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**Sample essays 2017**

**Pepperdine university**

**For the Love of the Script Jonathan Lee Hopkins**

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

Three A.M. I still smell like the chicken-soaked grease of a shift spent working at Chick-Fil-A, but I’ve hit a plot snag. My character’s stuck in Boston, I’m stuck on page 78, and I need to figure out how to get us both out before I’ll let myself shower and go to bed. If I had been thinking rationally, I might have wondered what I was doing. All I knew at that moment, however, was that I was consumed with a then-70-something-page screenplay that had stretched my imagination and creative ingenuity to the limits for the past few weeks.

Over the past several years, I had often casually mentioned to my family and friends that I might want to write movies someday. Their responses were similar and disempowering: I should spend my summers working at a “real” job and focus my spare time on something more ordinary. I probably wouldn’t be able to get past page five anyway, they said.

Yet plots kept creeping up on me. Ideas, characters, and images consumed my dormant mind, teasing my imagination as I bagged drive-thru orders of breaded chicken. As these ideas slowly evolved into stories, I realized that I didn’t just want to write -- I had to. Thus, a few days into the summer, I began writing. From the time my evening shift ended into the early hours of the next morning, I wrote in secret, pensively at first but always passionately. I lived to find intricacies in relationships that didn’t yet exist, to wrap my mind around a new character and find the soul in a scene. My imaginary settings existed independently and unknown to the rest of the world, but they were still vibrant, active, real. Late in July, as I began to wrap up my script’s loose ends with only one scene to go, I realized a fantastic truth: I had not only written a movie, but I had also discovered a passion.

The surprise on the faces of my friends and family when the freshly printed and bound script hit the table in front of them brought a smile to mine. The fact that I had written a script -- that I had actually completed a feat that most merely aspire to -- changed their attitudes toward my passion for writing. Immediately, their doubt shifted into support, and the next few weeks were a tizzy of queries, rejections, and editing suggestions: a harsh baptism into the world of cinema. I’m still searching for that first lucky break; my script may never find a home, or it may hit screens sooner than anyone would have ever guessed. To me, however, it doesn’t matter. I didn’t write a movie to prove anything, to get rich, or to satisfy my friends and family. I wrote it for the plot and for the characters. I wrote it for the joy I felt in each crafted scene. I wrote, and will continue to write, for the love of the script.

**Service and Learning Jonathan Lee Hopkins**

**Tell us how the integration of faith and learning can prepare you for a life of service, and discuss the impact service-learning can have on the renewal of your mind, spirit, and community.**

There are undoubtedly many essays that offer similar elaborations on an identical thesis: that the integration of faith and learning always prepares one for a life of service, and that service-learning has a positive influence on the mind, spirit, and community, improving them without exception.

Here’s a different take. Hebrews 11:1 describes faith as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” While these words are true, it is important to note that they are not limited to a faith in God. Consider Napoleon Bonaparte, for example. Napoleon was easily one of history’s most learned military tacticians. His intensive study of artillery gained him the position required to usurp an entire system of government. Still, it took more than knowledge to become an emperor. It was his faith in his perceived immortality that spurred his rise to power. This faith was irrational and fueled by nothing more than arrogance and blind luck. Because he drove recklessly into battle and came out unscathed time and again, he came to believe that he was invincible. Napoleon is a near-perfect example of the integration of faith and learning. Without it, he would have lacked the domineering presence and mindset required to slaughter six million Europeans in battle and rule a recovering French empire for eleven years.

Napoleon’s career is therefore a great example of how an integration of faith and learning does not always prepare one for a life of service. Napoleon did not serve: he was an atheist, and France suffered for many years after his fall. Similarly, a childlike faith can be cheapened when combined with “adult” learning. Often, to learn is to become fluent in the language of skepticism. And while learning is certainly important, academia’s frequent attempts to separate perceived reality from “myth” often lump a faith in God into the latter category. To a “learned” man, service might not make sense. To serve is to unlearn many of the lessons that society implicitly teaches: that men with money and power are the best, that service is nothing more than a burden, and that no one should ever humble himself. Service calls one to put aside worldly teachings and take action based on the illogical rather than the conventional.

Luckily, true learning is not restricted to academic skepticism. An old adage states that experience is the best teacher, and the lessons gained from a life of service reflect that sentiment. When one serves, he or she learns to reject convention and accept a faithful, dedicated role of humility in any situation. Service-learning’s impact on a community’s renewal is often obvious and seen through outward growth and development. Its impact on the mind and spirit, though less obvious, is even more prevalent. Service is a lesson in the right type of faith, and a faithful man, dedicated to the studies only service can teach, is in many ways richer than an emperor could ever be.

**Becoming a Model Anonymous**

**A Learning experience that changed me.**

It wasn’t my first audition, yet as I looked into the intimidating mirror, I needed to reassure myself: "You are Beyonce." I gasped for oxygen as I entered the dimly lit room, attempting to calm the fire in my stomach, but listening to other contestants croak one pop song after another didn’t help my nervousness.

Finally the judge called, "Next.” Composing myself, I began my rendition of Beyonce's “Listen.” As I belted out the complicated riff at the climax, I knew I hit every note just as I’d practiced. As I finished, the corners of the judge’s mouth rose and he handed me a paper. "Good rendition of the song. Welcome to Dream Entertainment."

I left, screaming with joy, mistakenly thinking I had achieved my dream of becoming a model and singer. But soon I came to realize that I had merely begun a thorny and exhausting climb towards an even higher ambition. In order for the company to invest in me, I would need to market myself and prove that I could outshine my competitors.

To push my limits, I attended additional training sessions beyond what was required. I took posture classes to walk in seven-inch heels, vocal lessons to enhance my tone, dance classes to improve my rhythm, and language classes to appeal to an international clientele. Through the assiduous training, I developed a new level of commitment, perseverance, and passion, learning to present myself as a well-rounded professional.

Recently, I was one of ten models who competed for a swimwear commercial that was essential for my career. We were photographed jumping off a 10-foot waterfall into a freezing pool of water. As the other models layered on makeup to enhance their beauty during the underwater shots, I learned from prior mistakes and concentrated on modeling the product. I wore minimal makeup to enhance the natural beauty around me and the versatility of the product. The director demanded multiple angles and expressed dissatisfaction with many of the pictures. As the other models grew frustrated, I remained optimistic during every retake until the director was pleased. Ultimately, the director chose me for my ability to make the product shine.

Since then, I’ve successfully applied the lessons from that professional modeling experience to other aspects of my life: professional networking, academic pursuits, and career. During my business internship, whenever the manager asked me to work extra hours or work outside of my responsibilities, I embraced it as a valuable professional experience. While dealing with unhappy customers, I adapted to deal with dissatisfaction. Ultimately, my manager gave me a permanent sales position and a detailed letter of recommendation.

Starting my modeling career at a young age, I had serious doubts as to whether I would last. But following my dreams, I’ve gained greater insights into business, learning that hard work and determination leads to satisfactory results. As a student, I intend to put the same positive dedication into my academic endeavors.

**4'11 Forever 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.**

When my mom gave birth to me, I weighed in at nine and a half pounds and measured twenty-two inches. One could say I was pretty big for a newborn, but whenever I tell this story, it is soon followed by a: “And that’s pretty much when I stopped growing.” Ever since I can remember, and up until the eleventh grade, I had always been the shortest guy in my class. The problem with this, coupled with the fact that I’m a guy, is that people usually only respect people who look “scary,” i.e., tall and big people. And I mean, who was I going to scare at 4’11?.

Ever since I started school I have had to compensate for my height to get people not to take advantage of me. For example, when I arrived in my current school, I decided to try out for the tennis team, which had just won the championship the year before. When I went to the try-outs, the other kids from my class taunted me because they thought that my height made me weak and a bad player. However, they were very wrong; I made the team and we won the championship that year. This is the compensation I am talking about, and it is the reason why I believe I am who I am today.

I entered my current high school in the seventh grade. I was a small kid and knew about 10 kids from my class, which is a small amount considering we were 150 back then. However, even though I knew no one, I ran for class president that same year. Thanks to my personality and some campaigning from my 10 friends, my class elected me president. That was the day I realized that it didn’t matter how tall I was as long as I proved I deserved respect. From that day forward, my “struggle” (because we teenagers exaggerate everything) with height has given me the character and dignity with which I portray myself every day.

I still find it ironic, however, that everyone from my class, even the ones that I’ve physically outgrown, still call me “enano,” which is Spanish for midget. At first, I didn’t understand. I mean, I knew I wasn’t that tall but I was now average, so why were they still taunting me? It was some time later that I realized that they weren’t taunting me; they just remember me as the short guy who didn’t care that he was short when he arrived in school. Now that I am taller, I think to myself: why should I care now? So I embrace the irony and laugh at it, and at the end of the day, the fact that you can laugh at yourself is a great indication of self-confidence, which is what we teenagers strive for during our time in school.