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**Sample essays 2017**

**University of Washington**

# The Insurmountable Slice William Gibbs

## The Honors staff's sentiments about food are nicely summed up by Monty Python's Michael Palin: "All I ask of food is that it doesn't harm me." Compose an essay about the worst meal of your life. We are interested in the details of your experience, including where this meal took place, why you were there, who was with you, and how you dealt with it.

I consider myself a food enthusiast. That is, I love food in all of its aspects; the obvious nutiritional significance, the delightful variations in flavor and texture, the cultural connections, and sometimes even the visual beauty of it. One may be hard-pressed to present to me a dish that I can not appreciate in one way or another. Due to this, I find it nearly impossible to recall an entire meal that could honestly be considered my "worst." Rather, I will speak of a single foodly entity, a slice of cheese - one which revealed to me the darker side of humanity.

It was a cool Saturday, sometime during April or May if I recall correctly. I had slept in late that day, resolving no earlier than noon that I should roll out of bed and get something done. Assessing the to-do list, I found that a visit to my grandparents' house was in order. It was to be a typical trip: I would chat with them about family goings-on, empathize with their complaints or opinions on this and that, munch on cookies or pretzels, then leave. Easy enough, I had done it a thousand times before.

As I made my way to their house, I noticed that the sky was becoming increasingly dark. Life seemed to have been frozen then: no animals frolicking alongside the road, no fellow motorists ahead or behind, the instrumentation in my car seemed even to slow in its various intervals. I cautiously pulled into the driveway and hurried to the door, knowing that something was bound to go horribly wrong. The moment I came into the sight of my grandparents, my grandfather jumped up out of his chair with more excitement than I had ever seen in a man. He proudly brought from the kitchen a large decorative box marked on the side with the words "Cheeses of the World." Great, I thought, I love cheese, but before I could ask which variety he was dishing out to me, I was introduced to a rectangular blob of something I had never seen before. It was surrounded by wheat crackers arranged in such a way that it appeared to me as though they were trying to get away from the stuff in the center. I was probably correct in that assumption.

I leaned closer to the plate to evaluate the chunk only to have every receptive sense in my body assaulted by the mysterious thing in front of me. It smelled like ripe baby diapers, it looked like what might be found inside, and I could even taste the nauseating vapor creeping into my mouth. What could it be? I asked myself, wondering also if my grandpa was playing some type of sick joke. But by the way he encouraged me with his eyes and exuberant hand gestures, I could tell it was no jest. "Come on boy, try a bit! It's limburger" he said in an almost angry tone. "Don't tell me you're not gonna' eat it." With that I gingerly applied a dime sized portion to the corner of a cracker then placed it on my tongue. What followed was a rather violent involuntary squinching of the face. Limburger tastes as bad as it smells. I managed to choke down that first sample, but I could not, for the life of me, stomach another bite. I felt that if any more entered my mouth, every contractile muscle in my digestive system would squeeze shut at the same time, exuding anything within. I stepped away from the stinky cheese and told my grandpa that I had had enough.

Now my grandfather is one of those guys who believes strongly in his various weird foods, so when I refused to consume the remainder of that horrendous limburger, he was deeply hurt. He didn't say much during the rest of my visit. As I went out the door, I looked back and saw that he was still scowling at me. I left my grandparent's house utterly defeated: mentally, emotionally, and gastrointestinally.

Since that day, I have been much less arrogant in my claims of being undaunted by unfamiliar food. I still wonder from time to time what could possibly have inspired anyone to create such an offensive thing, this limburger. That semisoft pseudo-slice of "cheese" was very effective in proving to me that evil really can manifest itself physically. It is indeed the worst food I have ever experienced, and I will avoid it in the future at all costs. Moreover, I have come to the realization that war and deforestation are among the least of our worries, for as long as humans are capable of and willing to create limburger cheese, the world will never be safe. Through this vile concoction, it has been proven to me that humankind can never be trusted.

# iBook William Gibbs

## Describe an experience in your life that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.

Admissions Board: In order to convey as much information as possible to you, I have written an essay that will help give an idea about what I am interested in, how I serve my peers and community, and the types of experiences that really stick in my mind and in my character.

With nine-hundred million clock cycles per second; 786,432 sensuous pixels and sixty billion seductive bytes of storage she purrs gracefully as she goes from power-down to GUI in ten seconds flat. Her generous curves are accented in a gorgeous snow-white polycarbonate number that makes one temporarily overlook her rigid magnesium frame hiding beneath. She's a 14-inch Apple iBook G3 and she's mine, all mine!

One day while my iBook and I were getting some work done in the counselor's office at school, I noticed another boy eying her with great interest. It came as no surprise to me that other people were drawn to her beauty, but his intense stare indicated to me that not only did he appreciate her outer charms, he also held an understanding of her inner workings. I found this intriguing and proceeded to ask him if he was interested in computers. His response was an emphatic, yet tragic, "Yes." He then continued to tell me that he had never owned a computer and that the only time he had to work with one was there in the counselor's office during lunch. I knew what I had to do. I decided that I couldn't let a fellow enthusiast, someone with a genuine interest in something I cared equally for, go without the equipment he needed. I didn't exactly have an unused computer sitting around, and I certainly didn't have enough money to buy another (having recently drained my accounts to buy my gorgeous aforementioned machine). Nonetheless, considering myself resourceful, I told him that I would gather up the necessary parts and put a computer together for him: one that he could use whenever he wanted, one that would help him with school work as well as personal pursuits. His face lit up at this. A big smile had been stretching across his face since I first spoke to him and it reached its climax as he told me how grateful he would be. As I made my way home that day I felt a bit different. I felt proud of what I had done... and at the same time I worried about providing what I had promised. I immediately began scouring all available outlets for a spare computer. It didn't have to be fast, nothing particularly new or extraordinary. Yet, as far as I searched, I could not find the pieces I needed. I gave up for the night and went to sleep, dreaming uneasily.

For the next few days I met the same discouraging result. No one had an extra PC, not even for a good cause. Every morning at school I found myself explaining to my new friend that I was still working on it, and that his computer would be coming together soon. He began to lose hope, I could tell. His constant smile in my presence started to recede and he told me that it was no big deal, that no one ever did much for him anyway, that he was surprised that I even spoke to him. This was the final straw, so to speak. I would not let him down.

Denying defeat I resorted to what I felt was necessary; I gave away a computer of my own. Not my glorious iBook, but second only to her, my previous love, a Pentium 2 desktop. While I was reluctant at first, I soon felt it rather fitting, as that machine had been my first real computer too. When I told the lucky recipient about his new toy he was positively ecstatic. That very day we spent the afternoon at his house, setting up his computer. With the insistence that it be as close as possible to his bed, I found myself donating also an extension cord and surge protector. As the power switch was flipped, his great smile quickly returned. He was proud and so was I.

I had never felt better. I had made a difference in someone's life. I had opened up a whole new set of possibilities for someone. Every time I see my friend (who remains nameless by request) he thanks me and tells me about his latest project. This experience has changed me greatly. Since I gave away that first computer, I have formed an organization that acts as a depository for unused computers and computer parts which are cleaned up, tested and given out, free of charge, to people who cannot access or afford a computer. I feel that with the experience of that first donation I gained not only a great friend, but also concern for those who are less fortunate. I am now dedicated to helping them. I have become more generous with the things I own and am ready to share much more if it may benefit someone else. And while I'm still very protective of my sweet little iBook, I can honestly say I'm not so jealous when I see someone else scoping her out.

# A Night at the Fifth Avenue Brian D. Earp

## Pick a topic of your own choosing that will give you the opportunity to express to us a sense of how you think, what issues and ideas are most important to you, and a sense of your personal philosophy, traits, goals, etc.

Midnight was two hours old before I could finally peel out of my costume. The prosthetic nose and glue-on beard tore at my skin as I tugged them off, and they quickly joined the clutter on the bathroom floor: a tired pile of mismatched robes, rags, and a decrepit old wig. I stood in my boxers and scrubbed at the layers of pasty make-up until forty years were washed down the sink, until finally a look in the mirror revealed my own face, clean and raw. It was the first time in the last six hours that I had confronted a reflection that told the truth. My own face.

The disjointed memory of a vibrant evening began to tickle my mind, whizzing around my brain like an insect trapped in a jar. Everything that evening had felt somehow monumental. A sea of people, and a white blaze that consumed my vision as I stood on that enormous stage. There was the elaborate music cue; the song performed in the violent shine of a spotlight; the applause that seemed almost too thick; and finally the award, handed to me by that black-bedecked woman. I remembered the podium and the clutter of notes that the announcer had left there. I remembered saying "thank you" into the microphone, and wishing I could think of something else to say. Seattle's premier professional theater, The Fifth Avenue, and I was performing on its stage. I had never experienced a night that felt so much like it was going to burst. So full of something. Yet even as the evening's events recycled through my mind, I felt something prick at my consciousness. I had to know, what did it all mean?

There is something warm about applause. About an award. It says that you're appreciated, that you did your job. It is the naked patter of rain or the damp roar of a waterfall, and it sneaks up your spine and tickles the back of your neck. Yet as the evening moved on, each hour felt saturated with it. Brian the Actor. Brian the Actor. Brian the Actor. A strange contradiction began to swim in my stomach. On the one hand, the smiles and cheers. On the other, something deeper. Something inescapable. Beyond the lights and laud, there is a satisfaction in theater that resonates with my core. Something intense.

Theater is fundamentally human, and sublimely ancient. It is the seed of religion itself; it is deeply spiritual. A heightened state of mind. You are at once yourself, and someone entirely unlike yourself. You forge a vibrant connection with the audience in a tacit and beautiful chemistry that cannot be grasped, but is always felt.

Theater is a process, not an event. For the actor as an individual, it's an internal struggle: finding the meaning as it exists between the character and yourself. Then, as it exists between your performance and those who are watching you perform. It's entering into a focus and dimension that is like space or infinity-that ineffable high that has a meaning of its own. It's sucking the marrow out of each word so that it becomes your own, imbued with life and meaning. It's the research, the internalization, and the assumption of another being. It's finding authenticity in a reality that's made up.

A performance lasts a night, and lingers only in mind and memory, but the achievement of theater is permanent. Transformative. It's searching a new depth with every role in order to attain a greater height. It's finding something in yourself that can only be discovered by being someone else.

This is theater. And the byproduct of this personal achievement is extraordinary: to be on a stage, and to captivate. To go deep, and perplex reality with what is unfolding under the stage lights. To eradicate the world as it exists outside the four walls of a darkened room.

Then there's the byproduct of applause. Brian the Actor. Brian the sixty-year-old pickpocket. And now, standing amidst the molted remains of that knavish old man, Brian the seventeen-year-old high school kid. Brian, standing in his boxers in front of his bathroom mirror after a very long night, with school in the morning.

# The Listening Party Brian D. Earp

## Personal essay that will help us to know you better. Families, intellectual and extracurricular interests, school and community events, people who have influenced, significant experiences, personal aspirations, or anything that pops into your head.

My brother lives in a "gated community," one of those manufactured neighborhoods. It was like we were driving through the streets of a toy city, a miniature suburb built for the amusement of a god-sized obsessive compulsive. I myself was steering the matchbox car, a massive and ancient gray truck I borrowed from my dad, and my girlfriend Alexis occupied the passenger's seat. Clone after architectural clone, we watched the houses float by the truck's windows. We were headed to our very first Listening Party.

I really didn't know what to expect. My "brother" Keith is actually my half-brother--Dad's first marriage--and quite a bit older than I. He's very intelligent and congenial, albeit occasionally unpredictable, and good looking for someone in his late thirties. He's just the sort of older sibling to suggest a vague "listening party" in the middle of the school week and actually inspire me to come. Plus, his friend Astrid was going to be there. She's "hip." I'm not certain what that means, but if someone were "hip," it would be Astrid. (She and Keith met in a health food store-he sells aged garlic extract and she's going to be a naturopathic doctor-and they've been good friends ever since.) Tall and unconventionally beautiful, she made a vivid impression on Alexis and me the first time we all met. We both looked forward to a rendezvous with her and Keith again.

We're an unlikely group of friends, I'll admit. Alexis, a freshman at the University of Washington, is...well, how does one describe Alexis? Long, reddish brown hair and a clever smile. Musical prodigy and a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. A girl of her own style. As for me, I'm an academic type still in his senior year of high school who has a knack for theater but hates being labeled an actor. I can balance a picnic table bench on my chin. I'm composedly quirky.

You've met Keith and Astrid.

As a group, we span twenty years from oldest to youngest and yet we connect on a level of common understanding. We click.

So that brings us back to the listening party. Let me set the stage:

His living room is clean, comfortable, and open, with windows on two sides overlooking the neighborhood. There's a gas fireplace and an elegant coffee table. Not opulent, but nice. After we had all taken up a station on the couch or one of the armchairs, Keith dimmed the lights. The mood was set with the mysterious glow of a few candles; the atmosphere was decidedly rich. The final step was adding the music.

Turn by turn, we filled the evening with melody, with rhythm. With chords and memories. Now and then, one of us would dispatch a story: "the first time I heard this song..." Or we'd talk about the way the music made us feel, why it was effective. The mood in the air became warm, reminiscent, thick, electric, inspired, deep, deeper, and intricate. We shared ourselves through our appreciation of good music. Time flew.

And as the evening finally drew to a close, ("We have to get going-school tomorrow") I knew it had been time well spent. Time away from work and obligations. Time with good friends, good music, good conversation, and a feeling like something glowing in the atmosphere. We drove back down the street, now befallen with night, and headed home.

# I'm No Buffy the Vampire Slayer Arielle Ring

## Personal Statement

A few years ago, USA Today named the star of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer", Sarah Michelle Gellar, the epitome of the modern feminist. Declaring "with her take-no-prisoners attitude...vampire-slaying Buffy Summers has become... a feminist hero who's smart, tough and self-reliant," the beautiful blonde was apotheosized by younger girls. When asked about feminism, she explained, "Feminism sort of has a negative connotation. It makes you think of women that don't shave their legs." Does Gellar consider herself a feminist? "I hate the word," she replied. Why is the public so uncomfortable with the word "feminism?" Society implores women to strive to be smart and strong, but to be too smart or too strong is discouraged. Instead, too many settle for being a "Buffy," a female with incredible potential kept in check by contemporary culture's definition of "woman."

Last year, one of my teachers cracked a sexist joke and I commented that I found it inappropriate. He informed me the class was "mature enough" for such content. After class ended, a male student rudely inquired, "Are you a feminist?" as if it were a disease. I immediately reverted to a defensive mode, feeling the burden to justify not only my opinions, but also the entire platform of feminism; for a moment, like Gellar, I did not want to associate myself with a term so disgraceful. Looking back on the incident, I wish I would have had the courage I now possess to defend my beliefs. I am willing to take the risk of standing up against a popular opinion if I do not believe it to be right.

Perhaps I illuminate the paradox many modern women face. On one hand, I embody the prototypical, devoted female, assuaging the plight of Romanian orphans and donating countless hours to the Second Harvest Food Bank of the Inland Northwest. Numerous local and national accolades verify my role as a nurturer and "do-gooder." But when I step into a cross-examination debate round where the object is to establish your case and tear apart the opposing side, I risk being considered too assertive, too aggressive, and too competitive, while all of these traits are seen as desirable qualities in my male opponents. Sadly, many believe that to be "feminine" one must remain passive, a role I refuse to accept.

Am I a feminist? If that means I take risks to make my convictions known and strive to be smart and strong, then people can call me that if society must label me. But feminism does not define who I am, it's merely a term to describe some of my principles. I do not advocate every issue grounded in the feminist agenda. Feminism neglects my passion for competition, my desire to enact change, and my love of history. Feminism fails to capture my compelling feelings on Weapons of Mass Destruction or on the high levels of poverty in my hometown of Spokane. No one term elucidates my fear of failure, nor my aspiration to transform others through journalism. Instead, feminism is just one of the many terms I use to express myself, and to differentiate myself from Buffy.

# Hawaiian Style Anonymous

## Describe an experience of cultural difference, positive or negative, you have had or observed. What did you learn from it? (250 word maximum)

Being born and raised in Hawaii as a hapa haole, or half-Caucasian and half-Asian, I have many insights about the local culture of my homeland. Today, Hawaiian culture doesn't just consist of the native Hawaiians, who currently make up less than 18 percent of Hawaii's population, but also includes the minorities within the Aloha State. Every individual in Hawaii is part of a minority population, due to the preponderance of cultures and ethnicities. This diverse population began with immigrants who arrived to work on the plantations, such as the Japanese, Chinese, and Portuguese. From this assimilation, an entirely unique local culture emerged.

Although commonalities between Hawaii and the mainland exist, Hawaii's distinctiveness is what makes it unique and appealing. A local language called Pidgin originated from the integration of diverse cultures at the plantations. This vernacular is widely used throughout the islands by anyone who stays long enough to pick it up. The Aloha Spirit - a warm, friendly, giving attitude towards all - is a vital component of island life. The concept of Hawaiian Time implies a laid-back lifestyle, and often results in a family-oriented existence. I've also become accustomed to calling all adults - whether neighbors, acquaintances, or family friends - Aunty and Uncle instead of Mr. or Ms. All of these characteristics express Hawaii's open, accepting way of life, and make me proud to be Hawaiian at heart.

Although commonalities between Hawaii and the mainland exist, Hawaii's distinctions make it unique and appealing. A local language called Pidgin originated from cultures integrating at the plantations. This vernacular is widely used throughout the islands by anyone who stays long enough to pick it up. The Aloha Spirit is a vital component of the islands that involves a warmth, friendliness, and giving attitude towards all. The concept of Hawaiian Time implies a laidback lifestyle and results in a family oriented existence. I've also come accustomed to calling all adults, whether neighbors, acquaintances, or family friends, Aunty and Uncle instead of Mr. or Ms. All of these characteristics express Hawaii's social acceptance and family oriented way of life. This environment has familiarized me with various cultural practices while making family life a priority. With these numerous contrasts from other states, I am proud to be Hawaiian-at-heart.

# Family Photos Young Kim

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

Nonchalantly browsing through family photos, I hastily flip through the pages when I suddenly get a paper cut. Blood slowly flows from a small slit on my finger and onto the plastic film. The blood lands on a particularly bland picture--but it instantly catches my attention. Humbly dressed, a younger version of my father stands with a stern look on his face while my mother grasps onto his hand, half-smiling.

Looking at the picture, I can't help but wonder: Why did they choose to make so many sacrifices to come to America and decide to start a family here? I jump from my couch with the album to find my mother. Holding up the picture, I ask the question.

In response, my mother’s eyes well with tears. With a quivering voice, she sits down, takes a long look at the picture, and asks me if I am content with my life. She explains that she and my father had made the tough decisions to leave their family, home and lives back in South Korea all so that they could raise a stable family in America. With an unstable government, ambiguous education systems and a bad economy, life was not stable in Korea. Needing a quick decision, my parents took a leap of faith, hoping to make it in the “Land of Opportunities”.

Leaving all of their comforts behind, they gathered their meager savings, purchased two tickets and packed what little they had to go to the foreign land. After 20 hours of flying, they squeezed their way through the doors of an airport in Phoenix, Arizona, luggage at hand, and asked a stranger in broken English where the nearest affordable place to stay was. After several frustrating minutes of flipping though a translation booklet and using body language, they headed towards to their hostel. Upon arrival, they entered a dark, disheveled, and tight room with a closet sized bathroom. With big sighs, they quietly accepted their circumstances as they placed their bags in the corner.

Right away, my father attempted to read a newspaper to look for a job. Having no success in comprehending the advertisements, he decided to search by visiting random businesses. After days of painstaking searching, my father finally found a job as a dishwasher in a small diner. Because he took on the workload of two men, he asked for a raise but the manager denied his request. Even though he could not communicate, he knew he was being manipulated and deceived. Not wanting to give up his dignity, he stacked up the dirty dishes and left.

Meanwhile, my mother was pregnant with me. I was born several weeks before my father found a job as a janitor in a grocery store. Working 18 hours a day and leaving my mother home with me, my father struggled to maintain his goal of building a stable family. My father walked every day to work because he couldn't even afford to buy a car. At times, a police officer would take him to work and home.

Because he didn't have enough money, he sacrificed his own health to sufficiently feed my mother and me. While he fed us, he was malnourished and sometimes stole food as a last resort. My father worked efficiently and was very dependable. Being a victim of racism, my father was discriminated against and mistreated by his boss. Eventually, he quit his job again and went home. Because my father covered 18 hours a day, his boss had to find four people to cover my father's previous shift.

Tired and eager to start his own business, my father established a janitorial business. After five years, he yearned to go a step higher and searched for help from his sister in Washington State. After several days of business there, my father signed a deal and bought a small motel. Because of my father’s hard work and my mother’s care, everything progressed from there. Our family continued to move around the state and work hard to keep that dream alive.

Without a doubt, I would say that my parents’ dreams have come alive. As I heard the end of the story, I realized that I had nothing to complain about in my life. Although the paper cut still stung, I knew I could not complain.

The blood that crept out of my finger and crawled onto a picture that led me to a discovery I will never forget. I hold onto the picture because it reminds me of the story every time. It is through this picture that I am reminded of the great trials and struggles my parents went through, and I feel blessed and grateful for such strong parents. Whenever I feel like everything is going downhill and I want to give up, I whip out that picture and remind myself I should persist and keep my priorities straight to reach my goals.

Because my father always wanted me to be the best, he set very high standards. Ever since I was younger, my dad made it clear that it was important to not slack off and excel in my academics. I worked hard and received straight A’s, was constantly admitted in the honor roll, and received academic recognition throughout school. Although I managed to meet these standards, there were many other standards he established. Most of the time when all my friends went out and had fun, I was expected to stay home and study more. Although at times I felt like socializing with my friends, I obeyed and studied at home. As a result of my hard work and many sacrifices under the constant surveillance of my father, I ranked at the top in all of my classes.

The man in the picture, throughout my whole life has influenced me to work hard, to be persistent, and to never give up. Without my father, I would not be where I am today.

# Ascending Anonymous

## Personal statement.

I walk into the darkened nave of the church, ascend the steep incline between the pews, and stop at the vacant and quiet sanctuary. At the top of my climb is an illuminated room full of lively preschool children chattering with one another and busy with crayons. As I sit trying to make sense of the paper, scissors, and glue placed before me, my teacher attempts to quiet the classroom while talking with a pen in her mouth, causing her words to emerge in a loud, incoherent hum. None of the children seem to understand what she is saying but I intuit the sounds and shape them into words for her as I announce to the class that the teacher wants us to be quiet. Right away, my teacher identifies my talent for listening. She knows that she had not been talking in a clear and articulate voice and yet I was able to decode her mumbling. Even at the young age of four, I had an affinity for sound. This aptitude has stayed with me my entire life and helped me negotiate difficulties and grow as a person.

Throughout my life, I have tried out several different musical instruments. Whether I was plucking on strings, tapping on keyboards, or banging on drums, I was seeking to channel my emotions, speak a language, and create a space in which I could find peace-of-mind through music. My childhood was defined by a frenetic mobility—between the ages of seven and 24, I moved between Chicago and Seattle no less than six times—and, as a result, I did not feel rooted in the world. Music, however, traveled with and grounded me. It served as a counterpoint to the instability, depression, and confusion that permeated my life. My problems were serious and, much as music could distract me from them, I needed to introduce some structure into my life. When I was 19 years old, this came in the form of work.

My first job after high school was at a small health food store on Chicago's trendy Halstead Street. Although I had only a vague concept of what “health food” comprised, my experience of working in a holistic environment ultimately changed my perspective on life dramatically. In particular, I was stunned by the direct but often overlooked connection between diet and emotions. Initially, I spent a great amount of time investigating this connection in my own body and, once convinced of its validity, went on to discuss the subject with other people. Similar to my affinity for sound, I started to notice my affinity for nutrition. Amazed by the personal empowerment I had discovered, I strove to describe, as precisely as possible, how different foods affected my moods, which is a practice I continue to this day.

It was also during this time that I read Deepak Chopra’s Quantum Healing and became fascinated by his perspective on the mind-body connection. His conception of health as a state of balance was nothing new; however, his identification of the deep level at which this equilibrium could be reached was. As he says in the book, “[Q]uantum healing makes peace. When consciousness is fragmented, it starts a war in the mind-body system. This war lies behind many diseases, giving rise to what modern medicine calls their psychosomatic component.” For a person such as myself whose life was generally turbulent, discovering an accessible means to achieve peace was mind-blowing. Essentially, Chopra’s views convinced me that my own experience with nutrition and emotional healing was concrete, not just academic, evidence of the power to take control of my life.

Now I want to harness that power and channel it toward a degree. My academic experience to date is an interrupted and fragmented tale. Ten years ago, I enrolled at Seattle Central Community College in order to satisfy the prerequisites for applying to Bastyr University’s naturopathic program. In the intervening years, I found myself needing to put this plan on hold in order to attend to my financial needs and work responsibilities. Nevertheless, I never lost sight of my desire to graduate and, although it has taken me ten years to do it, I am on the threshold of achieving my initial goal and will earn my A.A. this year.

In retrospect, this protracted route has been worthwhile, as it has allowed me to reflect on what I truly want from my education, namely, as bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in business administration. Although these may seem like disparate pursuits, I believe that these particular disciplines will complement one another as I pursue my current goal to become a school administrator with a background in developmental psychology. Ever since I was that little girl in that schoolroom in the back of a church, I have known that I had talents that I am only now able to clearly envision as a career. Given the spectrum of my experience from my nomadic childhood to holistic adulthood, I know I have a lot to offer in the field of education. The first step, however, is getting an education of my own.

# Military Brat Anonymous

## How a personal experience affected my life and made me who I am.

I have never lived in one place for more than four years at a time. The reason? I am an Army brat. Some feel sorry for me, but I think my life was greatly enriched by moving so often. My life has given me many unique opportunities to observe and live in other cultures, including a whole different lifestyle within the military community itself. I feel that this experience as a military child has positively developed my character and has enabled me to adapt readily to new situations.

Moving exposed me to many different countries and cultures. I was born in Germany and subsequently moved to Minnesota, Hawaii, Holland, Hawaii again, Pennsylvania, and finally back to Hawaii. In all these situations, I was struck by both the differences between people and places and our remarkable ability to get along anyway. For example, people of many countries converge in Hawaii, where one can hear five languages spoken around him at once, whereas Germany is a fairly homogenous place. In Holland, I attended an international school for two years and befriended Canadians, British, Germans, Dutch, and Yugoslavians – a wonderfully diverse group that found plenty of commonalities to share.

Living in a place is the best way to learn about its local culture, but traveling is a strong runner up. I have been fortunate to travel to many countries around the world and to many places in the USA. This traveling has made me realize how important it is to learn about other societies. Travel has taught me to be more open-minded, to accept others, and to appreciate how others may view life in a different way than I do.

Military culture has also affected who I am. Being part of a military community is different than growing up in what we call “the civilian world.” The rules – including my parents’ – are stricter than elsewhere. We live in close proximity to our neighbors, and that requires learning to get along with them. Learning to build relationships easily is essential to survival as a military brat since you have to make new friends and meet new people each time you move. I also attribute my independent and outgoing nature to the moving associated with military life. Moving and leaving friends behind is never easy, but these experiences have prepared me for change and taught me how to adapt. Because of these experiences I recognize that life is unpredictable and that sometimes there’s nothing I can do about it. I try to look at things optimistically and be the best person I can be.

Despite the negative connotations of the term, I am proud to be a “military brat” and I know that the experiences and skills I have developed as a result will benefit me in college and beyond.

# Communications and Leadership Scott Lemoine

## Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

“Good morning Torrey Pines! It’s a beautiful Monday, 77 degrees and partly cloudy.”

My voice echoed throughout the campus and every classroom, as it was my responsibility to do the morning announcements each day in my position as Senior Class Communications Director. The students dismissed the routine drone and started reminiscing about the weekend’s events instead; school announcements and important administrative updates went unheard.

Strangely, it took me four years to realize that Torrey Pines had a serious communication problem. When I finally grew tired of people’s inattention and their consequent lack of involvement in school events, I began to imagine a new method by which I would broadcast crucial information. Relying on many years of experience in cinematography and on a keen fondness for public speaking, I envisioned the creation of a television network that would air monthly, transmitting information to each classroom in a visual manner, a fun new medium for the students.

I gathered a group of outgoing, ambitious students who would assist me as co-anchors on the show. Hours and hours were spent after school, shooting, editing, and producing what would revolutionize communication at Torrey Pines, a program we called Torrey Pines Television, or TPTV for short. After days of frustration and stress, we compiled a five minute segment that addressed sports scores, individual class news, administrative updates, and short features on clubs and theater. The meeting at which I presented the segment to department chairs for approval was the most daunting of my life –c and I was ecstatic to learn that TPTV was approved and could air whenever I chose.

The first showing was efficacious; I noticed a much higher attendance at school events, and fewer students questioned me about activity-related details. I was gratified to know that I was the pioneer of communications at my high school and that it was possible to reach seemingly indifferent students after all. TPTV not only improved school communication, it also offered me insight about myself. I discovered that I have the ability to identify a problem and take action to resolve it. I was instrumental in producing powerful and enduring changes in school communication by leading and inspiring a team of co-anchors.

In the words of James Humes, “The art of communication is the language of leadership.” TPTV revealed to me that I am a determined leader who, with vision and effort, can catalyze positive change in my community.

# Special Olympics Scott Lemoine

## 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

Neither Ray nor I knew what miracles were possible. At one hundred and eighty-five pounds, five foot ten inches tall, and a victim of fetal alcohol syndrome, Ray was a Special Olympic athlete with a dream to become a champion, but his mental handicap blocked his path.

Although my family and I had long volunteered for the Multiple Sclerosis Society, Meals on Wheels, and other charity organizations, helping the Special Olympics never interested me. I needed community service hours for a leadership group, however, and decided to apply to be a Special Olympics referee and mentor.

In November, the chair of the Special Olympics committee introduced me to Ray, the young man whose mentor I would become. We had only one week together before his upcoming floor hockey championship. At first, Ray was unmotivated and uncooperative; this made me feel impatient and uninterested as well. I tried repeatedly to make him practice and improve his athleticism, but at the end of the day I felt about as unmotivated as Ray did. It wasn’t until the day I found Ray crying in the back of the locker room that a sudden realization struck me. Sobbing, he explained that he felt like a poor athlete and an embarrassment to his father, an overly competitive Special Olympics veteran. Having experienced unending drills as a varsity football player, I knew a variety of drills that could get Ray into shape in a severely limited time frame.

With only a week left till the finals, I took on the challenge to incorporate as many daily drills as possible. Ray’s attitude was increasingly cooperative so I pushed him as hard as he could go, with fatiguing wind sprints and a myriad of stamina-based exercises. I knew he was exhausted, but his eyes gleamed with the determination to stand out as a competitor.

As the final floor hockey event approached, I convinced Ray’s coach to let him start for the first period to give him a chance to show his newfound agility and speed. We were all taken aback. Ray demonstrated athletic excellence, scoring more than half the goals for his team – his best performance ever. This amazing accomplishment helped him believe that strong work ethics and diligence can produce phenomenal results.

Ray was not the only one to realize something new. My vision of community service had been transformed in its entirety. Through Ray’s victory, I could see that the value of community service went beyond adding a few hours for leadership requirements – it can change lives in a specialized community that cannot exist without its volunteers. While this particular experience as a mentor may only travel as far as Ray’s Special Olympics State Championship in Sacramento, the miracle I experienced with Ray has laid the foundation for my future in academics and a life of service and diligence.

# The Cliche Keenan Johns

## I have the potential to...

Forget for a moment all that you’ve heard about the student athlete. Forget about the dedication and determination one needs to compete on a top-level team. Forget about the teamwork, the almost insidious way an athlete learns the value of unselfishness. Forget too about how all the grace notes of being a top high school athlete often transfer into the academic side, creating an organized student who won’t back down from a challenge. For just one moment, put aside the paragon of skill and good character, because just briefly I want to introduce you to another character.

Here I am, right where I’ve been most of my life, in Port Townsend, a small town on the northeastern tip of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State. If I walk a few blocks from my house, I can climb the Fort Worden bluff and look across the Straits of Juan De Fuca to Canada. The wind will no doubt be blowing; the cold Northwest rain misting. It’s no place to be a soccer player. And yet there I am, day after day, on a field at Fort Worden. I am six, then seven, eight, nine. The grass is sopping wet, and I think that sliding in the mud is almost as fun as scoring a goal. Ten, eleven…I’m playing now on another field, this one surrounded by a ten-foot blackberry bramble that snatches wayward balls and will only give them back after imparting a few good scratches on me. This is the field where my dribbling and shooting skills begin to improve, thanks to the neighborhood deer who graze in front of the goals, refusing to give way to soccer players. Twelve, thirteen…I try out for a premier level soccer team and don’t make it. My parents try to soothe me with stories of how they had to overcome obstacles in their lives, how those obstacles made them stronger. I don’t want to hear their stories. Instead, I construct a few cardboard opponents in my garage. I am relentless against them. I spend hours juggling and practicing moves in my paved driveway. Then I go on long runs through the woods, following the curves and twists of a dozen hiking trails until I can barely stand. Fourteen…Again, I try out for a premier level soccer team. This time I make it, and I enter a whole new world.

When you live in a small town out on the edge of the country, a town with only one road going in and out, and a single ferry that shuts down at 8 p.m., you can easily reconcile yourself to the idea of limits. Once I began playing premier soccer, however, such a notion became alien to me. My new team practiced an hour away from home. Every weekend, too, we had games, most of them a half-day’s journey for me and my parents. Even as I gave up the ease of “free” weekends, I learned to stretch my boundaries in all possible ways. I did my homework on the road, using my dad’s headlamp as I crunched numbers for AP Calculus. I had teammates quiz me on my vocabulary list. And, on the field, too, I found myself learning new ways of being. I learned the weird contradiction of being a team player, how sometimes letting go of individual goals leads to success as a team. I learned too that competitiveness didn’t always mean winning a game. For example, I would get excited at every chance to guard Nik Besagno, the No.1 pick overall in the Major League Soccer draft. I would make it my goal to shut him down by playing him tight and giving him a few opportunities to advance the ball.

It’s hard to pinpoint the moment when a routine becomes a habit and when that habit becomes a part of you. Remember that athlete in the first paragraph, the one dripping with admirable qualities. Sure, he is a cliché, but clichés are widely used because they are often true, and this too is the truth: Somewhere in the process of learning to be a better soccer player, somewhere between being that gawky six-year-old, sliding on the muddy field, and becoming the first soccer player to make the All-State team from Port Townsend, my character was developed. Regardless of whether I play another game of soccer once I graduate from high school, I know now that the lessons I learned from the game are a part of me now. I might not always win, but I know well how to work toward my goals: Practice, Set Up, Deliver.

# Life as a Scribe Anthony Mells

## Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

As I rushed up to the sliding glass doors that marked the entrance to the Emergency Room, my heart pounded with exhilaration. Patients were sitting in chairs, lying on stretchers, and nervously pacing the floor. With a dry mouth and sweaty palms, I entered, peering into each room and observing the ill patients who lined the halls. This trip to the ER was a life-changing experience for me. However, I was not in the ER for a personal emergency; I was there to begin my first shift as an ER Scribe.

My job as a scribe requires me to shadow an ER physician and create a medical record of each patient’s visit to the Emergency Room. Utilizing a wireless Tablet PC that is integrated into the hospital-wide database, my duties are much larger than simply jotting down notes. I interpret the medical history, record the physical exam, and document medications, x-rays, and CT scans. The complex and fast-paced environment of the ER requires that I be familiar with medical terminology, comfortable with mature situations, and able to effectively communicate with multiple types of healthcare professionals.

I knew this would be difficult. I am the youngest employee in the company, and all of my coworkers are already in college or beyond. Before I began my first shift, I had trained for hours in the computer classroom, ears pricked to the faint sounds of the activity in the ER one floor above me. When the day arrived, I thought I was fully equipped with all of the necessary tools; however, I was not nearly prepared for the reality of the ER.

The greatest challenge I faced was the effect that human suffering would have on me. On that first day in the ER I was confronted with a young woman, just a few months older than I, whose self-inflicted wounds were clearly visible through the bloodstained gauze on her wrist. Her troubled past, filled with drug addiction, parental suicide, and teen pregnancy, had provoked her to commit this act. Her misfortunes haunted me for days, as I realized she could easily have been one of my classmates. The connection created by our proximity in age afforded me a rare, intimate look into a vulnerable life.

Later in my shift, I was called to the bedside of a man in his fifties who was undergoing CPR. The physician confidently administered a single electric shock, and the patient was revived. I looked over at the family, whose tears were replaced by an expression of hope as the heart monitor began to register renewed electrical activity. With the building emotion in the room, I thought to myself, “His family will now enjoy his company for another day.” I had never considered what it would feel like to see a human being rescued from the grip of death. This man was a stranger to me, but in a small way I was now a part of his life.

Standing in that room, I realized the importance of what we do in the ER. I pondered the difference between working at a coffee shop and working in the hospital. If one was to mistakenly put the wrong mocha in a frappuccino, the result might be an unhappy customer. However, if I mistakenly enter the wrong medications into the ER chart, we might have a dead customer. Mistakes are not an option.

Reflecting upon my experiences as a scribe over the past several months, I have realized that the world’s challenges are much bigger than a SAT test, an English essay, or a Calculus quiz. How I approach my future will be forever impacted by the maturity I have gained by working in the ER.

As I drove home after a recent shift, I considered the significance of health, and the impact of illness on people’s lives. When I arrived home, I gave my mom and dad a hug, affectionately patted my younger brother on the head, and went to my room to do my homework. I neatly laid my uniform over the back of my chair, and I gazed at the company logo on my shirt.

I felt like I could take on the world.

# Unconditional Love Anonymous

## Common Application - Topic of Your Choice

The roaring waves crashed against the rocks. The sky was black except for two glowing fluorescent lights in a distance. I stood alone facing the Pacific Ocean and tears slowly trickled down my face but the wind quickly blew them away into the retreating sand.

It was a cold December night on which I had another petty argument with my mother. Earlier, she was on the phone with my grandmother for more than an hour. I anticipated a celebration for the holiday, not a longwinded conversation with my grandmother. My mother sounded quiet concerned. She just never wants to spend any time with me, I thought to myself. Anger trailed behind as I slammed the door and walked out to the beach. After I came back home, my mother gave me a tirade about how I should not go outside alone at night. I should not have fought back, but my tongue could not control my emotions. I was tired of her control over my daily affairs. I talked loudly to assert my independence and bravado. Then, she said, “You are old enough but you still do not know how to make me happy.” Her expression was a mirror that gave an unforgiving reflection of my personality. My cheeks burned as I stood there in silence, quietly recognizing that everything she said was true. My flaws felt as if they were etched on my forehead. The argument quickly turned into a pointless and bitter conversation. For the next week, we would not talk to each other.

This scenario has been repeated several times as I grew up with a strict but caring mother. Maybe she was doing the right thing, but at the moment, I did not understand. Later, I discovered that my grandmother had crashed into a car while crossing the street. She remained unconscious in the hospital for many hours. After learning about this dire situation, I suddenly realized that my mother did the right thing. I felt so childish and selfish. I deserved her silent punishment.

This was the best mistake I have ever made because my mother starkly exposed my flaws. She spotted my weaknesses more quickly than anyone else. She made me personally experience the harm from the lack of filial piety and sympathy for other human beings. After our bickering, I knew that my character definitely needed improvement. Now, I can clearly see why and how I should change. That argument has taught me much more than what teachers did in the classrooms.

I am so glad I made the mistake of walking alone on the beach on that cold December night. The quarrel that ensued was an awakening. My mother defeated my selfish and hubristic attitude. She opened a door that transformed me into a considerate individual for others’ predicaments. She taught her daughter the meaning of unconditional love.

# How Clay Changed My Attitude Anonymous

## Personal Statement

When I read through my first semester schedule, my face glowed with happiness when I saw Ceramics as my first period class. On the first day of school, I walked into the classroom with a smirk. I pitied the freshmen and sophomores for listening so attentively to our teacher. What is so hard about making a vase? Mr. Helle sat in front of the potter wheel and began to center a small ball of soft clay. Quickly, it turned into a perfect cylinder spinning right in the middle of the wheel. Seconds later, it transformed into a beautiful vase with a flawless curve. It was too easy! Next, it was my turn. For some strange reason, I struggled just to force the clay onto the center of the wheel before it became lopsided again and splashed mud all over my clean shirt. I paid no attention to posture, speed, and details. Looking embarrassed, I asked Mr. Helle to give me the whole lecture again. My hubristic attitude tricked me. I spend the next hour just trying to center. I could not even begin to think how difficult it would be to make a vase.

While I succeeded in AP classes, I made little progress in mastering the necessary skills to make a vase. The next day, I wore a completely different expression. Those students who had practiced carefully were making symmetrical and cylindrical shapes while I continued to focus on the basics. After months of paying careful attention and staying after school to make a simple object, I learned an important lesson. If I am too arrogant, then I see no room for improvement. My humility helped me realize that there is knowledge to be gained in every subject. I became an intellectual sponge, absorbing all the techniques Mr. Helle taught me. Toward the end of the semester, I did not become a famous potter but I could make a decent vase. To this day, Mr. Helle’s agility fascinates me as he turns an oddly shaped ball of clay into an elegant 12-inch tall pitcher. Now, I know the difference between pride and arrogance.

Several months later, I faced another challenge. While my friends were still worrying about their Junior Prom dresses, I decided to apply to Reed College in Portland, Oregon. Better opportunities were within my reach when the acceptance letter came from this small liberal arts college. Orientation was just a few days away and I was still scared to go. Thanks to the Ceramics class, I gained the confidence to not let fear bring me down. Each difficult situation requires an appropriate response. Thus, I chose to strive for the best education because I was capable, reliable, and smart. A week into college, I was incredibly glad that I entered this world of new possibilities. I made the right decision.

I am passionate about learning. The University of Washington will provide me an intellectually challenging environment to thrive. In small conference classes, my peers and professors profoundly affect my academic enrichment and personal character growth. Learning is a journey that requires self-discipline, honor principle, and different perspectives. At Reed, I learn to become fully human by discovering my individual identity and building a solid foundation for rigorous academic pursuits. With the experiences I gained from this academic community, I will prove to be a positive asset to the University of Washington.

# Obstacles in Responding to Medical Crises Anonymous

## How can you make a difference in the world?

During the first months of my residence in New York City, the lavishness and consumption of the American lifestyle surprised me. As a new immigrant from rural China to the Big Apple, I was mentally unprepared for the sights and sounds of such a wealthy country, which is capable of utilizing so much of the world’s resources for her luxurious ways. Now, I have become accustomed to these ways of life. Water, food, and shelter come easily and everyone around me is immune against contagious diseases. I soon discovered the harsh truth, however, that not everyone is so fortunate.

When I returned to my birthplace, I found myself unable to grasp the magnitude of the health problems people face outside of the United States. I visited hospitals and temporary clinics that had unacceptable health practices according to American standards. Still, to people with acute and chronic illnesses, those establishments were the best options available. Finally, I realized that the United States is such a lucky nation endowed with the resources to meet people’s basic needs and to respond to medical crises. My trip to China starkly exposed a major societal problem of our generation, which is the lack of proper healthcare. As a global citizen, I have the responsibility to make an attempt to resolve these issues. In the future, I want to the first one to provide immediate assistance to those who are traumatized by medical crises abroad.

Responding to medical crises proves to be an enormous obstacle for numerous countries. Experiencing climate change and unpredictable weather patterns, our country faces the problem of ensuring her citizens’ health and safety during dangerous times. Nevertheless, this is not only a national problem, but also a global emergency. Just last month, a terrible earthquake shook the Sichuan province of China and ravaged its landscape and human demography. Displaced homes, rotting bodies, and unsanitary water are only a few of the many health-related crises that require critical attention. The efforts of rescue teams, generous donations from charitable organizations, and selfless volunteers at the site of disaster provide invaluable relief to the earthquake victims. All of these actions, however, only scratch the surface of the necessary clean-up operation and medical response after a natural disaster. The earthquake has shattered homes, schools, and various buildings, which bury many of the dead. These bodies can potentially spread diseases and pollute surrounding water sources and food supplies. As of now, thousands of displaced victims are still waiting for rescue teams to provide them with urgent medical attention. Their lives become more endangered each day from the lack of proper nutrients and drinking contaminated water spilling out of uprooted chemical plants. One monumental societal problem we encounter today is proper medical response for people after a calamity.

From this single earthquake alone, we can see clearly that handling medical crises can be extremely difficult. The first main obstacle is securing clean water and supplies. Efficient and timely global transportation systems and rapid communication will help to resolve this issue. Secondly, most victims after natural disasters such as an earthquake or a cyclone need immediate medical attention. Establishing temporary clinics requires sanitary conditions for patient treatment and recovery. In addition to addressing this problem, we need to recruit competent volunteers and doctors in order to staff these emergency facilities. Lastly, one nation should not face the medical crisis caused by an unpredicted natural catastrophe alone. As global citizens, we need to raise awareness and encourage international collaboration to minimize the obstacles in responding to medical emergencies. Recovering from tremendous losses, our global family needs to cross political, religious, and cultural barriers to save as many lives as possible.

During my trip to China, I witnessed people suffering without proper medical care. Societies in many countries experience similar problems in everyday life and during times of unforeseen disasters. As a citizen of the United States, I have the responsibility to extend my privileged lifestyle to others around the world. In order to achieve this goal, education becomes my first priority. After undergraduate studies, I will pursue a M.D./Ph.D. dual degree. This will allow me both interaction with patients and communication with the larger scientific community to advance treatments and improve our response to medical crises. Also, I plan to join non-profit organizations to work in developing countries. By helping the impoverished and injured individuals who immediately need medical attention, I can contribute significantly to the international community. Solving the world's medical problems proves to be a daunting task. Nevertheless, I believe in my determination and indomitable will to strive for solutions to healthcare problems.

# The Fortune Spiders Anonymous

## personal statement

When the clear automatic doors opened to the humid air of New York City, my life would never be the same. The busy traffic with dozens of yellow cabs overwhelmed a girl who grew up in a place where a bike is an expensive transportation tool. While my parents drove past an endless chain of fast food restaurants, I marveled at the luxurious American lifestyle. Adjusting to my new home in New York City, after flying thousands of miles from rural China, exposed me to unforeseen lavishness and extravagance.

Living in the United States, what was previously impossible became possible. Most people have access to food and water all the time. They can go to work in skyscrapers and drive luxurious cars. Gradually, the city’s wastefulness and consumption brainwashed me into thinking that I do not have to consider those who lack the simple basic necessities. While all of my demands were satisfied, I forgot the values I grew up with and ignored the plight of others in developing countries. Shelter, healthcare, and education came easily. What a fortune to live here, I thought. At the same time, it is also a curse. I slowly lost my native culture’s values, such as frugality and determination that enable the Chinese people to become the next world leaders.

As my grandmother’s diabetic conditions worsened each day, I reluctantly flew to China to visit her. When I arrived at her house, a second culture shock daunted me. I no longer recalled the summer nights when I sat in the yard listening to my grandmother’s anecdotes that teach moral lessons. Rather, I focused on the old stench slowly diffusing across the yard. I saw my grandmother, albeit with serious diabetes and failing eyesight, washing dishes. Her strong muscles, from working as a migrant worker, now became limp. She turned around and gave me a smile that exposed her rotting teeth. Her excitement to see me was overwhelming. She commented on how much I had changed. Unfortunately, she could not see how dramatically I had changed on the outside. She soon found out, however, that I had forgotten the qualities she had instilled in me; I grimaced at the food she prepared and complained about how dirty the toilet looked.

When eating lunch, I panicked when I saw a spider crawling on the wall. My grandmother calmly picked up the spider and chanted an ancient poem. The words and rhyme of the poem tickled my memory. The poem asks the fortune spider to bring food and guests to the house. The spider traps its own food with the web it weaves. If the web breaks, it will fix it. Its independence and resolution to support itself won admiration. The poem also made me recall my grandmother’s hospitality and friendship despite hunger and hardships. I once loved this story, believing that someday I will overcome obstacles with perseverance. The spoiled lifestyle in the big city, however, distracted me from setting and achieving long-term goals. My grandmother cannot even read or write but my mother became a successful doctor. I realized that my mother must possess the qualities I was ignoring to overcome the poverty cycle that trapped my ancestors.

This trip to visit my grandmother in China forever changed my attitude on the so-called fortunate life in the pompous city. My grandmother helped me recover my roots and values that I have resolved to never forget. As I learn and grow in a competitive world, the rekindling of the rich cultural ties I have with my grandmother, and with China, is absolutely priceless.

# Humility Christopher Kim

## What are your dreams and aspirations?

My childhood began amidst a bevy of confusion – my parents worked several jobs and rushed in and out of the front door from one shift to the next, each time in a different uniform. Although my sister and I were able to take part in every school event, extra-curricular activity and any other interest we chose, we often had to find rides home as the only parentless students. Over time, I grew to resent my parents dedication to work – what was it about their jobs that would keep them from home and every single thing my sister and I took part in? Seemingly nothing more than workaholics, my parents slowly began to represent everything that I did not want in life: no time at home, on the weekends, or with the kids. In school I was consistently at the top of my class in the hopes of transcending my parent’s lot in life. My wayward perception allowed to go unchecked, I garnered a naïve sense of confidence and continued to believe that my parents’ actions were out of sheer selfishness.

When I reached high school, the activities that I became involved in grew exponentially in number – just more events for my parents to ignore. Again, I immersed myself in every opportunity, exhausting every resource available and pushing myself to every possible limit. I began computing mathematical equations that most adults could not even do, interpreting texts that most men could not interpret, and studying advanced fields that I knew my parents had never even scratched the surface of.

During my junior year, my perception of my parents’ role in my life seemingly established, I set off for New York with my school’s orchestra to play at Carnegie Hall. I viewed their participation again as merely flipping the bill, yet another absentee moment. As our orchestra sat down to play our first piece, I spied the audience. Just as our conductor was about to begin, I caught a glimpse of my parents, sitting far in the back rows. Believing that my eyes were merely deceiving me, I played through our entire performance without looking in that direction again. Upon the performance’s end, as the entire orchestra rose to the greet the audience’s applause, I stole another glance at my parents standing in the back rows, clapping furiously with smiles beaming across their faces.

Hoping to catch them at the performance’s end, they were nowhere to be found. In fact, I never saw them again the entire time I was in New York.

When I came home, my parents’ attempt to hide their trip to New York was clearly unsuccessful. Playful smiles on their faces for seemingly the first time in their lives, they told me that they had indeed been there. Somewhat dumbfounded, I could not comprehend why they had come - they had been vacationing in New York, they had coincidentally gone to Carnegie Hall in the hopes of catching a show, anything but the answer that they gave me: “We’ve never gone to any of your performances before, so we had to see you in Carnegie Hall.”

All the years of bitterness slowly began to melt away as they continued. “We tried to hide from you because we know how much you hate having us around, but we were so proud we had to stand!”

Tears streaming down my face, I finally understood the misguided perception I had fostered for so long: my parents hadn’t missed all of my life’s most important events by choice, they had missed them in order to work – I was able to do everything I ever wanted in life at the expense of my parents’ schedules and wants.

Humility is a virtue that I have worked hard to establish since that day. Despite the ostensibly ill-conceived circumstances under which my drive to succeed was forged, I am utterly thankful for my parents and the life lesson that they emblazoned in my mind that day – that sacrifices of love are clearly worth the price of great accomplishment.

# Outside the Box Anonymous

## What do you wonder about, ponder, or wish you knew more about that isn't within your intended field of study? Would you ever be willing to put all else on hold to satisfy your curiosity?

As I graduate from high school with just enough basic understanding of the arts and sciences to appreciate their complexity and depth, I find myself constantly investigating a broad range of topics. My intended field of study is biology, with the hope of someday studying medicine. Although an MD is my educational goal, I have come to the conclusion that life is a constant process of gaining knowledge. It is in this spirit that I would be willing to put everything else on hold to satisfy a curiosity that may arise. Before I enter medical school, I wish I could explore the field of oceanography, as it has always fascinated me. It is said that we know less about our oceans than we do of our moon. I would love to take part in the discovery and protection of our world’s oceans, as they are the essential lifeblood of our planet, and are deteriorating at an alarming rate.

In no way do I feel that my educational foundation needs to be in a linear-sequential direction. Sometimes it is a combination of interests that creates the most interesting people, as well as some of the most employable and creative graduates. Education founded by passion will be embraced, and the student will usually be exceptionally driven, leading to a higher calibre of understanding and application. Consider a degree in sociology and medicine; a combination that creates an incredible understanding of the patient’s background. This is certainly more valuable than either individual degree. Finally, I truly believe education should not be directed by an attempt to collect graduation credit, but rather in an attempt to follow a passion. This will undoubtedly lead to a path we do not expect, and results we cannot imagine.

# 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.

# Live On Anonymous

## Topic of Choice on the Common Application

I always thought Peter Pan was mad. While he and his fellow Neverlanders were enjoying their eternal childhood, I was desperately awaiting my "grown-up" days. I just wanted to rush through life; I wanted to close my eyes and wake up a responsible, respected adult.

I have my piano teacher to thank for stopping my headlong rush through life. He had spent the summer in Israel and had been unable to teach me; upon his return, he was astounded by the amount of improvement I showed and commented, "You should be a junior so I can have one extra year with you. By then, you'll be ready to go pro." Then he sighed and added, "Well, it's a year; you can do a lot in a year if you set your mind to it." As I pondered his words, it struck me that he had mourned the shortness of my last year with him. A year, which to me, had always appeared endless, suddenly seemed as if it could vanish in a blink of an eye.

As I drove home afterward, my mother said, "Remember that year when your old piano teacher never wanted to teach you? We should have switched teachers then." I thought about it a moment, then replied, "No, she only didn't have the heart to teach me because I didn't have the heart to learn." I had been about ten or eleven that year, and had been in such a hurry to reach the future that I had half-ignored the present. I didn’t know what I know now: the past and present prepare us for the future. Although I was never a slacker and always did my work well, I could have done everything better. If I had worked harder, one year would have been sufficient for me to “go pro.” If I had focused on enjoying life as it was, I would now have many sweet memories to rival the unhappy ones. But I had passed my days waiting for the future, enduring the present, and escaping from the world through my dreams.

But enough of this. Thinking of past mistakes is a waste of time if one does not learn from them. After all, it is impossible to change the past, so why not change the future instead? Instead of running futilely from the present, I will grasp the wisdom in the old cliché, “Dream like you’ll live forever, live like you’ll die today,” and apply it to the present and future. As my teacher said, I can do a lot in a year. So for now, I will work hard and push myself, all the while remembering to enjoy the beauty of life, so that in the future, I will have all the necessary skills to live my life well, and I will look back and smile at my multitude of happy memories, like perfect pearls on a string, mine to cherish and hold close forever.

# Project in International Engagement Cameron Vohr

## Please outline the kind of international engagement project that you might consider pursuing and explain how such a project would fit into your broader academic vision. (300 words or less)

Two things happened to me in elementary school that changed my life: I started organizing small local peace rallies with my mother and I got my first alto saxophone. In those days, the two were unrelated. Years later, however, upon joining the jazz band in middle school, I began to make connections. The socioeconomic and racial diversity I encountered in jazz band and the process of uniting through playing together gave me a deeper understanding of the power of music. I began to see music as a language: raw emotion that could be used to open doors of communication between people of any nationality or level of education, and even between groups with histories of violence and hatred. My planned international engagement project is a small step in that direction.

I would start with challenged countries -- perhaps countries such as Afghanistan, Chad, Iraq, or Somalia -- that have been plagued by war. By acquainting myself with community members engaged in conflict, I would attempt to gain an understanding of their cultures through a shared passion for music. With a desire to understand the perspectives of the different communities, I would take concrete steps to stimulate communication between the different groups. I imagine musicians participating in all-inclusive jam sessions, alleviated from their emotional responsibilities to their conflicting parties. There is no substitute for such personal contact and the musical and social benefits that come with it. You can’t hate the drummer if he’s giving you the beat. Music can help these people see each other as human beings rather than as enemies. Even if I can only do that on a small scale, I will at least have contributed to making peaceful change in a unique way.

# Personal Statement Essay Anonymous

## Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

“You’re in the wrong line, Melody!” my former classmate shouted across the blacktop. Heads turned and people stared, and my blushing cheeks complemented my hot pink shirt. I felt embarrassed and proud at the same time. On a hot September day in 2001, I skipped second grade. Was this a foolish choice or a smart move? I say everything in life happens for a reason, so I am sure it was the right decision, easy or not.

I was an early walker, talker, and reader. By kindergarten, I played Mozart sonatas on the piano and helped fourth-graders with their math. My handwriting was messy merely because my hand could not keep up with my brain. In first grade I was miles ahead of my classmates, so my parents and school officials agreed that I should skip second grade. On the first day of third grade, when all my friends formed lines on the blacktop behind their second-grade teachers, I gave a shy smile and nervously approached the crowd of unfamiliar third-grade faces. I was tempted to run away and shrink into the shadows.

Several months later, I moved to my current hometown of Palos Verdes, California. The story about my age spread quickly; here, skipping a grade is about as common as a high school hosting the Olympics. I started to become embarrassed about the fact that I was a year or two younger. I was determined to keep my age a secret in middle school, but on the first day of sixth grade, my P.E. teacher made us organize by birth year to determine our required times for the mile. Not surprisingly, I was the only student in the 1994 group, and this caused much confusion among my classmates. “Why are you so young?” “I was that age in fourth grade!” These words mortified me, but regardless of my embarrassment, I still managed to have a successful middle school career, complete with a high GPA and a position as a tutor for ELD students.

The stigma worsened in high school. I was the youngest of 2,400 students, but I faced my fear of people finding out my secret and ran for class president. Despite the fact that I was adapting to people knowing my age, new obstacles kept coming my way. I started having to shamefully admit that I was not old enough to obtain my driver’s license and turn down invitations to see R-rated movie in theaters because of my age. When new people find out that I skipped a grade and the reason why, I can tell that their opinions of me automatically revert to assuming that I am a genius. I still timidly slide my hand over forms that require writing my birth year for fear that someone near me will see.

While skipping a grade has presented a lot of difficulties, it has also shaped me into a stronger person. I am very tolerant of people with different backgrounds because I can relate. I work better in difficult circumstances because I am used to being constantly challenged, and I value my friends who defend me against people who ridicule my age. I am also very proud of the fact that, year after year, I have been able to adjust to new classes and new groups of people. Facing such an obstacle has caused me to acquire great people skills to compensate, so I am now a very socially adequate person. My friends say that I should not worry about my age at all, because I am still at the same -- or higher -- maturity level of everyone in my grade.

I admit that I am scared for college. I fear the moment when my roommate finds out how young I am, that first impression that I cannot reverse. I will always be the young one; that is something I cannot change. However, over the years I have learned that age is just a number, and it does not define a person. Only their individual contributions to society can do that.

# Understanding and Developing from MisconceptionsAnonymous

## Personal Statement

As a blonde cheerleader, I've chuckled to myself when instructors who don't yet know me refrain from calling on me the first week of class. I guess the uniform and pom-poms give them a subconscious stereotype that I will be unable to answer the questions they pose. Eventually, they come to the realization that their preconceived notions are not holding true, and they begin to treat me based on my capabilities rather than my appearance. It is at this point that I feel as though the instructors begin to see me as more than a bubbly and energetic cheerleader and accept me as an intelligent and focused student.

I became aware of stereotyping at an early age because it happened frequently to me. Because I am blonde, it has always been easy for others to make assumptions about my intelligence or abilities. When I became a cheerleader, absolute strangers made more assumptions. Based on a stereotype, people assume they know me and do not expect to find anything different. I surprise them when they find out how much I enjoy and excel at math and science. Once people see me complete assignments and do well in class, their opinions change.

Strangers can be confused by the "blonde cheerleader" stereotype when I make a friendly gesture, too. Occasionally I see fellow students walking slowly through the hall slumped over and with their heads lowered, looking as though they feel uncomfortable or unhappy. When I reach out to them by smiling or by starting a conversation, they often look at me in surprise. Once they realize that my attempt to connect with them is genuine, however, their smiles mirror mine. My sincerity comes through and allows people to see and understand who I am. It also sets me apart from the simplistic stereotype through which they first might have viewed me.

Stereotyping amounts to expectations based on limited information. My family has more complete information, and they see me differently than my peers and instructors first view me. My family sees in me someone with no limits to success. They consider me a leader in my work and activities, and my parents have always believed in me, which encourages me to push forward. For example, one day when I felt quite frustrated, and wanted to take a break from the homework, my mom said, "That is your choice, but I believe that if you push yourself you can do it." And with that, I continued until I completed the homework. The look in her eyes told me much more than words could ever say about what she thought I could do.

The assumptions and expectations of others do not define me or make me who I am, but I do consider them. When people put aside the stereotype of the blonde cheerleader and stop judging me by it, they learn that I am ambitious, hard-working, and I want the best for everyone. I do not let others' uninformed opinions affect my self-esteem or hurt my feelings because I know that in time they will see the difference between me and their stereotype. I am determined and prepared to be the first in my family to graduate from a four-year college, and I plan to continue on to medical school. I take pride in all of my activities and schoolwork, and I look forward to challenging myself throughout college. In the end, my experience with stereotypes has helped me. I have learned that appearances can be deceiving, and people are usually even more interesting once I get to know them.

# Lessons from Footloose Nathan Bartos

## Tell us a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.

Walking out onto the stage, petrified, I hear the director utter in monotone, “Whenever you’re ready.” I figure that I will never be ready, but I decide that I’ve worked too hard to just walk away now. I read off some of the lines that I’ve rehearsed so many times, I practically have them memorized. Then comes the part I have been dreading: singing alone. However, I give it all I have, and, when I’m done, the director announces, “You may go.” My head is spinning as I wander out of the auditorium. Just then, it finally hits me: I have just auditioned for the lead in a musical, and I did fairly well!

When I get back home, I can’t focus on anything. I begin to pace back and forth in my room, mulling over in my mind all the things that I did wrong. I stuttered on a line, I spoke too quickly... This begins to drive me crazy, so I decide to just go to sleep. Mind racing, I do my best to focus on preparing for bed. When I finally lie down and attempt to fall asleep, my mind is still haunted by the audition. I strive to push it out of my mind, and, eventually, I drift into a deep sleep.

Waking up in the morning, my mind is gyrating. My whole morning is a blur; before I know it, I am inside the school. My hands are shaking as my friend and I trudge over to the casting list. Frightened to see the list, I slowly twist to look at the casting list. “Ren McCormack - Ruben Hanohano”

My hope spirals downward as all the things that I did wrong come crashing back to me. I think of how I could have done better, and I wonder what Ruben did that I didn’t do. People celebrating around me snaps me back to reality. I read on to see the character that I received. “Chuck Cranston - Jonathan Keller.” I feel relief rush over me as I realize that I don’t have to portray myself as the bully.

“Willard Hewitt - Nathan Bartos.” I never would have thought of myself as the comic relief in the play, but I decide that it could be fun to play someone so different from myself. Still disappointed, I walk into the musical director’s office and ask what I can do better for the next year’s audition. She tells me that Ruben had a more pop-sounding voice, which is what they were looking for in the actor playing Ren, and that he is a better dancer than I am. She also gives me common acting reminders: be louder, be calm, and be confident. I thank her and walk out of her office, then spot a friend who runs up give me a hug. I tell her I'm all right and that I am kind of excited to play the country role of Willard.

I have a great experience through all the rehearsals and wouldn't trade it for anything. Ruben, who got the part I wanted, is hilarious and becomes a good friend.

Being in the play shaped me and will stay with me for a long time. First, I came to understand that although things may not go the way that we planned, most of the time they come out okay anyway. Furthermore, I realized that hard work is important and will help you to succeed; however, it may not always make you achieve the desired result. I became a better person because of the production of “Footloose” and had a great experience along the way.

# The Importance of Honors Programs to Fulfill Interdisciplinary Goals Anonymous

## How will the Honors College enrich your educational experience, and how will you be able to give back to the Honors College community?

I am a goal-oriented person. I realized my passions long ago—to work in natural resources and conservation biology and to share the knowledge and experience I gain through writing. Influences such as John Muir, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, and Terry Tempest Williams have inspired me with their methods of imparting their ideologies to others through writing. Their ability to craft passion, opinion, and feeling into beautiful prose, influenced others to listen to them and create real change. Such writers and scientists increased my introspective and passionate feelings about protecting and respecting the wilderness. I believe I will be able to add to the Honors College and university community with my passion for what I will study and my ability to engage others through my writing.

The Honors College will both help me enrich my life through the achievement of my goals. An environmental writer must combine two disparate disciplines — hard science and a creative branch of humanities. I want to convey my passion and love for the environment to others through the written word. However, in many traditional academic settings this combination of disciplines could be difficult to attain. The interdisciplinary program will broaden my mind, and provide ideas for my future that I have yet to consider.

Additionally, the Honors College conception as a small liberal arts school within a major university appeals to my basic love of learning because it offers a liberal arts education while still providing access to the various benefits of a top research university.

I am completing an interdisciplinary experience in high school through my studies in the International Baccalaureate program. The program focuses on the development of a well-rounded academic personality. I desire the same intellectually stimulating experience in college, because I cannot know one subject well without knowledge of many others. This is evident in my future goals, where I hope to combine science and English into a tool to raise awareness about land conservation and the natural world. This is how I believe I will be able to contribute to the community and make a difference in the world. The Honors College curriculum will help me achieve this goal.

# My Greek Roots 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.

I am convinced that I only have friends because of my mother’s cooking. Friends always seem to come through the door when spanakopita, tiropita, baklava, and other ethnic Greek foods are on the table. Watching others become infatuated with the food I grew up with is both humorous and normal by now. I welcome friends and acquaintances to step into my alternate life so I can share with them a taste of my culture.

For many, the perception of Greek-Americans ends with Classical Greece--the Parthenon, ancient gods, the birthplace of democracy, and various famous philosophers. Today, however, growing up in a Greek-American community involves attending Greek School, being a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, going to Greek dance after school and in between soccer games, and of course being a part of a Greek family. At a young age, I started learning the language in Greek school, learning relevant phrases like, “Nikko has one goat.” Not until later in grade school, when I started to decipher biology terms, did I start to appreciate knowing a language that is the root of many of my vocabulary words.

The Greek Church, the largest organization in the Greek-American community, has enabled me to be a part of a group of people that provides many opportunities for community and service. GOYA, Greek Orthodox Youth Association, has proved to be a rewarding social experience growing up. It builds the groundwork for getting involved in with projects and services and has opened me up to various communities in need of assistance. I have enjoyed working together with similar Greek organizations on projects and events, enabling me to develop leadership qualities and a strong sense of kinship.

Another way I have been able to preserve my identity and culture is through Greek dance. Most people assume I wear a toga and perform rain dances for the gods when I tell them I do Greek dance. I explain to them that Greeks dance at festivals and ceremonies, in preparation for war and in celebration of victories. We dance at weddings till all hours of the night, just to celebrate life. Almost every dance has a story behind it. Today we do not only dance in competition; we dance to share and keep our culture alive and to honor our ancestors’ traditions. Dance has taught me discipline and challenged my patience. However, as an important part of my heritage, I value the lessons it has taught me and the friendships it has allowed me to create above everything else.

Being a part of my family also meant spending summers in Greece. These trips put everything from Greek school to dance in perspective. Summer days included playing soccer in the streets with the children of my grandmother’s village and conversing with family members in the language I have been taught to speak. I visited the remains of my grandfather’s village, which had been bombed during World War II, and admired him as he stood in front of the stone that used to be his home. He stood there, proud and without a complaint. My family’s rich past has become my present, and I look forward to carrying on my roots in the future. Besides the lessons of how to cook lamb or how to pick a nice Greek husband, my family has shown me the importance of being a part of a community that will be there for me through every obstacle in life.

While my identity is not only composed of my Greek side, that culture has played a significant role in my development. When friends want desperately to try my mother’s food, I am proud to share it with them. For with every new food they try, I can share with them the culture that has given me the foundation of who I am and who I aspire to be.

# Exploring New Territory Anonymous

## "Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?"

I am an explorer. At 10 months old, my travels began with my family’s first move. Over the years, we have been relocated because of my father’s company, gradually bringing a family of five from East to West. Five states, five homes, and five experiences: I am from where I have been.

Wandering is said to be aimless and with no purpose, and each moment my father sat my siblings and me down, I would have agreed with this seemingly appropriate definition to describe moving. There was no reason for me to start all over again as the alien outsider in a new school each time; my dad did not need to accept another new job opportunity. As I wandered however, I learned, I adapted, and I became somebody who thrived in new environments, taking in new cultures and ideas along the way. There was a purpose, and in it I grew from a wanderer into something else, an explorer.

I have had the privilege to not only discover diversity but to distinguish and develop myself in each and every state: New York, Virginia, Minnesota, Arizona, and California. From shoveling snow in Minnesota to hiking through cacti in Arizona, the transitions were both intimidating and exciting. At a young age I learned to adjust to new people and places. Not wanting to be stuck as a stranger to my new classmates, I took the initiative in getting to know them. I met new personalities and tried to grasp new ways of thinking, many times questioning my own previously-held worldviews. New ideas and perspectives clouded my perspective, but as I grew, I explored more, and the fog cleared to reveal the significance of diversity. With every move, every accent, and every new friend, I increasingly appreciated living in a nation that stems from a variety of cultures, backgrounds, and religions, all contributing to the vitality and richness of its people. With these experiences, I developed my own character, with my own background and heritage, open-minded and ready to embrace the world rich in different ethnicities, personalities, and political perspectives.

Today, as a leader of the student inclusion committee of student government in my current school, I am able to take my experiences and apply them in assisting students to become involved and united. Whether they are new students or those just trying to find a place in the crowd, I have had the opportunity to help them adapt and take in everything that the school and other students have to offer. From different backgrounds and with different stories, each student has a contribution to make. From planning new-student lunch-ins to organizing an anti-bullying week, I have had the privilege of opening the door to students and illustrating the beauty that their individuality contributes to a student body.

While I traveled, I also started to develop my educational interests. New soccer teams meant witnessing new injuries. New towns meant observing and interacting with different doctors. I heard of and saw unique health issues and became intrigued with the human body. As my compassion, curiosity, and creativity started to develop, I realized that I wanted to pursue a career in medicine and help the human race thrive. I thank my experiences for giving me the capabilities to follow my dreams and aspirations by setting the foundation from which the rest of my character has been shaped. The initial transitions were tough, but I value the friendships I have made across the country and the lessons I have learned. Now I look forward to another exploration filled with new people and concepts. I am an explorer and I am ready to take on and discover my new destination.

# The Difference Between Throats and Toes Sarah Tokos

## Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?

The wind whipped across my face, grabbing the hair I had attempted to coax into a ponytail, pushing it into my mouth, and tangling it around my neck. Water splashed with unrelenting ferocity off the blade spinning desperately in my hands. My muscles ached with a vengeance and my throat stung from the harsh intake of breath, but I ignored my discomfort. I wanted this race more than anything.

For the past three years, my favorite part of the day has been settling into my kayak seat, slipping my feet beneath the foot strap and on either side of the tiller bar, and sinking my blade into the murky, pollen-filled lake that was my training arena. School day afternoons consisted of lifting weights in my high school weight room, surrounded only by testosterone-fueled young men, and then spending two hours on the water. Because I fell in love with a unique water sport in ice-infested Minnesota, most of my training has been done on my own and thus required a large amount of willpower, extensive cross-training, and a working stop watch. Each spring, summer, and fall, I spent hundreds of hours working with my amazingly supportive coach to condition my mind and body in hopes of achieving my dream. I yearned to compete at the Junior World Sprint Kayak Championships in Welland, Ontario.

My only chance was to race at trials in April and make the team. April is a fine month for states on the coast that have open water and cooperating weather. Minnesota, however, was not bothered by my dream. Lakes remained stubbornly frozen, despite my daily efforts to warm them with my gaze. With trials swiftly approaching, I had been on the water a total of five hours in the preceding seven months. While I knew I would be at a disadvantage, I refused to let the things I could not control nibble away at my confidence—if my hairdryer blowing full blast would not melt the ice, there was nothing else I could do. All of this preparation and anticipation, doubt and fear, worry and hope, would culminate in the millisecond the bow of my boat touched the finish line.

I did not need to turn my head to see who finished first, but I turned it nonetheless. I did not want to believe the emptiness gathering in my stomach. I did not want to see the three boats sweep across the line ahead of me. But that is what I saw, and the reality of failure was numbing.

The numbers smirked and taunted from their place on the time sheet so hastily slapped on the wall with a jagged piece of scotch tape. I struggled to control the corners of my mouth and keep the feeling of childish disappointment from showing on my face. The most difficult part though, was acting kindly towards the girls who did make the team. Although I had missed a goal, I knew that good sportsmanship was more important than floundering in sobbing waves of self-pity.

Until then, I had never had to face real failure. Failure on a vocab quiz or in a soccer match, yes. But failure of a dream is an uppercut to the throat compared to those toe-stubs. It knocked me breathless with its harshness. But I refused to crawl under a rug and collect dust while lamenting what could have been. Instead, I found the strength to congratulate those girls sincerely on winning the spot I had so badly craved. I worked hard, and got my spot back one year later.

# An Evolution Anonymous

## Tell us a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.

The chilly air of the California winter tingled across my face, my arms filled with dolls, bears, and toy cars. I cautiously trudged past the stores, making sure to not drop anything. I slipped. Before I knew it, the toys had all tumbled to the ground. The sound of children’s laughter filled my ears, but rather than feeling embarrassed, I broke into a wide smile. I hadn’t realized it at the time, but my goofiness would help mold a strong relationship with the children entrusted to me.

I was shocked to learn that, even today, many of the 189,000 Vietnamese-Americans who live in Little Saigon, one of the oldest and largest Vietnamese-American groups in the country, are refugees. So unfortunately, many families cannot enjoy the simple delights and luxuries of celebrating the holiday season. As the son of two Vietnamese immigrants myself, I felt a debt to my own community. With donations from my Key Club, I decided to reach out to a local church and asked them to connect us with refugees from around the area. I wanted to make sure these kids wouldn’t go empty-handed this holiday season, to instead finally have the opportunity to truly celebrate Christmas.

On that December morning, crowds of people had lined up in front of the Asian Garden Mall, a centerpiece of the Vietnamese-American community. Lines of children gleefully held onto their parents’ hands, waiting for their turn to shop for their presents with one of our volunteers. The smiles of excitement on their faces were contagious, and I couldn’t help but smile along.

I was given the honor of taking Thomas and his little brother, Sam, to buy their first Christmas presents. They loved every moment of it. They ran from store to store, mirth etched across their faces. They finally felt free, alive. Thomas aspires to one day become a doctor, so I bought him his own little doctor’s kit that he could use to build his dreams. As he slowly unwrapped it, his eyes began to light up in excitement. He rushed over and wrapped his arms around me, and I realized others’ happiness made me happy too. From just a small gift like this, I was able to give these children newfound hope, something to hold on, and something to finally be able to take for granted. Who knew that such a simple gift would give children the opportunity to make their dreams come true?

But beyond the bonds, I gained something else - the beginning of an evolution of my own. I discovered the happiness and joy that come with helping those less fortunate. I realized that not too many people are able to celebrate Christmas with family and friends, eat Mom’s homemade meals, or simply enjoy life at its fullest. The word “refugee” often has a bad connotation, but I learned that my new friends aren’t bad people; they’re just in a tough situation.

Being able to have such an impact on others that day has meant much to me, but I know there’s still so much more work that needs to be done. Since then, I have taken an active role in organizations like the Special Olympics and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. With an infinite number of people out there who need help, I want to be that person who can give it to them. I want to be the one who makes the difference, the one who can change lives.

# Two Languages, One World Daniel Salazar

## 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.

I come from a culture where everything, from the language to the way one dances, is rhythmical. Everything flows freely in the mind, everything makes sense, and nothing is inhibited. I feel this sense of absolute free flow when I push the sole of my foot into the soft creamy-white carpet and turn on the music, to feel the lyrical sensation and soft rhythmical beat of Vallenato take over my body. I feel it especially when I open a book of Spanish literature, from the poems of Pablo Neruda to the magical reality of Gabriel Garcìa Màrquez.

When I entered the realm of English at age six, I felt the language as too rough, too stringent, filled with too many rules, with a comma here and a comma there. I thought that the literary, grammatical and syntactical rules of English inhibited the free flow of the mind. For me, English was like New York, with a perfect ninety degree angle between each street and avenue--too structural, while Spanish was like the streets of my native town of Medellin, Colombia, with a bunch of curves here and there, a kind of innate simplicity. Yet as the years progressed, I came to fully realize the importance of mixing these two languages and valuing diversity.

I remember my mom sitting on the living room couch when we had just moved in from Colombia. She had her untamed hair up in a bun and me upon her lap. We looked around the apartment. There was nothing, just white space. She had a weathered looking book full of poems beside her. She opened the book to a poem by Neruda, one accompanied by a picture of the calming sea, whose ripples kissed the sand. While I was transfixed on this picture, she recited the following words:

“Necesito del mar porque me enseña:

no sé si aprendo música o conciencia:

no sé si es ola sola o ser profundo…”

Although I didn’t understand the impact these words had at the time, the words were soothing in my seven year-old-heart. Her words were just like the waves of the sea, cascading from her mouth, coursing through me. Those words gave me a conciencia, a word that, when translated to English, I think, doesn’t carry the same emotion. The phrase with the closest meaning I can think of would be “an inner peace”. The reason I felt such inner peace was not only the way she recited the poem, but also the flow with which the Spanish phrases traveled to my ears. This was the way Neruda meant for them to be read. Spanish evokes vibrant human emotion: utter joy, excitement, and sincerity. Spanish is sustained by a flow of thought, and an understanding that everything is part of one vast existence.

English, on the other hand, with all of its structural elements, has forced me to accept that clarity is just as important as rhythm. It is just like math in the sense that it “shows” all of the steps. It is clear-cut and it makes sense. I think it doesn’t portray the natural flow of ideas as well as Spanish does; however, it does make one value the detail. It is that structure and detail that make me so vividly recall the war landscape in A Farewell to Arms and the gruesome death of Snowden in Catch-22, one of my favorite novels.

Each day I encounter both of these languages: Spanish at home and English at school. Each language compels me to put ideas in its own words. One day, I can sit in my chair and engulf myself in the world of English, reading books such as Miraclesby C.S Lewis and discovering clarity about the existence of God. The next day, I can submerge my mind into the depths of Gabriel Garcìa Màrquez's Cien Años de Soledad. I feel blessed to know and appreciate the qualities of both literatures, both languages.

# First, Sketchbook Anonymous

## 2. 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?

I gasped when I peeked into Christine’s sketchbook, a kaleidoscope of vibrant colors and eye-popping characters. Hoping to see more of her drawings, I eagerly tried to befriend her. Although Christine covered her sketchbook at first, she slowly let her guard down and opened it.

As we became closer, we would sit at our circular table in the cafeteria and talk about our common interests: drawing and social justice. Passionately identifying the micro-aggressions around us, she often asked for my view. I felt naturally indignant about those injustices, yet too shy and immature to express my opinion. Frustrated, I joined the speech and debate team to keep up with Christine. I competed as an expository orator to better articulate my ideas and a Lincoln-Douglas debater to polish my arguments.

Heavily involved in debate, I spent less time at our circular table with Christine. Although we were still friends, I only heard snippets of her life. So when I heard about her decision to forgo college, I was astonished. Knowing her potential, I was convinced that without a degree, her artistic talent would go unseen in this materialistic world. I needed her to go to college. I returned to the circular table. Surprised, Christine immediately introduced me to her post-graduation plan of working on her web-comic. She reached for her sketchbook, only to gasp when I shoved it aside. Understanding both Lincoln-Douglas and her character well, I bombarded her with preemptive arguments regarding the importance of college.

Had there been a judge sitting in front of me, no doubt that I would have won this debate; except there were no ballots, only a girl who cowered back to clutch her sketchbook.

Indulging in the echoes of my eloquence and naively expecting a token of appreciation, I barely noticed when Christine took her sketchbook and left without a word. Since then, she has scarcely updated her art blog or talked to me. I couldn’t believe that what she pushed me into, debate, was the very thing that pushed her away from me. But how? After all, everything I said was in her best interests… Or was it? I tried to apologize, but I was the inarticulate one this time. Even now, her sketchbook remained closed to me.

Debate had taught me that there was little to fear if my message was clear and selfless. But communications were not like debates. Under a condescending assumption, I arbitrarily told Christine how to live her life. In fact, I hardly listened to her feelings because I was too busy feeding my voracious ego and arguing for the satisfaction of arguing, instead of for Christine’s future. Ignoring her feelings, I misinterpreted debate as a panacea to communicate with a dear friend.

Now, sitting at our empty circular table, I regret not listening. I hope to never lose friends like that again. Since then, I have switched my style from attack to exchange in Lincoln-Douglas debate. I felt calmer and more confident once I stopped worrying about not being the skilled one. As a result, I found fresher perspectives of the subject-matter and articulated my ideas clearer.

I used to enjoy showing off my clever yet impractical methods to the students I tutored. Now I try to withhold judgement, patiently observe how they approach the problems, and then kindly point out potential mistakes. We currently work together to correct fundamental misconceptions we originally overlooked.

What my stressed out friends need most is not a bombastic preacher, but a firm shoulder to lean on. So, when they come for consolation, instead of forcing my opinions on them, I appreciate their trust and respond with unconditional positive regard while listening.

Now, I would prefer to be kind rather than right in communications. Unlike speech and debate, my aptitude for speech is useless until I looked at other people’s sketchbook first.

# 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.

# The Box Anonymous

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

Staring out at the rain pouring down onto the sidewalk beside the airport exit, I thought one thing. This is foreign territory. Just moments before, I had found myself facing down a horde of about 60 squealing EXO (a Kpop idol group) fangirls. This was my first impression of Korea. Reeling with shock, I labeled this event in my head as something that "Did Not Fit" in my carefully kept box titled "My Identity." Everything was neatly organized and filed away in my metaphorical box. I quietly played the flute in concert band. Check. I maintained steady good grades, and always completed work on time. Check. I knew a little Korean, but not enough to alienate me from my American friends. Check. This version of myself was all that I had ever known – and I had no desire to venture outside the box. However, now that I had moved, I had no choice. I had officially gone rogue.

Although a South Korean citizen, I had never visited my mother country in all my 16 years of living in America. I was now permanently living here. I ached for Seattle in a way that I felt nobody could understand. I vowed to never call my new apartment home. I realized just how much I didn't fit in either country. As a full-blooded Korean, I look as if I should speak Korean fluently. However, I was raised as an American. I stood in class every day and recited the Pledge of Allegiance with my fellow classmates. Remembering this as I stepped out into the rain, I felt like an imposter. Who was I? I had no idea.

At first, I was horrified that my new life was so insolent as to not recognize the rules of "My Identity." I had always been the student that teachers knew they could trust to study and turn in work before the due date. Now, I was a student with no reputation. Not only that, but there was no concert band where I could stay invisible, and my new friends spoke limited English. Just like that, my carefully kept box fell apart. For the first time in my life, I was doing things without planning them.

I may not have needed to be invisible, but I did miss the community that came along with being in a musical group. One day, I decided to start an orchestra at my school, and gathered up a group of people with the help of a friend. We received permission, and thus the first completely student run club at our school was born. At my counselor's urging, I applied for student council. To my surprise, I was admitted. During class, I began to raise my hand without obsessively planning my answer to absolutely make sure I was right. It was okay to be wrong, I found, as long as I kept trying. It was at my school where I found people exactly like me, people who were also caught between two cultures. My classmates understood me, and I found that my two cultures didn't have to be separate. I joined Model UN, where I realized that I actually love talking and debating with people. Once, a friend told me that I was the most outgoing and confident girl in our grade. I was taken aback, but I realized that I had truly changed a lot.

Now, I don't categorize things in my mind's box. A person cannot be filed away neatly in categories and checklists. I have started calling my new apartment "home," and I've found the fragile balance between my two cultures. I have grown up. I am free of the box.

# The Tap Shoes 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.

On my first day of third grade, I wore tap shoes to school. The majority of my elementary school years was a blur, but I vividly remember this occurrence as it is the earliest memory I have of going decisively against the crowd. They were a creamy beige color with a dainty ribbon tied into a tiny bow, and aluminum taps that were so reflective if you turned them towards the light in a certain way, they’d blind you. Although my interest in dance was short-lived, those shoes made me feel like an icon, a Fred Astaire of some sort. My eight-year-old self made the executive decision to wear them to school.

So when the day came, I, with the utmost defiance, slipped on the tap shoes, ran onto the bus, and made my way to school. As I strode into the building, nearly all the students turned their heads in response to the rhythmic clacking that echoed from the aluminum taps hitting the shiny, epoxy floors. Only a few hours into the school day, my English teacher pulled me aside and curtly explained that the noise from my shoes was distracting, then proceeded to walk me down to the nurse’s office. The nurse was lighthearted about the situation, mentioning how my footwear dilemma was the first one she had encountered in her career. After a brief discussion with the teacher, the nurse pulled out a roll of masking tape and began taping the bottom of the shoes in order to dull out their sound. Considering that I chose to wear them solely for their unique silver taps, I was thoroughly disappointed. My special shoes were now like every other pair I owned, with no sign of the individuality I possessed at such a young age.

My footwear of choice that day was not to purposely garner attention, but instead represented the non-conformist attitudes I continued to stand by throughout my life. To my fifth-grade school pictures, I wore a ridiculous pink dress because it was my desire to do so, and even then, I was comfortable with being different from the majority. Fitting in with my peers was a secondary concern when compared to my need for self-expression. As my academic career progressed and my interests grew, I learned to embrace what was unique to me - even if it was challenging, even if it was outlandish. I didn’t dress, act, or even draw a certain way in order to seek approval from my peers, but because my nonconformist qualities were what shaped my identity - mostly, after a time, my psychology.

Is the power of non-conformity only displayed through outward appearances? Of course not. Even when faced with hardships or opportunities, I approach them differently than someone else standing in my shoes might. And in doing so, I make the problems I encounter my own, and often, come up with a solution that no one would have expected.

Those old tap shoes and frilly dresses are most likely stuffed into a closet collecting dust, yet they are still a reminder of my non-conformist choices that I am proud of - the very first symbols of individuality that eventually shaped my life and my future.

# Compliment? Anonymous

## Describe an experience of cultural difference or insensitivity you have had or observed. What did you learn from it?

It was my second time visiting Qatar as a presenter at its leadership conference. Amid the bustle, I managed to re-connect with Adeeba, a friend of mine from the online MUN program I pioneered. By then, the novelty of being in the Middle East was fading and while I was careful about my dress and actions, I was not especially cautious about my speech.

"Your hijab is really pretty! It looks great," I mentioned.

"Oh, I can get you one tomorrow! I can't give it to your right now, but I'll bring another one like this," she insisted genuinely.

Confused, I loaded the conversation with a few jokes to shield my bewilderment and treated it as a passing remark.

The following week in psychology class, in discussing social scripts, we watched a video titled "10 Surprising Ways to Offend People in Other Countries." In the darkened classroom, the stream of white subtitles "Making a compliment like "I love your couch" in Arab and African nations can make your host feel awkwardly obliged to give you the item" caught my attention.

Suddenly, Adeeba's insistent remark bubbled up in my memory and I understood that the exchange was not a lighthearted joke.

I do not know what Adeeba thought when I complimented her hijab. I know from our solid friendship that she would not be seriously offended by my insensitivity of the situation. However, had the same conversation occurred between an acquaintance and me, perhaps I would have lost the chance to connect with an individual.

I am fortunate to have experienced this surprising encounter with Adeeba but it has also taught me to take nothing for granted. No matter how positive something may appear, in a different place, different time, under different circumstances, it may just not have the intended effect.

# Engaging the Arts Anonymous

## Describe an experience of cultural difference, positive or negative, you have had or observed. What did you learn from it?

The second high school play I acted in was a curiosity, a documentary production written and rehearsed at the same time. The OMI Project was an attempt to document the history and culture of the combined district of the Ocean View, Merced Heights, and Ingleside (OMI) neighborhoods that surrounds my high school. Because the OMI is San Francisco's most ethnically diverse district, we knew race would figure prominently in the play. Indeed, we dug up interviews about baseball legend Willie Mays' troubles with buying a house in an all-white neighborhood, and the neighbors' reaction to school desegregation. The history of the district's demographic changes was an important component of the play's narrative, but we needed some method of showing the OMI's modern diversity.

That's where Mr. Lawson came in. Lonnie Lawson is a soft-spoken 72-year-old African-American man who was president of the OMI homeowners’ association at the time the play was written. He has lived through the OMI’s transitions from a White working class, to a predominantly African-American, to a majority Asian, and now to a multi-ethnic gentrified neighborhood. Playing him in a verité style, evoking his downtempo speech patterns, vaguely rural accent, and whispered mannerisms was the challenge I tackled in order to get into the play's unfamiliar topic of race

Walking the fine line between authenticity and caricature kept my interest in not just the script, but also the message of the play. Lawson's main contribution to the OMI's spirit of cultural inclusivity was the development of Brooks Park, a community garden designed to help immigrant neighbors "speak through vegetables, if not through language," as Peter Vaernet, Lawson's collaborator on the park project, likes to say. Restoring the park from a dilapidated lot where dog fights and drug deals took place was a monumental effort that we hoped to do justice with our portrayal. The result is a place where people of all races, nationalities, and cultures can go to enjoy nature.

I've witnessed that sense of OMI inclusivity firsthand on two occasions. The first was during our Ingleside library benefit performance of The OMI Project that we put on after our school theatre premiere. Instead of a set stage, we performed the show in the rec room of a local church whose “rose window” is a mural of the African-American leaders who made the OMI a sanctuary of tolerance. Surrounded by a collage of visionary faces, the audience and the players alike really felt they had contributed to Lawson and Vaernet's vision of creating safe spaces for cultural exchange. The other moment arose when I was doing some landscaping work at Brooks Park and saw Vaernet, a native Dutch and English speaker, greet gardeners in fluent Chinese. What might otherwise seem an unexpected common ground between people of far-flung cultural backgrounds is actually the centerpiece of the OMI. Through our stage production and subsequent volunteering at the park, I've learned how a little creativity and labor can go a long way towards engendering that curious but fulfilling sense of multiculturalism. These are big ideas, but they can come alive closest to home.

# Folding Futures Maria Scanlan

## Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.

In fourth grade, I learned how to fold “fortune tellers”-- square, pointy origami creations. My class crowded together as one of our peers patiently explained the process, and we followed attentively, eagerly grasping our pieces of hastily torn out paper, and determinedly folded, creased, and fitted them until we reached the desired shape.

To make our newly created figures tell our fortunes, we were instructed to write colors on the outside, square side of the flaps, and numbers on the inverse, triangle side. Beneath the numbers, we lifted the flaps and giggling, hurriedly scribbled what our futures would hold. "You will be a rockstar!" "You will have 14 kids!"

After that lesson, I became obsessed, folding teller after teller from whatever material I had on hand-- worksheets, newspapers, anything. With my equally captivated classmates, we shrieked in laughter over someone’s future job and adopted grave expressions once realizing that someone would one day have a broken leg.

Eventually, the forecasting sessions faded away. There was no longer any time to fold tellers in class, and after school, there was practice, homework, and meetings. Folding fortune tellers seemed childish and a waste of time, and soon, we had forgotten the art of making them.

Over those years, my set of tellers slowly piled up, each filled with a different set of possible futures. Sometimes, I pulled them out, chose a random one, and picked whatever numbers and colors my gut decided on that day. Some days, it was predicted that I would have my fourth grade self’s dream job: a singer. Other days, a more serious sixth grade me predicted that I would become a lawyer.

My stack of futures eventually disappeared, most likely inadvertently recycled, and I didn’t think about them anymore. I focused on my grades and on making friends, not on the silly fortunes of the past.

A few months ago, however, I made a fortune teller in class. For some reason, the paper in my hands spoke to my fingers, and suddenly they were flying from memory, jotting down numbers and colors arbitrarily, and settling for bizarre fortunes like, "You will eat only chocolate next week!" somehow unable to write more serious futures. As a fourth grader, I had no qualms on writing, "You’ll make a ton of money," or "You’ll have a happy marriage." Then, everything seemed absolutely possible, but now, it seemed almost bad luck to predict a future that was so close.

When I finished the teller, my classmates lit up, overjoyed by the idea of having their fortunes read again, however silly they were.

And then, I understood why.

Just as the fortune is the innermost layer of the teller, so too do our dreams become buried. As the realism of growing up hit my classmates and me, as we devoted ourselves to schoolwork and extracurricular activities, and as we saw the uglier things in life, we stopped believing in the magic of the teller, focusing only on the present. But our souls still believed in life’s beauty, in its endless possibilities and opportunities. I saw this hope clearest when volunteering, in the smiles of children and in those touched by the suicide prevention campaign.

To dream again and to be free of disenchantment requires more than a five minute lesson, but I’m building my stack of fortunes anew. With a fresh piece of paper, I tug my dreams from deep within me, and I let my fortunes fly with laughter and boundless imagination, for each dream is waiting for us if we reach for it.

# Snapshots Anonymous

## Our families and communities often define us and our individual worlds. Community might refer to your cultural group, extended family, religious group, neighborhood or school, sports team or club, co-workers, etc. Describe the world you come from and how you, as a product of it, might add to the diversity of the University of Washington. (Maximum: 300 words)

“This weekend we’ll be travelling to Auburn. Please make sure you sign up on the spreadsheet if you wish to compete!”

Click.

“If the U.S. were to crack down on the grey market for software vulnerabilities, it would decrease IP theft of military technology.”

Click.

“Stephanie, party of three? Your table is ready!”

Click.

“What do we do first when we want to find the greatest common factor?”

Click.

Sometimes the days feel disjointed, as if I am channel surfing, clicking through and transforming into a new character before the start of each new day.

I am the club officer who seeks out every opportunity for members to learn and compete, as if they are each a younger version of myself.

I am one of few Chinese female debaters on the national circuit. It is difficult not to blend into the racism that often papers over the individuality of Asian-Americans, and even harder to assert myself in an environment where I am constantly talked over and cut off.

I am the youngest among the staff, the bright and eager waitress running around to meet every customer’s demand with a smile.

I have encountered the best and worst of people, seeing for myself the world beyond the classroom.I am the strict but hip math teacher: the one who starts early and ends late, but never fails to offer her opinion on the best coffee shops nearby. One moment playing hide-and-seek with six-year-olds; the next, laying out my curriculum to an expectant parent.

Click.

The commonality among every ‘version’ of me, is a desire to use my different experiences to make the community a better place. I flip through my channels once more, and imagine the next ‘character’ I will add amid new adventures waiting for me next year.

# The Unlimited Box Anonymous

## Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

There it is in front of me: a box, its edges carefully encased in a glossy white wrapping paper. The exterior is plain and simple—she loves things minimalistic. Inside, an ambient light in the shape of a mystical creature glows her favorite color. There’s a handwritten poem for her too. I’m proud of all the thought that went into it.

To me, Christmas, birthdays, and all the little occasions someone might mark on a calendar as “special" are ideal for small surprises—small bits of my mind that just want to create.It has to be practical—useful yet aesthetically appealing. It has to be personal—something that highlights their importance in my life. Most importantly, it has to be spontaneous and thoughtful—no good gift should ever feel forced. Too many people think of gifts as mere tradition.Gift-giving is an art. There’s a perfect gift for everyone—you just know it when you see it. Whether in a professional environment or a personal one with the friends and family I love, a facial expression tells more than words can describe. The smile that breaks out from the look of surprise—there’s no better indication that my creativity paid off

I’ve always wanted to turn gimmicky ideas into practical realities, not for the purpose of selling, but rather so that I could give a gift nobody else could have given. Windshield wipers for glasses for the friend who lives in rainy Seattle. Camouflaging cloaks for the friend with the strict parents. Maybe, in some distant future, I’ll even create a video animator for bringing to life ideas straight from the imagination of a friend who dreams too much.Perhaps it’s because I grew up in a community that has always given to me—I know how good it feels to receive that surprise, so I try every little thing to recreate that feeling for those around me. Creativity, to me, is not just thinking outside the box.It’s deciding what’s inside it.

# Hyphenation 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.

One of the first dances I ever performed was a trio with my two best friends: a frivolous, cheerful number with far too many sequins, gauzy handkerchiefs disguising the awkwardness of our skinny arms. Backstage, we trembled in terror at the prospect of presenting ourselves in front of the friends we had so foolishly invited. But it was too late to worry about how embarrassed I felt telling people I did Chinese dance, too late to worry about our distinctly foreign (and undeniably Chinese) music and costumes, and too late to worry about our choreography, the facial expressions and wild gestures that made even us giggle. Because then it was our turn: smiling through our teeth for dear life, we blinked hard in the lights that seemed harsher than before, doing our best not to recoil from the dark mass of whispering grandparents and chattering toddlers.

Somehow, we survived—and we kept coming back for more. For six days a week, [Redacted] Dance Academy was home to dozens of girls like me: Chinese-Americans, otherwise estranged from our heritage, seeking to rediscover it here. On the scarred marley floor, we practiced pliés and tendus, panwan and yueliangmen. And as we learned the languages of movement, we relearned the languages we had taught ourselves to forget.

In that simple studio we breathed in the musky odor of sweat, dust, and exhaustion, and breathed out the scent of camaraderie and shared experience. As we painted on our faces for performances, we recalled all the times tipsy white guys not-so-jokingly asked if we were sisters, while other moms at competitions gushed about our “fascinating” and “exotic” costumes. And we pondered the way the catcalls we received on the street were doubly disarming because, as we were inevitably reminded, we weren’t just girls, we were Asian girls; not just dolls, but China dolls.

My experiences feeling foreign as a minority raised further questions--why, and how, and what it means when we perform the traditional dances of ethnic minorities that Han Chinese had all but exterminated; how our performances of the Tibetan cowgirl or Mongolian bowl dances intersect with disputes that continue to this day. But isn’t it better to uncover and investigate than it is to obscure and ignore? And isn’t it better that we can at least learn, understand, and appreciate the dances of Tibet and the others, even if dissecting their history and politics isn’t nearly as simple?

Dance provided me a community and a context to center these conversations. And over time, dance became a way for me to reconcile the hyphen bridging the ocean between Chinese and American, to somehow take the threads of something long lost and weave them into a cloth more beautiful than before. Distinctive costumes and dozens of ethnic dance styles infused me with an appreciation of the kaleidoscope that is Chinese culture; dance reminded me to find beauty in each toss of the head and flick of the fingers, and to find beauty in myself.

The answers come slowly, but they come all the same. As messy as it can be, the process of figuring out what it means to perform Chinese dance has been for me a vehicle to understanding what it means to be a Chinese woman in America: a dance in itself, to be performed on the stage of American society. I’ve come to realize that no matter the setting, performance is a process, not a product. It’s a journey of exploration, understanding, and self-discovery, and my journey so far has been much more than just learning to move my body. It’s been the understanding that Chinese and American aren’t mutually exclusive; it’s been an awareness of how social location shapes experience. And it’s become a way to move forward: I think I’m ready for this show to begin.

# Interdisciplinary Studies - UW Honors Anonymous

## The Honors Program’s core curriculum is comprised of interdisciplinary courses, experiential learning, and reflection via a portfolio. Why do you think an interdisciplinary education is important and how do you think it will impact your undergraduate experience?

Whether we like it or not, life is messy, and the world is messy; it doesn’t make sense to assume that the subjects taught in school are abstract and insular concepts, neatly categorized and inevitably isolated from one another by the five-minute passing periods between them. Debate has exposed me to vast fields of academic scholarship that I never imagined to even exist, and I’m glad for it. From Agamben to Zizek and everything in between, I’ve discovered that oftentimes, whether it’s IR theory, scientific publications, critical race theory or gender studies, interdisciplinary connections are not just the products of curiosity and exploration but also crucial to the understanding of the academic subject itself.

Research my debate partner and I have done, for instance, centers on how the portrayal of Chinese women in the media, in film, and in pop culture reflects the history of American engagement with China in terms of patterns of colonialism, immigration, and economic and racial integration and exclusion. A second key component of our research is concerned with how the above ideas frame and implicate American policymaking apparatuses with regards to political engagement in the domestic sphere, and foreign policy on a global stage. To refuse to investigate these connections in any academic area is to miss key parts of the story, and to severely hinder attempts at taking action.

I think that interdisciplinary studies are central to achieving a holistic worldview, and necessarily relevant beyond academia: for what is a scientist without awareness of the societal implications of research; what is an economist without awareness of how history plays a role in gentrification or racial disparities; what is an engineer without awareness of the public policy that frames her projects; and what is an IP lawyer without awareness of the technology she defends?

# What impact do you want to make in the world? Select a problem or social issue and explain why it is important to you. What do you need to learn to contribute toward its solution? Anonymous

## What impact do you want to make in the world? Select a problem or social issue and explain why it is important to you. What do you need to learn to contribute toward its solution?

Regardless of where you come from, police brutality is currently the hot topic in media. With countless accusations of police using excessive force making the headlines, it has generated unfavorable views against those in law enforcement. Race is viewed as a driving factor for inciting police to lash out, but it is much more than that.

You may recall the death of Tamir Rice, which didn’t only affect the Cleveland community, but generated a national outcry. Though undoubtedly a tragedy, it was clearly preventable. Racism was cited as the instigator for the incident. While supporters of the officer responsible for the death will deny this, there is one thing for certain; excessive force was used. Officer Timothy Loehmann opened fire within seconds of arriving on the scene. I would attribute this to Loehmann’s lack of training and screening. Not only did he make an incredibly sporadic decision that resulted in the loss of the life of a child, he caused an uproar across the nation, sparking mass criticism of public law enforcement.

As a Clevelander, this topic has struck close to home to the point where I was even a witness to a particular incident. This past Tuesday, I came to the corner of Crocker and Detroit Road to find traffic at a stop. I noticed what seemed to be police attending to a car crash at the corner, but only seconds later, I heard several gunshots. An unarmed man laid motionless on the ground while an officer attempted to usher the traffic away from the scene. I zoned out, I don’t remember the drive home. But what will stick with me is witnessing the death of a man so close to home. Was excessive force used? Possibly. But this shouldn’t be a debate that occurs when there is a law enforcement induced homicide.

Americans should have the peace of mind that their law enforcement is properly trained in handling high pressure situations. Although body camera may help to identify circumstances of police brutality, it can’t reverse the damage that’s already been done. Therefore, it is imperative to prevent instances of excessive force. With something as valuable as human lives on the line, a change needs to be made. When speaking with my friend’s father, a local police chief, I learned that when training new officers, the emphasis on officer safety, is emphasized so heavily that they refer to it as the “first rule of law enforcement”. The notion that every seemingly minor encounter has the potential to turn deadly is drilled into the rookies’ heads. The first thing that needs to be done is to create a clear cut definition for what constitutes an appropriate use of force. Currently, there is no national standard, allowing this to be up to the interpretation of individual police departments. This forces officers to act in a reflexive way, often firing their gun out of fear, even when it is unnecessary. Upon reaching a general definition, police academies can begin implementing training that involves detecting and eliminating officer bias, deescalating deadly situations and taking care when dealing with vulnerable populations such as the mentally ill and individuals who do not understand English.

Besides learning how to deal with violent situations, it is imperative to decrease the number of violent situations in the first place. This can be done through greater police involvement in the community. This concept of community policing involves the police department working collaboratively with citizens. By being loyal to one region, officers can create relationships with their communities, working together to prevent crime rather than to simply fight it. They can also take an active role in the community by becoming involved with issues besides crime fighting, such as educational and political causes. Through a greater emphasis on situational training and prevention, police brutality no longer has to be something that keeps us up at night.