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**Sample essays 2017**

**UIUC**

**Piano Lessons Nicole DiPaolo**

**What is your single most important extracurricular/volunteer activity and why?**

I have always considered my self-employment as a private piano teacher to be my single greatest contribution, not only to my students but to myself. I began giving lessons as a freshman, after several family friends expressed interest in having their children study with me. I admittedly did not know much about what I was getting into - but since I loved music, and I loved these kids, I decided that I would begin to teach them.

As my students - three at first, then four, then five - began to grow and progress musically, I found that my own musical progress was also flourishing. The concepts which I was instilling in these children were also being enforced in my mind. When I played short pieces for my students and challenged them to describe the moods and emotions they elicited, I found myself similarly challenged to reflect on the composer's intentions through choice of key, tempo, phrasing, and dynamics. As each student climbed up on the bench and stared in wonder at the inner workings of my piano, I was reminded to take into account the mechanics of the piano sound and use them to my advantage while playing. As my budding music readers scanned the pages of Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata looking for notes marked with sharps and flats, I remembered that it is never too early to familiarize oneself with the great works of musical literature - then it will be much less overwhelming when it comes time to study them in-depth. And as I saw the joy of playing music shining in their eyes and in their performances, I knew why I had begun to study music in the first place. I had to share this joy with anyone and everyone who would accept it. For these reasons - and many more - I will always consider my position as a piano teacher my most important and cherished activity.

**Signora Bernardo Anonymous**

**Tell us about someone (a teacher, parent or friend) who has made a difference in your life, and in what way.**

As a teenage girl with hyperlexia - a communications disorder that causes some social problems - my life has had its share of interesting challenges. Although my disorder is not nearly as severe as it was during my childhood, it has left some residual consequences which can be detected by the trained eye. In one recent situation, that trained eye was my wonderful Italian teacher, Mrs. Bernardo. Through Mrs. Bernardo's continued encouragement and her caring, sensitive heart, I have transformed as a person and have become better able to face difficulties in my life.

My relationship with Mrs. Bernardo began when I first entered her Italian 1 classroom. I was extremely excited to take her class - being of partly Italian heritage gave me an appreciation for the language and the motivation to master it. This enthusiasm carried over to the classroom, where I was always eager to learn, speak the language, and help others in the classroom. Unfortunately, I wasn't noticing that I was beginning to take over the classroom with my chatter, and it was annoying some of my classmates. I was fairly oblivious to this, because hyperlexia often causes those who have it to miss social cues such as annoyance or boredom. I carried on in this manner for about half the year, thinking that I was the star of the class and that my classmates and Mrs. Bernardo all loved me. I was soon going to find out that Mrs. Bernardo did indeed love me - more than I could ever imagine.

One afternoon in the middle of the year, I entered my classroom as usual. The day was fairly typical, but when the bell rang, Mrs. Bernardo motioned for me to come over. She slipped me an envelope, saying, "Potete leggerla nella casa," or "you can read it at home." At first I thought it was some sort of scholarship opportunity or something she didn't want leaked to the rest of the class. I dutifully waited until I came home to read it, all the while wondering what it was. When I opened it, I was somewhat surprised to find a long, typed letter, entirely in Italian. I began to read it. The first paragraph consisted of a long, drawn out apology for not writing the letter earlier. I furrowed my brow, bewildered, but I kept on reading. She then began to tell me, bluntly but lovingly, of her observations in the classroom - everything from my excessive chatter to the fact that I tended to monopolize the classroom by answering every question - and that it was beginning to annoy the other students. She assured me that she loved me and wanted to help me in any way possible. By the end of the letter, I felt as if I had been punched in the stomach. But at that moment, I knew I had to tell her everything. With tears in my eyes, I poured my heart out to Mrs. Bernardo in a long letter in halting Italian. I e-mailed it to her, and I soon received a reply. Mrs. Bernardo thanked me for the letter and said that it helped her understand me much more deeply. She also offered to help me work on my behavior not just in the classroom but in general. For a long while I just sat there - I had no idea just how compassionate and caring Mrs. Bernardo really was.

Through Mrs. Bernardo's gentle, loving spirit, I have been inspired to look into myself and monitor myself more closely, which has made a positive difference in my life as a whole. In Mrs. Bernardo I have also gained a lifelong friend, confidante, and "Italian buddy." My only wish to others is that every hyperlexic teenager - or every teenager in general - has their own "Mrs. Bernardo."

**Elizabeth Nicole DiPaolo**

**Write about a problem of local, national or international concern, and what you would do to solve it.**

A petite young woman sits in the obstetrician's office, her four-year-old daughter in her lap. The little girl is restless yet unable to extricate herself from her mother's arms due to cerebral palsy. Both mother and daughter wear worried expressions, anxiously waiting for the doctor to return with the results of last week's tests. The young woman, Sandra, is four months pregnant with her second child. Because her daughter, Michaela, was born with physical and developmental problems, Sandra wants to treat her unborn baby with the utmost care and make sure that he or she is not also affected. She is lost in thought when the doctor's presence suddenly snaps her back to reality. "Sandra," he begins.

"Yes, doctor?" The worry in Sandra's voice is palpable, her brown eyes as large as saucers.

"I'm afraid the prognosis for your second child is very grim. It appears that the fetus does not have an esophagus. When the baby is born, it will not be able to feed and will die very quickly. I would strongly advise terminating this pregnancy."

Sandra is numb. She leaves the office, Michaela in tow, unable to discern anything or anyone around her. She knows that her baby is going to die, but she cannot come to terms with that reality. Somehow, somewhere, however, a thread of hope remains for Sandra. That thread of hope, which she cannot explain, eventually stops her from following her doctor's orders of ending the life of the child who was doomed to die anyway.

That child - the baby who was doomed to die - was born on February 20, 1986. Her name is Elizabeth Marie Miner, and today she is one of my best friends. She is perfectly healthy, delightfully intelligent, and beautiful - so beautiful, in fact, that she has been a model for several years. Her life was almost cut short before it had a chance to begin, all because of one doctor's erroneous testing and even more erroneous view that the human child is disposable so long as he or she has not yet been born. Many of my friends were just as close to falling victim to such doctors as Elizabeth was - but unfortunately, not every story ends as happily as hers. Because of this fact - and my many personal experiences with those who almost lost their lives to pregnancy termination - I am a strong opponent of abortion.

Many proponents of abortion will ask, "What would you say to teenage mothers or women unable to support a child?" I firmly believe that adoption is the answer. In addition to my experiences with nearly-aborted babies, I have developed close friendships with many people who are adopted. These men and women could easily have been aborted, but their parents chose to give them a chance at a good life they could not have received with their birth families. So many couples ache for the chance to hold a child in their arms, yet they cannot conceive naturally. For these parents, an adopted baby is the greatest gift they could receive. If the choice of adoption were more widely marketed to mothers unable to support their unborn children, the death toll caused by abortion would be decimated. Since 1973, more than 39 million children have been denied their chance to live outside the womb. We will never know how those children could have lived in adoptive homes, how they could have grown up, or how they could have contributed to society. Through the promotion of adoption, however, we could get the chance to see how scores of valuable children can grow and blossom when given a chance at life.

**My Room Anonymous**

**Personal Statement (500-800 words). The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign values excellence, inclusion, and service. We expect students at Illinois to embrace these values as described below: Academic excellence and intellectual adventure, cultural diversity, service.**

It was 11:30 on a chilly Thursday night, and I was taking a brief stroll through my neighborhood. My mind swarmed with overwhelming thoughts concerning school, parents, and most of all, the college application. I had been tirelessly trying to 'find myself' over the past few months, but to no avail. As I continued walking through the quiet streets, I knew that I only had generic descriptions of myself, descriptions only worthy enough to put in a shabby singles ad. Chuckling at my exasperation, I turned the corner and suddenly found myself staring at the rear end of my house. I was standing on the sidewalk, viewing my house from a distance, and my eyes lingered on the only room in the house that was lit up: my study room. In the darkness of the night, my room looked like a welcoming haven and it felt so personal; so me. In that spark of rationale, I realized that I did not necessarily have to look within to 'find myself', but rather, a momentary glimpse into my room revealed the hidden treasures about myself that I had been looking for all along.

Gazing into my room, the first thing that caught my attention was the vast array of cutout art pictures that dotted the walls. Ranging from a self-portrait of Frida Kahlo to a Renaissance painting, my love of the aesthetic shone on my study room walls. I have always had a deep interest in art and history, and these pictures on the wall look down on me everyday, as a simple reminder of my appreciation for their beauty. Looking at these pictures, I realized that my passion for art also extends into the music world. My study room has been the location for countless hours of violin practice, and in this room I have developed my love for music. Whether it is classical, country, or rock, I am fascinated by all types of music, and it is music that helps me express my emotions. My study room also has an immense bookcase along the wall, in which it holds all of my favorite books. Since I was a child, I have always read fervently, and I was the model child for reading under the bedcovers with a flashlight. Looking at my artistic belongings, I now realize that my fascination with the arts has shaped me into who I am.

Besides being a creative outlet for me, my study room also reveals my passion for volunteering. Since I am the treasurer of our school's volunteer club, Key Club, many of my awards for community service line the walls of my study room. When I think of volunteering, I don't think of doing an unpaid service, but rather, I see volunteering as an extraordinary chance for me to interact and help out the community and the world. For me, volunteering is like indulging in a slice of double-chocolate cake; I get such a satisfied feeling from it, even after I've finished the last crumb. Volunteering my time with others is truly one of my most valued devotions, and I cherish every moment that I volunteer.

One possession that catches my eye in the study room is a jade necklace hanging from my music stand. It does not grab my attention because it is glittery, but rather it truly represents my rich Chinese heritage. The most fascinating part of growing up in a diverse household is the fact that I am exposed to two worlds everyday. Because I have grown up in such an embracing family, I also have an insatiable interest for all cultures of the world. Whether it is eating Indian food with my father or attending a Greek concert, I love exploring the wealth of knowledge that this world has to offer.

One of the most important aspects of my study room is that it houses all of my awards and trophies. Even though these awards in academics and sports are only mere pieces of paper, I value them in the sense that they represent my personal achievements and leadership. Throughout the school years, I have taken the most challenging courses that are offered, and my current Advanced Placement classes represent the climax of my academic success. Although I have braved through AP U.S History and Honors Physics, I not only value the material I have learned, but the learning process that goes along with it. My experience tells me that the best path towards academic victory is an infinite amount of self-will and perseverance (I also recommend large doses of coffee). Thus, I am very perceptive of my ability to achieve, and I know this will guide me in my transition from a splendid high school student to the proudest college student at the University of Illinois.

**What Makes This Black Guy Himself?Robert Marshawn Walker**

**Each year, the University attempts to admit a student class with diverse backgrounds to bring diversity to the University campus. In an essay of no more than 300 words, tell us why you would be a fine addition to the diverse nature of students and faculty on campus.**

I defy odds. From birth, doctors predicted bad things for me based on my environment, including that I would not be intelligent, because I lacked proper motor skills and speech proficiency. Today, I have defied those odds, because my mother didn't believe their assumptions, and I didn't believe them either. She pushed me to transcend all expectations, and has always supported me.

I am an intellectual, because I engage in rational and creative thought and I am a driven scholar. I get assignments done early at the library everyday. I employ critical thinking for my assignments. I assist my classmates with problem solving and memorization. I can derive a conclusion from a variety of choices and approaches. I use my ever-expanding imagination to complete projects and constructive work at school and church.

My parents call me the "Strangest Teenager in America," since I don't talk to people a lot, don't listen to music, and I'm a black person that dislikes hot sauce. I have been more creative and comfortable in my home than outside since childhood, and I participate actively and efficiently within my house along with the rest of my family.

I'm very talented at art; I have an aptitude for drawing and painting settings and living things. I've had exhibitions at art shows, and sold my art to people. One person said that I have "the mind of a mathematician, and the soul of an artist," and I am self-taught. I know how to blend colors together to appeal to human taste. I want to be as influential a studio artist as Stan Lee and Matt Groening are today. People know me as a shy individual, lackadaisical towards politics, music, but I'm also a person with an easily triggered, explosive imagination.

**Hidden Interests Anonymous**

**In an essay of about 300 words, tell us more about yourself, describing interests and accomplishments which are not indicated elsewhere on this application.**

The question was "1. Having a diverse and exciting community of students is an important component in determining a great university. How can I contribute to that population?"

As I sat at my desk pondering this question, I grabbed my 7-year-old Easter bunny pouch and took out a tiny strawberry-shaped eraser to wipe out an awful idea from my outline. Looking at the eraser, I realized that I had received it in a goody bag from a 5th grade birthday party. It suddenly dawned upon me that I have a unique subconscious interest in garbage collecting.

Don't get me wrong, I am not a trash lover. Seldom will anyone see me rummaging over trash cans the night before garbage pickup. Rather, I just can't seem to throw anything away. The Easter pouch that once held colorful chocolate eggs is still sitting on my desk, now containing an assortment of erasers. Intermingled with all my stylish necklaces and bracelets are old worn out Barbie lockets. There is even a large cardboard box in my closet that houses hundreds of my "one day these will be worth a fortune" beanie babies.

Not everything I keep is trivial though. I have a nice pouch of pins that I collected from my summer at the National Student Leadership Conference in Chicago. My favorites are the pins from the Chicago Board of Trade and the Federal Reserve Building. A haphazardly painted paper plate mask hangs on my wall, a remembrance of my times volunteering as a children's art teacher. Ribbons of all shapes and sizes flow down my wall, representing anywhere from wins at badminton tournaments to piano competitions to old spelling bees.

My parents especially dislike my interest in collecting. Every now and then they complain to me that my junk is exponentially increasing since I never throw any of it away. They don't seem mollified by my explanation that I am merely building memories. The entire top drawer of my night stand is a large box containing all my movie and ticket stubs since middle school. Whenever I add to my collection, I often look through the others and reminisce on the good times of the past. Who would've thought that I watched Spice World four times?

There is a story behind every piece of "junk" that I keep. Today, I can still remember my best friend and I fighting over who found the cute strawberry eraser from the goody bag first. Saving up memories has been an interest of mine for years. I hope to add a lot more to my collection at the University of Illinois.

**From Drought to Genetics, A Lifetime of PlantsAnonymous**

**Why do I belong at the University of Illinois?**

In 1988, drought was the main concern in my small southern Illinois town. My parents’ only blessing that year was the birth of a baby girl amidst the withering crops. What no one knew then was that the current drought crisis would ultimately influence the career that baby – me – would eventually choose.

Growing up in a rural community has been a tremendous experience. Since I was the closest thing to a boy my father had, I was the one to help him on the farm. We bonded over farming; it taught me perseverence and a positive attitude that went beyond the farm into schoolwork and social interactions.

Farm life also inspired my love for plants. For as long as I can remember, plants have amazed me. As a child I liked to cut the stems of my grandmother’s flowers in half to see what was hidden inside. The sight and smell of corn growing and pollinating are some of my favorite memories, and continue to enthrall me now. My strong interest in both plants and biology makes me certain that I want to be a geneticist.

I plan to attend the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign because of its esteemed reputation in the agricultural field. My hope is to earn a doctoral degree at the University of Illinois and then work for a leading agricultural company such as Monsanto, where I could immediately apply my education and help eliminate world hunger and crop disasters.

I know that without a rural childhood, including the drought that surrounded my entry into the world, I would not have the enthusiasm or commitment needed to make the most of the University of Illinois’s opportunities in agricultural education. In between childhood on a farm and an adult life as a geneticist, the University of Illinois is where I belong.

**If You Want the Rainbow Anonymous**

**If you were to choose or create a quote or saying that defined you, what would it be and why?**

It seemed as if it was just yesterday when I anxiously fidgeted around in the airplane seat, awaiting unexpected surprises in my new home. This, however, was ten years ago when I emigrated from China to the United States. My parents had warned me that it would be a drastic change; but when one is at the naïve age of six, change hardly means more than a brand new place to play in. Leaving behind years of comfort and memories, I found myself arriving in not only a new location but adapting to a new lifestyle as well.

At first, America turned out to be quite different than I had imagined it to be, mainly because of my language barrier. While other children enjoyed their carefree years in elementary school, I dreaded science and history classes since the new English terms were unfamiliar to me. Every night my parents and I would decrypt both these lectures and homework assignments in hopes of helping me catch up to the other students. I distinctly remember one afternoon when I had gotten an assignment from third grade English class; the instructions were to create a sentence using the word “green.” Although the task was simple, it caused distress among my parents and me.

With time, the handicap that forced me to hurdle many hindrances soon became an advantage; being fluent in both Mandarin and English opened up many doors and it would be foolish to say all that hardship failed to pay off. As Dolly Parton once said, “The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain.”

**Aspirations Anonymous**

**In an essay of about 300 words, tell us more about your professional and intellectual aspirations and prior personal experiences relevant to your choice of a specific college or academic program at the University of Illinois.**

When I was around nine years old, I would always sit at the dinner table with my mom, waiting for my dad to come home from a busy day at work. After changing out of his suit, he would come to the kitchen and start to talk about his day. The way my dad described it, work always seemed to be a fascinating experience, especially since it was under the leadership of Thomas Siebel. Mr. Siebel, a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, was the founder and chief executive officer of Siebel Systems Inc., one of the world’s leading software companies. Soon enough, I had heard so much about Mr. Siebel that it seemed as if I knew him myself. The more I was exposed to such a successful influence, the more I became interested in the management field.

During the beginning of this summer as I was putting together my college list, I recalled the college I had heard so much about during my childhood, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; I jotted it down on the list for a more thorough analysis later on. Little did I know, this university was one that would match my interests most perfectly. Its College of Business in particular not only emphasized academic and analytic skills, but interpersonal and practical business skills as well. In a business world as competitive as today’s, it is of great importance that after graduating with a degree, one should be well rounded in all areas, not just academically. An employee with such interpersonal skills could benefit both herself and her company; and it is the objective of the College of Business at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign that their graduates possess such qualities.

**There's No Business Like Show Business Anonymous**

**Choose one extracurricular activity, work experience, or community service project from the list you provided on the application and explain why you initially chose it, why you continued with it, and how you have benefited from it.**

Electrifying bursts of energy flow through my veins as the excitement builds up just minutes before opening night. The lights flicker and the audience goes silent. The curtains slowly glide open as I set foot on the stage. The lights turn on and illuminate the faces of the actors as the music begins playing. A rush of exhilaration spreads through my body as I temporarily become my character.

I was drawn to the theatre when I realized that playing the roles of different characters improves my communication skills since I have to be able to read the nonverbal clues of other actors onstage. It also forces me to concentrate on what is happening onstage and react to it through my character.

Yet, the use of imagination is not the only thing that drew me into the theatre. It was also the incredible people that I came to know through these shows, some of whom are now my best friends. They always think outside the box and can have fun in any situation. There is never a dull moment when I am with them since they always have creative new ideas to keep us busy. The Oak Lawn Park District stage is like a second home to me. It is where I grew up and where I spent numerous years of my life. Of all the different groups of people from all the shows I’ve done, every single cast feels like family to me.

The curtains are drawn as the audience stands and breaks into thunderous applause. I bow and take in the last sensational feelings of being under the lights. Theatre, like life, has shown me how working with others, taking direction, working hard, and making corrections along the way pay off in the final production.

**Creativity Anonymous**

**Discuss your academic interests and/or your professional goals.**

My room is a reflection of me. From the moment you step inside, my organizational skills and creativity are apparent. My walls are covered with pictures and magazine cutouts, but they’re not just put there in any random way. My arrangements are creatively grouped by subject matter and themes. You will find the same to be true if you open my closet. It is color coordinated and grouped by type. I would like to apply my creativity and my organizational skills to my career and use them to help others.

Being organized helps me to maintain order in my daily academic life. I prioritize my assignments and exhibit exceptional study habits. Taking precise notes and keeping them organized develops these good study habits, which allows me to be prepared for tests. The results of these skills are reflected in my average GPA of 3.7.

My goal as a professional would be a career that would allow my creativity to benefit others. Careers in human resources, charitable organizations, or health management fields are some areas where I could use my skills to accomplish this goal. When I volunteered at Ronald McDonald House, I was able to see firsthand how organizations like this work, and it piqued my interest in pursuing this as a career. My creativity and organizational skills can also be used for planning events and activities for major corporations. I have always been the coordinator and planner of events within my group of friends and would like to bring that aspect of my life into my career.

My room clearly portrays how my creativity and organizational skills can help me to see the big picture in any endeavor I undertake. I look forward to a rewarding career helping others. I hope to bring my skills and what I have learned through my life experiences into my future.

**I Love Teeth Anonymous**

**In an essay of 300 words or less, please discuss your academic interests and/or professional goals.**

A strong collective scent of generic medicine, hints of mint, and latex gloves permeate the orthodontic dental office, exciting me as I enter the place. I take a seat in the waiting room and impatiently wait for my name to be called. While waiting, I become engrossed in this amazing place. The variety of different teeth shapes, from the round and soft edged, to the pointed, and rough edged, fascinate me. The miraculous transformation of disordered, jagged teeth to ones so perfectly aligned, displayed in the illusive “before and after” posters, is magical. The sounds of the dialogue between the doctor and assistants, and the sharp noise of the drills and beeping equipment sounds, intensify the thrill and vivacity of this place. Above all, the smiles on the faces of patients, with and without braces, give me joy and delight. Undoubtedly, my passion resides within this place. I dream to be an orthodontist who can help create and bring a million more beautiful smiles into this world.

My professional goal to be an orthodontist started with my academic interest in school. Since elementary, I have always enjoyed taking math and science classes. I joined many activities and programs, such as Math Olympiad, Math Counts, and the annual science fairs. My interest towards these fields continued to grow, evident in my solid grades in those classes. Therefore, I plan to continue my path by majoring in biology along with other science and math courses in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where vast opportunities are offered with excellent pre-professional programs and a rich education that will guide me to my dream dental school.

**The Visit Anonymous**

**In no more than 300 words, tell us something about yourself that isn't covered elsewhere in this application, some interest or experience of yours that you think the University of Illinois should know about as part of the admissions review.**

When deciding where to go to college, most students do not know which school is the perfect one for them. But for me, this is not the case. I know that the University of Illinois is the ideal choice for me. I know it is perfect because of the great experiences I have had there while visiting my brother, who is currently a senior at the university.

The first time I visited, I immediately fell in love with Illinois. I was with my parents four years ago to see my brother. The rural-urban campus instantly attracted me. It is secluded enough that it is not overly congested like Chicago, yet there is plenty of city life to offer many great restaurants and things to do within walking distance. My love only grew after going to my first of many Illini football games. The amount of school spirit was energizing. It made me want to become a part of that amazing sea of orange when it was time for me to move on from high school to college. The high level of all the athletics at the University is a huge bonus. I can picture myself watching the vast selection of Division I sports after long days of class and studying. I even plan on participating on an intramural team.

I hope to join a long legacy of family members who are graduates of the University of Illinois. My grandpa, aunts, and uncles are all proud Illini alumni, and my brother will be joining them soon. I have worked very hard for the chance to make that same claim. It is my dream to go to the Illini football season opener next fall, but this time as a member of that sea of orange in the stunning student section!

**Not Your Average Jock Anonymous**

**What event in your life helps describe qualities that others may not know?**

Out of breath, I settle down in my three point stance. Everyone on the line is pointing and yelling to say who they are blocking. On the snap of the ball I exert all my energy to push the other opponent into the ground. While football may seem like an extremely physical game, the mental aspect may exceed the physical need. Every player in every position needs to know where they are lining up and who to block for the play to go exactly right, then whoever is more physical wins. This showing of mental capacity also shows my versatility in the classroom as I manage 3 AP classes and one honors class.

Playing on a small team requires me to know basically every position on the offensive and defensive line, each position requiring a different skill set. This has taught me how to be versatile in my education as I matured. My first class is physics honors, which uses math concepts to prove the physical world. I must turn the intensity up on my math and problem solving skills as I dive into my AP B/C Calculus class. I relate this on the football field as going from kickoff into the first offensive play. You must be extremely mentally tough on offense while still out playing the other opponent, probably the hardest part of the game.

The switch from offense to defense can also be linked to my switch from AP Calculus to AP Literature. These two subjects have almost nothing in common, requiring me to use another part of my brain. On the football field, offense and defense are not polar opposites, they are as close as it’s going to get. I must switch gears back to offense as I go to my AP Calc homeroom. Halftime, I get my lunch as I am able to cool my brain down. The kickoff to the second half begins as I go to my Theology class where I get to turn my brain back on and stimulate my brain thinking about the teachings of the Catholic Church. This class really questions your brain and brings up a lot of discussions. The final stretch of the day ends with a double period of AP Biology, a class that brings back many memories of my AP Chemistry class and requires a lot of memorization. A victory bell rings as I make my way out to the football field.

My football career has brought up many achievements with All-Conference, All-County, All-Area, and All-Region recognitions on the offensive line. I have also made All-Conference for defense. These awards show my versatility on the football field, and I have awards to show it in the classroom with not only a high 3.84 unweighted GPA, but also a well rounded resume with many AP and honor classes. Most classify jocks with being very irresponsible in the classroom, but this “jock” can’t even imagine about letting his grades slip.

**Extra! Extra! Read All About It! Anonymous**

**Explain your interest in the major you selected. Describe an experience related to that area of study, what first introduced you to this field, and/or your future career goals. Limit your response to 300-400 words.**

“You save BIG money, you save BIG money, you save BIG money at Menards!”

The songs that I sang as a child were never the opening themes of Clifford or Arthur. Instead, I would sing the jingles of the commercials I saw on television: Luna, State Farm, or Empire Today. They were simple, catchy, and easy to remember, advertisements that had caught my attention. I could hardly ignore them.

One day, I was absentmindedly scrolling through my Facebook News Feed, skimming over status posts and profile updates, when an automatically played video suddenly emerged. It was the latest Pantene commercial, featuring Selena Gomez. Expanding the video to full screen, I admired the way Selena whipped her full luscious hair, landing her locks on her shoulders with a natural bounce. My focus was entirely on the format, starting with the white and gold theme, the slow motion, the contrast of Selena’s dark chocolate hair against the milky white background, the intriguing aerial view of Selena on top of a large blow dryer emphasizing the hair’s endurance against strong heat, up to the abstract, kaleidoscope view of the brand name as the finishing touch to the commercial. Although the video was a mere thirty seconds, it still contained an overload of detail. I realized that, despite the limited time or space given, the most concise advertisements can impact their viewers with colors, words, and pictures. It was a form of communication through art. Now, *that* is a language I understand.

Advertisements are quite persistent on television, magazines, billboards, radio, and the Internet. In short, people may find them annoying. However, I find their persuasive power compelling in the way they ignite desires, causing people to think: *I want that.* The format in which the advertisement presents itself and how it convinces customers are too eye-catching for me to overlook. So, when people ask me, “Did you watch the SuperBowl?” I could only tell them that I did not, for I have little interest in the actual game. When asked, “Which SuperBowl commercial was your favorite this year?” I easily reply, “Doritos: Middle Seat.”

**Dreams Sanjiv Prabhunandan**

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

It’s 3:16 A.M.

My eyes are bloodshot from sleeplessness; I stumble into my room and crash my head against the soft, plush pillow laying on my bed. I pull the blanket over my head and close my eyes, trying desperately to get some sleep before the sun rises. In the fleeting moments before I pass into deep slumber, my mind is finally free to wander after an arduous day filled with school and work. My thoughts stream in a blurring sequence of images, each of which help me recall what I learned and experienced in the day. My mind races between the Lakers injury report I saw on ESPN at the breakfast table to the article I read on my iPhone about the future of nanotechnology between classes. My mind then flashes to the Socratic Seminar I presided over as President of my school debate team and then to new piece I learned from my Tabla guru. Combining that with the unfamiliar faces at school, the new Drake song on the radio, and the universal grumble about college application essays I hear in the hallways leads to an unimaginable volume of sensory input that the human brain has to process, sort, and hierarchize every single day. This self-improving organ, which enables us to make sense of this world and has allowed us to go the moon and back, is truly the most amazing aspect of the human experience. It is my fascination with the human brain that keeps me up at night. Although the human race has successfully mapped everything from the crystalline structure of a diamond to the arrangement of stars in our galaxy, we are still in the preliminary stages of understanding the developmental anatomy of the human brain. The next great frontier for human discovery is right within us; it is my mission to unlock the brain’s secret mechanisms, and discover the clues that will provide breakthroughs in implementing prosthetics, treating mental illness, and curing disease.

3:35 A.M

My thoughts flash to being in the emergency room and seeing my grandmother in the initial hours after suffering a catastrophic stroke. At that moment, my fascination of the brain was more of terror, and it was heartbreaking that she could not recognize the ones she spent a lifetime raising. In the hospital ward I had prayed for many things, but mostly that I could do something to help her. I was too late, but out of the grief of her death rose the inspiration to learn more about the organ that caused her demise.

4:08 A.M

As a contributor to KQED’s #DoNow program, I was able to write articles about the brain that science teachers in the Bay Area used in their curriculum. In the passionate debates our writing team had about the ethics of brain implants and the merits of psychosurgery, I came to realize the power of the brain’s perception: the profound emotions we experience are really nothing but electrical signals in the hippocampus.

4:17 A.M

My mind always returns to a place of unbounded optimism and fascination about the prospects of a future where we’ll be able to harness all the power that the brain has to offer. It amazes me that there are currently thousands solving humanity’s greatest challenges, and I can’t wait to join their ranks. On late nights when my mind is restless, this sense of assurance lulls me to sleep, and the promise of a new day always leaves me excited to wake up and chase my dreams.