Postal Worker’s Union helped my dad. Looking beyond the individual case, I managed to grasp the optimistic reality that Senate Bill 501’s impact resonates with thousands of families across California who struggle with similar situations to Mrs. Torres. Therefore, I hope to utilize the omniscient power of future public policy to create permanent, far-reaching impacts in the workplace.

# The Application of Hospitality to MedicineAris Raj Agarwala

**The global hospitality industry includes hotel and foodservice management, real estate, finance, entrepreneurship, marketing, technology, and law. Describe what has influenced your decision to study business through the lens of hospitality. What personal qualities make you a good fit for SHA? (Please limit your response to 650 words.)**

Throughout high school, I pursued endeavors to alleviate suffering and fulfill my Catholic calling, volunteering in nursing homes, hospitals and clinics for chronically ill patients. However, working in these places made me notice the inherent difficulties faced by many institutions to provide a decent standard of living for their patients, not providing proper sanitation, palatable food, and pleasant environments. Instead, I have seen individuals suffering from sickness spread through the poorly-ventilated rooms and unsanitary water, contracting additional illnesses which only tax their bodies further. Being in these positions illustrated to me the necessity needed in leading these facilities to provide health care at a comfortable standard for patients. Thus, at Cornell University’s School of Hotel Administration, I hope to integrate the schooling that I will get in hospitality with the medical industry, restructuring nursing homes, hospitals and clinics to both improve the health care quality while also saving many of them from bankruptcy which causes strife for the sick people housed in them.

Even with the government funding that many of these facilities receive, their overheads are higher than their revenue, thereby causing many of them to fall into debt. While it is indicated that the expenditures of a medical institution will be higher than hotels for reasons associated with specialized labor, machinery and expensive medicines driving up costs, the inefficiencies that they face only harm the patients with less money being allotted to their overall care. Thus, as an individual who wishes to pursue medicine, I believe that a degree from the School of Hotel Administration will be beneficial to the medical field because it will provide a different perspective on organizing the health care system in this country. I truly think that we have the resources necessary to radically change the way that medical services are provided. However, we must also have individuals pursue the schooling necessary to evaluate the current state of each facility needing to be reformed and to employ the proper tactics for revitalizing each one so that they may continue to provide care in a dignified manner. Also, the knowledge base that attending the School of Hotel Administration provides would allow me to even establish a few of these clinics in underserved regions and ultimately help populations for the better.

Ultimately, the difference between hotels and many medical institutions is simply the administering of health care to ease suffering. While one a person vacations at, the other a person resides at following surgery, bodily failure or physical trauma. Why can’t the administration of commodities like nutritious food and healthy water in aesthetically pleasing environments be applied to both models?

Overall, I would say the strongest testament to my success at the School of Hotel Administration is my experiences in hospitals and nursing homes throughout New Jersey. Given the opportunity to work with patients, I have also managed to help the supervisors with many of their tasks related to the management of these medical facilities. Whether it is fully processing the payroll with an upcoming deadline to helping establish a budget and executing the remodeling of a new portion of the clinic, I have dealt and persevered through many of the tribulations that business executives have to conquer by employing my stellar work ethic that is reflected by my grades in school. Constantly on top of deadlines, I consistently manage to do work without procrastination, finishing it early while still achieving top grades on the products. Furthermore, as a Catholic school student, I have delved into moral Theology and Philosophy, ethically fortifying myself for the trials of college and the rigors of my lifelong career. Thus, the strength of my candidacy for the School of Hotel Administration is my combining of medical volunteerism, business experience, efficient work ethic and overall morality, culminating in my initiative to reform medical institutions for the benefit of who they are for: the patients.

# Quadrilingual Anonymous

**Discuss a department you're interested in.**

I am quadrilingual. Sure, it sounds fancy, but as a biracial child of two immigrants, being quadrilingual feels natural to me. English. My mother tongue. No explanation required. As an infant my mom would teach me words by holding up a ball and saying, “Ball, qui, bala.” I’d learn Chinese and Greek for the next seventeen years. The fourth language came in seventh grade, when I started learning French.

Languages are fascinating to me because there are so many little intricacies within a language that just aren’t so easily translated into another. You’d think to “poser un lapin” in French would mean to ask a rabbit a question. But no. It means to stand someone up. Or how about the fact that when Greeks say the English expression “it’s all Greek to me,” they say, “Eisai san na you miles Kinezika,” which translates to “it’s like you’re talking to me in Chinese.” And then in Chinese, there’s actually no real word for “yes.” There’s she de, which translates more to “it is so,” and there’s dui which translates more to “that’s correct.” But there’s no word that actually means yes. And the closest translation I’ve found to a more colloquial “yeah” is a grunt of affirmation, similar to cutting the American “uhuh” in two and using the first half.

Thus as a lover of both writing and languages, it is no accident that I’m drawn to Cornell’s Comparative Literature department, which will allow me to directly apply my knowledge of languages to analyzing literature. Classes such as COML 4367 and COML 3985 will allow me to study literature in the context of the language it was originally written in. In an increasingly globally-interconnected society, I think it’s important to study literature as it was originally intended to be read, so that we can explore similarities while still appreciating the linguistic differences that make writing across cultures so unique.