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**Sample essays 2017**

**Williams College**

**The Absurd, The Prom Anthony Haddad**

**In the space provided below, or on a separate sheet if necessary, please describe which activity (extracurricular and personal activities or work experience) has had the most meaning for you, and why.**

In ninth grade, we learned that Voltaire's Candide was a satire on society, expressed through the absurd extremities Candide must face. In "What Befell Candide among the Bulgarians", 'our hero' must 'run the gauntlet six and thirty times through the whole regiment, or to have his brains blown out with a dozen musket-balls'. Two years later, as Prom Committee President, such a dilemma hit close home. But who was playing this cruel satire on my life? Any path I attempted seemed near-fatal. Many were disillusioned about this "First Ever Prom", few were dedicated or willing to help, and people bluntly said it could not be done.

After all, though, we lived in suffocating Saudi Arabia, where a heavily publicized COED gathering, moreover, a dance, would be impossible. So was my call to empowerment. I became Prom for six months. I inhaled menu plans, and exhaled decoration themes. I spoke royalty items, and heard ticket sales. Never before had I ever felt a task so personal, so symbiotic, so me. May 30th, 2002, "Midsummer Night's Dream" was ready: the lamps twinkled, the tiered fountain sparkled, and the enchanted garden exuded life. It was the most ecstatic and gratifying night of my life...As I ushered my classmates out, one of my senior friends, with tears in her eyes, begged me to extend the Prom just another half hour. All these sleepless nights, this hardship, this aggravation, seemed somehow to be worth it. For one whole night, I felt fulfilled, achieved, accomplished... Satisfaction glared me in the eye: I delved in it.

# An Academic Affair Anthony Haddad

## This personal statement helps us become acquainted with you in ways different from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. It will demonstrate your ability to organize thoughts and express yourself. We are looking for an essay that will help us know you better as a person and as a student. Please write an essay (250-500 words) on a topic of your choice or on one of the options listed below. You may attach your essay on separate sheets (same size, please). Also, please indicate your topic by checking the appropriate box below.

Oh, you naughty girl you! NO, I can't spend the night, I have so much work to do. I'm sorry...look...I promise I'll make it up to you on the weekend. I won't even go see my friends on Friday. Yeah, I promise. Sure, of course I think about you...I think about you all the ti-what!?! Now you think I'm cheating on you? Listen, don't make this any bigger than it already is. I said I got some important stuff to do, and I'll see you later!

I just had a talk with her. Didn't go too well...Well what more does she want from me? Three hours a night isn't good enough? But wait! Allow me to clarify things! This is not some petty teenage love quarrel, but a gruesome, drawn out war I have engaged in for much of my life. The "significant other" I argued with above is not a girlfriend, but uniquely, a void filled in my life by....a BED: that's right! A bed! I'm unfaithful to sleep! I cheat on sleep like an adulterous husband, like a tango dancer that has had one too many partners! I "sleep around": just about anywhere- in the car, on the lunch table, in history class-I'm high on life while simultaneously, nearly every individual component within my environment has a near sleep-inducing effect on me. But I realize now by the near end of my high school term, I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

"Are you O.K. honey? Lately, you've seemed a little hara-kiriish-well, I mean, you're way up there with your potential...you do have a lot on your plate." Many concerned teachers have approached me with this same, almost robotically preset inquiry. My Algebra II/Trig. teacher, apparently with a bachelor's in psychology, called me in once for a one-on-one. From his line of questioning, it was obvious he was looking for the tell-tale signs of suicide...No, I'm not suicidal! I have a wonderfully loving family, great friends, a great school: life is grand! I'm involved in so many things because that's the only way I like it. While it may be somewhat painful the night of, the next morning, I'm amazed at having finished my math homework, written an English essay, and memorized all my lines for the play. What I do not like, though, is the word potential..."Calm down man, you're way ahead of your potential" someone once said. A potential attempts to impose a calculated box around one's achievements, limiting their possible accomplishments. If I am convinced my potential is an '8', my every effort from then on will be to achieve a '9'. Potential is an individual's promise to one's self: one of excellence-to strive to achieve, to succeed everyday, to encapsulate yourself within a shell by morning and break through it by night. Only a quitter has a fixed potential.

I must say now, this whole 'cheating-on-sleep' idea is somewhat exaggerated and meant for comical effect. Surely, I am not an insomniac, nor am I narcoleptic, and I don't intend on changing in college and making up for this 'lost' nap-time. But all I know for sure is this: if commitment to excellence comes at the expense of 'cheating-on-sleep', file me for adultery, 'cuz I'm not changing!

# Ignoring Apples Brittany Adam

## Describe a time you dealt with a moral problem that you treated differently the second time you faced it.

St. Augustine tells us, "It is not true to say that a thing rightly done once should not be changed." I know this is true because of my experience with my grandfather's failing health. My grandfather, Sinclair Adam, is a gentleman farmer in Chester County, Pennsylvania. In the fall, he harvests apples, which he offers to friends and neighbors, even my family in California. Every tree in the orchard bears a different variety of apple - winesaps, Johnathans, macouns, grimes, northern spys, romes, granny smiths - and our box contains a sampling with the lid labeled like a box of chocolates. In the spring he devotes himself to the trees; he prunes, chops, plants, cuts, thins, and sprays meticulously, knowing he will reap the rewards of a gorgeous and plentiful fall harvest. Last year, however, we received our annual box of the apples that he had picked and so meticulously wrapped filled with fruit that was disappointing, smaller, dryer, and more blemished than usual. We overlooked the flaws because we remembered that my grandfather's heart surgery in the spring must have prevented him from properly caring for the trees he prized so much. Under the circumstances, I chose to ignore the signs of failing health and thanked him as enthusiastically as ever for his gift. To do otherwise would have hurt his pride.

I recently visited my grandfather on a trip I made to visit East coast colleges. While the less than perfect apples could be overlooked, another occasion arose that could not be ignored. My grandfather's declining vision makes him a dangerous driver, although he has not faced that fact yet. This time I chose to take action because, although I would rather let him keep his pride and avoid an awkward confrontation, I value his life too much to risk it.

# Watch Me Callie Adam

## Common Application: General topic of your choice.

I'm sure I have the visiting team's attention by the time I finish my first lap around the soccer field. Standing in a circle, contemplating my presence, they venture guesses quietly, "Cross country? Lost? Girl's soccer?" Finishing my second lap, I can always feel them looking at me, trying to put the pieces together. I am running the laps by myself because today, like many other days, I have missed my team's warm-up when classes at school ran into practice. Although it is amusing to hear the other team's bewilderment, by the end of my warm-up I welcome the security of a group. The boys, discussing whatever had happened in school, include me with friendly greetings. I join 'my' team with a feeling of satisfaction; glancing at the visitors, I think, 'Let them ponder that for a while.'

Now the other team stands, and stares across the field trying not to look too obvious. Their coach barks, "Concentrate! Move! What are you looking at?" But chances are he knew long before he even got to the game. "It's just a girl," he says.

I knew it was risky accepting the opportunity to play with a boys' team. It is something that could have had resonating effects on me, as I am in high school, and passing judgment on people seems to be something my age group has a knack for. The team isn't my high school's either so school pride and loyalty are potentially sensitive issues as well. However, when I consider my passion to play and improve, this seems like a perfect opportunity.

I have proved myself to my own adoptive team and coach, but because others do not know me, scrimmages are always the most eventful, not to mention trying experiences. When we begin to play, the opposing team's initial confusion is to our advantage since I have no challenges. The defender who is my mark, assigned to keep me from the ball, doubtfully attempts to tackle while his exasperated coach yells. The other team's slow start doesn't always last, and in an effort to save their dignity in the face of accusations, opponents frequently resort to more than soccer, and the games become quite entertaining.

I have learned that I cannot expect my reputation to precede me; I must start over every scrimmage with the faith that after playing the ninety minutes I will have earned the respect of a fellow player. I like to see that the effort I put into each game has made me an equal. Regardless of the score, I count a game as a victory when I can look evenly at my former mark and he can sincerely, albeit quietly, say "Good game."

Every new experience requires me to earn my reputation. In the future, I expect that some first impressions of a young girl aspiring to become an engineer will have to be proven wrong, just as I strive not only to win a soccer game, but also to win my opponent's respect. I have to answer many questions about my decision and interest in playing with the boys; most people, confused, wink and grin, and ask if I really even play. These are the people who do not know me yet, and normally, smiling, I invite them to a game- "watch me."

# My Ugly Blue Poncho Ayden Winter

## Name a piece of clothing that you have found to be beneficial.

My old poncho is an absurdly bright shade of blue. It has the uncanny ability to turn anyone who wears it into a baggy, rather ridiculous-looking blob. This poncho holds a special place in my heart.

When my mom first gave it to me as I was entering eighth grade, I tried my hardest to refuse bringing the hideous thing to school. At her insistence that I not be left unprotected “in case it rains,” though, I stuffed the poncho into the bottom of my backpack and prayed I would never have any reason to use it. But one February day while I was in Latin class, disaster struck.

I was taking AP Latin at La Jolla High, although I officially went to Muirlands Middle School, because I had taken Latin privately for two years in elementary school and was ready for AP by eighth grade. The high school was close to Muirlands, so leaving Latin a bit early every day to walk up the hill to middle school was not a problem. Everything was fine - technically. The real difficulty lay in the fact that my AP Latin class was an extremely close-knit one, having had one teacher for all four years of Latin. It came as no surprise, then, that my classmates had never really accepted the “middle school kid” who had joined them a year earlier. Sure, they were outwardly nice to me, but I never had conversations with them about anything other than Latin. I was definitely still an outsider.

So, on that fateful February morning when it started pouring and I was caught without an umbrella, I was petrified by the realization that I would have to don my poncho in front of the entire Latin class - that is, if I didn’t wish to get soaked to the bone on my way back to Muirlands. Five minutes before the end of class, I sneaked off into the corner of the room, took out the poncho, and draped it over myself, trying to make as little noise as possible, praying that no one would notice. Alas, notice they did. I heard the first snickers before I had even finished putting my poncho on. I turned around dejectedly, confident I would find a room full of scornful faces.

I could not have been more wrong. My classmates were laughing all right, but their laughter was not at all malicious or humiliating. They were simply amused by my utterly ridiculous appearance. As I walked past the Latin room on my way up to Muirlands, greatly relieved, the whole class stood by the window and waved at me, still giggling. The next day, I came into class unsure of what the other students would say to me but was immediately met with “Eighth Grader, where’s your poncho?” “Eighth Grader” - the nickname stuck, as did an increased friendliness of the class toward me. Wearing that poncho gave me something to talk about with my classmates. For the first time, I was discussing a topic other than the scansion of the Aeneid Book VI, line 287. These initial conversations about my poncho led to many other unrelated but equally interesting conversations throughout the year, and I made several good friends during my last few months in AP Latin.

From then on, every time it rained, my classmates clamored for me to bring out “The Poncho.” I only wore “The Poncho” once more in front of that class, but I left AP Latin in June having bonded with what may be the most interesting and intelligent group of people I have ever met. And I owe it all to my ugly blue poncho.

# Humanitarian Disaster Ipsita Basu

## Imagine looking through a window at any environment that is particularly significant to you. Reflect on the scene, paying close attention to the relation between what you are seeing and why it is meaningful to you.

Not through tinted glass, or windows fringed with laced curtains, I stared out at the vast expanse. I was observing a beautiful environment, one of unblemished forests and cultivated Elysian fields. But this was an optimistic view because the cranes were glaring at me, ready to begin the construction of the dam and reservoir as part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project Treaty. The farmer in whose hut I was standing expressed his melancholy; I recoiled in response. All I saw was the green of the forests and the livelihood that the arable land depicted, one that would be altered with false hopes of relocation and rehabilitation. I should have been in my element; this was such an oft-debated contemporary issue.

Standing there in a foreign land with a man who spoke an alien language interjected by hand actions bespeaking vehemence, I understood that the same issues plagued the entire world. I could relate because in my own country, dam and hydroelectric power station building had lead to the loss of many sub-species and entire ecosystems. It had upset the balance of nature, leading to flooding and destruction.

The view made me reflect on how our every action as a community or individual affected our environment and how selfish it was for us to harm the environment in the name of development. As for the farmer, he shared the same fate as other plants and animals dwelling in that region; These were the last few months at his home. This scene was the last glimpse of what would remain, it made me cherish every moment my eyes beheld this sight. The scene was also a depiction of how nature should be. Truly, we should leave an untouched environment and let it remain as it is, pristine and thriving.

# Disparity Through My Windows Ipsita Basu

## 2. Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.

The colors through the window become inconsequential, only the forms and their faces significant. Through the window of my hometown Kolkata, India I see a half naked child running around on the street. His face depicts childish levity and frolic but the swell of his belly betrays the daily struggle facing him. It speaks of abject poverty, of a hand to mouth existence where life constitutes begging or odd jobs to satisfy one’s basic physiological necessities. In contrariety, when I observe children of the same age in Singapore, the city where I have lived for the past 15 years, I see the same naïve smile, cherishing moments spent on one of his three pairs of roller blades.

For me, this is one of the world’s biggest tragedies: unbearable starvation leads to death in one place and affluence necessitates the limitless squandering of money in another. In simple terms this is inequality, in economic terms, inequality of wealth and income distribution. The power of this term is in the fact that it highlights a multitude of underlying causes leading to this gap and the beauty of its solution is that it can be addressed at any level by absolutely anyone.

Inequality in income distribution is taking place due to a number of reasons. On a global scale, it is taking place because of preferential terms of trade and multi-national companies exploiting wage differentials due to which developing countries are not paid what the good or labour would be worth in a developed country. Within a country, the capital is in the hands of the rich and when they utilize it, the profits benefit only the rich, thus, never alleviating the poor from there deplorable condition. Illiteracy is one of the major causes of inequal income distribution because without education it is very difficult for people working in the primary sector or performing blue collar labour to improve their standard of living.

Inevitably, its solution would entail large scale governmental policies like progressive taxation and social benefits in addition to intervention by the WTO or IMF but every individual can play a part by simply donating small sums of money or uneaten food in their household to the soup kitchen. This situation manifests how every movement towards change starts from the grassroots level. Indeed, it is imperative that people understand this crisis and influence some redress because if an economic policies to encourage the same are implemented, they need to possess the support of the middle and affluent class.

When recently elected U.S. president Barack Obama spoke about wealth distribution in his presidential campaign, I stood up from my couch and applauded this sentiment. In fact, if the divide lessens, a lot of related factors will change. Crime rate and poverty levels will reduce, and health care for the lower class will improve.

Human rights have been integrated into the ideology of most countries as this is a basic pre-requisite for the development and advancement of the country. Using the same line of argument, do human rights not encompass the ‘right to life’ and ‘right to food’? The amalgamation between my cultural background and country of residence impels me to dwell on this problem and provide my contribution. When I volunteer at the Missionary of Charity Kolkata founded by Mother Teresa for a month every year, serving food and distributing clothes to the underprivileged gives me immense satisfaction.

I do not deny that there are a number of causes for unequal income distribution but they have to be eradicated, one at a time. One day, when I go back to my hometown or to any other neighborhood where there had been relative or absolute poverty, I do not want to see the ache in the eyes of the poor that I see now; I wish to see satisfaction, well-sustained satisfaction.

# In the Projection Booth Anonymous

## Imagine looking out a window at an environment that is particularly significant to you. Describe it.

It’s a dirty, badly-lit, second-storey room. Inside is a desk, a pile of movie posters, a phone, an answering machine, and a trash can. The desk holds my modes of entertainment for the night: a couple of YA books and a drawing pad in which I write and rewrite the first chapter of my story. I’ve learned to ignore the whirring of the film reels next door, but occasionally I stop and listen when the soundtrack swells through the viewing hole. Sometimes, when the phone rings, I answer it rather than let it go to the answering machine, and tell them what’s playing rather than let the owner’s recording play again.

When I’m absolutely certain the owner is occupied downstairs with customers, I wedge my fingers at random into the pile of posters, lift up as much as I can against the weight, and study whatever one I’ve landed on, guessing what the movie must have been about. Once a week, I check the trash can. Every time we change the movie, the owner has to fix the new reels of film, cutting out the trailers, splicing the damaged film, connecting the reels. I collect the discarded pieces: Jack Sparrow and Peter Parker and Frodo Baggins, all sooty with cigarette ashes in the bottom of the trash can.

In the summer my domain extends to the whole downtown area, and the tourist shops and docks and playgrounds are mine to explore every night. But in the winter, I have to stay inside, and if it’s a lousy movie, I only watch it twice. The rest of the time I retreat to the office upstairs, listening to soundtracks while I read. I am ten, and I take my kingdom for granted.

# Court 1 Anonymous

## Imagine looking through a window at any environment that is particularly significant to you. Reflect on the scene, paying close attention to the relation between what you are seeing and why it is meaningful to you. Please limit your statement to 300 words.

There is a friendly but serious white bench on court 1 that critically watches me from the sidelines, yet still allows me to rest upon it. The net stands at attention unlike the other courts’ droopy ones, and the court itself is bright blue with crisp white lines that always try to grab at any ball hit by me. A panel of fence protrudes between court 1 and 2 to stop balls from rolling from court to court, and it’s definitely a safety hazard. But I don’t mind because I love court 1.

I have stayed here with Hugh and hit hundreds of balls, waiting for him to say, “That’s the one I’m lookin’ for,” in his heavy Jamaican accent. I have run "suicides" while Coach Welsh blew his strident whistle, threatening that he would make us do them again if every sneaker did not touch the new white line on time. I beat Jared on this court and lost to Greg on it. I have yelled “C’mon!” after winning dramatic points so many times that when I am silent, the bench knows that something is awry and calls me over to sit.

The court has become part of me, and its familiarity is what draws me to it. When I play on court 2, it’s just not the same, and everything feels so wrong. Court 1 has been there during the good and bad matches; it has absorbed my sweat, endured the whack of my racquet, and felt the power of my forehand winners. Here, I have been challenged more than I have ever been challenged by any class, essay, or assignment. I have been forced to move out of my comfort zone to hit the difficult shots and driven to hit several buckets of balls until my serve was perfect. Court 1 pushes me to be great.

# The Storyteller Anne Mathews

## A topic of your choice.

I learned to write essays like prefabricated housing and sensible shoes—standardized, impeccable, identical. No flight of fancy dared disturb the military precision of my supporting arguments as they marched in brigades of four to five sentences, intent upon storming the fortress and seizing the A-plus as a trophy of war. Winning that war became so important that I forgot what drew me to books and poetry in the first place—not the letter grade, but the process of committing ideas to paper and the exhilaration of finally understanding.

The passion for storytelling that flourished through my younger years was battered by the onslaught of school and family responsibilities. It lay dormant until the night I read Jane Eyre for tenth grade English. Although my paper was due in two days, the book lay unopened on my desk, just another task on a seemingly endless list. I opened it expecting an indecipherable chain of subordinate clauses, but instead I found a heroine whose quiet grit and genuine self-respect made me want to know her. Her story absorbed me completely, transporting me the way that A Little Princess and Anne of Green Gables had in the time before all reading led to multiple-choice tests. It was like an old friend had come back to return something that I didn't remember losing.

Since then, I have reclaimed my identity as a reader, a writer, and a seeker. I’m the girl who loves history for its shadowy personages and bare-bones story lines ripe for retelling. After watching Elizabeth: The Golden Age one too many times, my best friend and I would exchange in-character letters as Elizabeth I and Mary, painting speculative pictures in intricate prose and sealing them with candle wax. Crossing over to contemporary fiction challenges me differently by forcing me to make familiar happenings new and engaging. No matter the genre, writing is important to me because it is both a source of escape and a source of insight. Although some of my work makes me cringe when I reread it, I keep writing because the little people who populate my imagination torment me if confined.

When I read, I take surreptitious glances between the lines, looking for the moments that go beyond being poignant and become profound. Although I'm apt to let details fly by me in my daily life, novels invite me to sit down and reflect. A good book goes beyond the surface and asks the tough questions, pushing me to explore the narrow side streets and secluded window seats of my own mind. When I use fiction as a tool to understand the world beyond myself, it becomes the tour guide who shares a local's perspective on a strange and exciting city. The best deal in the travel industry is hidden at the secondhand bookstore—enlightenment for ninety-five cents, no vaccinations required.

I am grateful to have rediscovered the joy in reading and writing for my own fulfillment. I may never be a Kafka or an Austen, but I'll remain a storyteller and a keen observer, always running off down roads less traveled in the pursuit of some glimmer of truth.

# Against the Odds Anonymous

## Topic of your choice.

Unlike most children, I loved the doctor. As I bubbled after hearing the news of a doctor's appointment, I'd begin preparing a list of questions. At the clinic, the nurses laughed at me, but I was determined to get to the bottom of my quest of how to become a doctor. By accompanying me through obstacles in life, my quest for scientific education has helped me persevere to achieve my goals.

As a child in Pakistan, I lived in an environment that did not agree with my passion. As a young girl, my job was to help out at home while the boys ran the errands outside. I made the observation that boys and girls were treated differently. More significantly, girls were not expected to excel academically. To compound this, I realized that the financial conditions of our fathers determined our futures—even if we were all boys. My hypothesis was seemingly true when I realized that none of my female cousins attended college. I concluded differently for myself. I could not adjust to this and decided that I would be a fabulous and intelligent doctor that would one day be famous worldwide. I was neither financially gifted nor a boy, but I could be just as successful if I studied diligently. My passion for science and mathematics became of second nature to me. I read every book I could get my hands on, and my determination grew stronger.

Moving to the USA made my dream much more realistic. However, when we first moved, we had no home and no jobs. We did not speak English. We spent our first few months in the basements of relatives. I stayed silent during my first days of school because I did not know English. Moreover, my parents did not allow me to try speaking English at home in order to preserve our native language. Therefore, some days I came in to school completely embarrassed of having done the homework incorrectly. I often cried when the teacher yelled at me, but I never complained that my parents could not help me. I never left anything incomplete, always attempting everything with my best effort. Determined to excel, I began practicing my English in solitude with books and by watching television. I requested that my cousins to speak to me in English rather than Urdu in order to improve my understanding. After multiple tries, I eventually mastered assignments. I developed as a scholar and became a perseverant person.

I knew that I had to learn English to study medicine, and my dedication to overcoming difficulties allowed me to quickly adjust to the American education system. Adversity was not a dead end, but a learning experience that made me stronger. Therefore, my love of science encouraged me to take initiative for myself. I highly value education because I have a simple logic: increase in education increases the potential to help myself and others. My passion for science and education has always driven me to persevere.

# Inquisition Betty Chen

## Imagine yourself in a tutorial at Williams. Of anyone in the world, whom would you choose to be the other student in the class, and why? (Please limit your response to 300 words.)

I select Grace Lee Boggs to delve with me into the origins and implications of radical activism. As a self-identified writer, activist, and philosopher, Boggs embodies the character and tenacity I hope to evolve in myself and in my investigations of discriminatory policing. Boggs began her own work in Chicago in the 1960s, where she focused on marginalized groups such as women and people of color. Given her long history of organizing, the evolution women leaders have had in the past fifty years, and the myriad of issues in existence today, we will recall anecdotes, write papers comparing such time periods, and harness an amalgam of perspectives, successes, and realizations in our works. We will discuss the progression of the black struggle from her time with the Black Panther Party to the current occurrences in Ferguson and nationwide.

As an adamant believer in constant questioning—who we are as individuals, and how we relate to those in our community and country—Boggs will challenge me to reflect critically and act consciously. I wish to explain to her my struggle to reconcile my multiple identities as a low-income, first-generation Chinese-American woman: How do I pursue a field of inquisition given my culture of conservatism? Where do I belong in a country whose conversations on race are spoken mainly in black-and-white terms? We will dissect her idea of sustainable activism: rather than advocate for a revolution, she stresses the need to work from the ground up. How has this been exemplified in her program, Detroit Summer? How can this be applied to movements occurring around the country and the world?

Boggs and I know that the tutorial is just the beginning of visionary organizing, and we hope that such conversations will disseminate well beyond the campus, molding themselves into concrete changes.

# The Data That Saves Lives 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.

For four dollars, anyone can buy a bag of heroin in a town five minutes from my school. Prescription cousins of heroin, like Oxycontin and Vicodin, have been over-prescribed for decades. But as the war on drugs has progressed, a crackdown on prescription drugs has led to higher usage of harder drugs, like heroin, in accordance with Richard Cowan’s Iron Law of Prohibition. Heroin is a very potent drug, and doesn’t come in specific concentrations or milligram amounts, which makes overdose extremely likely.

“The DPH’s inaction shows lethargy and indifference to a massive public health crisis in our community." That quote was given to a reporter six months ago by my county’s sheriff. I live in Franklin County, Massachusetts, one region bearing the brunt of the nationwide opiate pandemic. And in the state's poorest county, the Department of Public Health has failed to release statistics on the number of overdoses for five years, statistics which could lead to better funding, strategy, and treatment. The lack of data shocked me. The DPH could provide the exact number of flu patients by the hour, but had absolutely no data on the number of overdoses. The problem seemed so meaningful, so in need of a functional solution. And yet there was none, not from the state or others in the county.

So I made my own. I talked to local doctors and officials to figure out what data they would like to collect, and created a cloud-based survey to compile the data. Then I reached out to local first responders, including Police, Fire, and EMS services, and they adopted my system in early February of 2014. First responders enter a password, and fill out a short survey with no identifying patient information, either on their phones or on a computer, which is then sent to a database. I worked with the local sheriff's office to have an adult in charge of the database, and every two weeks, I send infographics to the DA, local judges, and the sheriff, allowing some of this information to be released to the media. I also work closely with the new Opioid Task Force based in Franklin County, helping with community outreach, as well as analyzing and cross referencing data from local hospitals.

Despite my liberal inclinations, I recognized that this was one case where the government-run solution had failed my community. Yet it would have been far easier for me to critique the DPH’s work on this issue than to actually make a new, better solution. After I made my system, I grew more and more curious about why one didn’t exist already. While the work I had done couldn’t be considered simplistic, it was not overly complex either. I started to examine the DPH’s budget, and I couldn’t find a single item I would be willing to cut. The two biggest programs funded public health hospitals and substance abuse clinics, the latter often treating those opiate addicts trying to recover.

That's when I realized what my role was: to help a small rural community collect free data, and use it to garner needed funding.

I couldn’t treat every overdose, or fundraise nearly enough money to build rehab clinics, or get this oft-fatal drug off the streets forever. In the past few months, this issue has received more coverage, with articles in the Boston Globeand other sources using my statistics. Members of the County Government also presented this growing problem to a panel of senior judges and sheriffs in nearby communities, and I am expanding my program to their counties. These members also met with the head of the DPH, and our governor has promised to allocate $20 million to treating and managing the crisis in our state, including a sum for improved data collection.

Watching my community be ravaged by a crisis and watching my data do a small part to alleviate that crisis has given me a firsthand experience of the beneficence good public health policy can provide. In college, I will continue to study public health and statistics and, hopefully, bring that knowledge back to my ailing community.

# Euler--Brilliant or Crazy? Anonymous

## At Williams we believe that bringing together students and professors in small groups produces extraordinary academic outcomes. Our distinctive Oxford-style tutorial classes—in which two students are guided by a professor in deep exploration of a single topic—are a prime example. Each week the students take turns developing independent work—an essay, a problem set, a piece of art—and critiquing their partner’s work. Focused on close reading, writing, and oral defense of ideas, more than 70 tutorials a year are offered across the curriculum, with titles like “Biomedical Ethics,” “Women in National Politics,” and “Extraterrestrial Life in the Galaxy: a Sure Thing or a Snowball’s Chance?” Imagine yourself in a tutorial at Williams. Of anyone in the world, whom would you choose to be the other student in the class, and why?

Euler once wrote out the following equation: (a+b^n)/n=x.

At first glance, this function is unremarkable; there are too many unknowns for a single solution to exist. Though there are infinite combinations of a,b,n, and x to satisfy this function, none of them are groundbreaking. Why, then, would I bring it up?

This was Euler’s proof of God.

Interestingly enough, Euler never rationalized this claim. He presented it in court, and he was never given a chance to explain himself. Euler, a mathematical genius, believed that this simple function indicated a divine power, something beyond humanity.

I’ve spent more time than I’d like to admit puzzling over this function. Despite scouring the Internet, I’ve never found logical reasoning to explain how this function could possibly prove the existence of God. Instead of accepting defeat, I dug a little deeper into Euler’s enigmatic mind and history. And, after further research, I realized Euler would be a fantastic tutorial partner.

Several of Euler’s works portray him as a pious Christian. In fact, before Bernoulli noticed Euler's talent in mathematics, Euler was well on his way to becoming a pastor. The existence of God, to Euler, was a subject of great interest. But despite his ability to prove the power expansion for e, Euler was never able to publish a rigorous proof of the existence of God. He was never able to explain this equation to others. It appears, then, that Euler was never able to definitively find God. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that he failed.

I want to read tracts by Descartes and Plato, both of whom were philosophers and mathematicians. I want to examine texts by Walras and Cournot, both of whom brilliantly applied math to economics. Above all, I want to explore the interdisciplinary uses of math, economics, and philosophy. And who better to work with than Euler?

# Taking a Handicap in Hand 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.

I sat quietly at my desk on the morning of September 4th, 2005, steeling myself for my first day of second grade. Thus far, I had managed to deflect my classmates’ earnest conversation attempts, and my seeming indifference made them wonder about this new student. The teacher finally claimed the attention of my classmates and, one by one, they stated their names, their favorite foods, and their favorite animals. Soon, the moment I had been dreading arrived, and all eyes were on me.

“My n-n-name’s An-n-nita.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my teacher’s lips curve into a smile, and my classmates exchange looks of amusement. They probably attributed this first disfluency to nerves. However, after I spent the next several minutes struggling through ‘P-p-izza’ and ‘D-d-ogs,’ their looks of amusement turned to confusion. My secret exposed and my heart pounding, I finished my introduction.

Because my stutter was at its worst when I was young girl, these classroom scenes were as frequent as they were awful. Each time I raised my hand in class, I risked mangling words as simple as my own name. My teachers and the school administration did their best to protect me from my classmates, but to what extent? My peers’ snide glances and whispered mimicry were things that the administration could do nothing about.

I have particular difficulty pronouncing hard consonants; the toughest are words containing ‘N’s, ‘L’s, ‘P’s and ‘D’s. To most children, these letters are punctuated sounds strung together to form emphatic conversation. To me, these letters are obstacles, uncomfortably and incessantly lodged in my throat. In my speech therapy classes, I could fluently recite the texts my counselor set before me. But this confidence deserted me in front of my peers. They teased me mercilessly, calling me ‘retarded’ and regaling me with choruses of “An-n-nita”s as I walked in and out of the lunchroom. As a young girl I was silent, not by choice, but from fear of ridicule. Though my thoughts were colorful and bold, they were censored by something within me that I thought I couldn’t control.

When I was twelve years old, my dad, from whom I inherited my stuttering, hoisted me into his arms and said that just because I had a different way of speaking did not mean that I should be ashamed. He explained that my desperation to hide my stuttering only further reinforced it. By embracing my uniqueness, I could challenge others to accept me as well. As to my intelligence, he said something that has inspired me ever since:

“Retarded? No. In fact, stutterers are intelligent because their thoughts come faster than their lips can move.”

I was so galvanized by his words that I resolved to either rid myself of my speech impediment, or finally accept it as part of my identity: a quirk of the “An-n-nita” that I strive to be. I developed a love of language and vocabulary, using both as means to survival. I read voraciously because I wanted to so expand my vocabulary that I could replace a word I was having trouble saying with a new and more powerful one. Eventually, my love of words fostered a love of writing. Indeed, writing is a seamless method of expressing myself, in that I can connect with others without uttering a word. Though my stutter has vastly diminished, I still find solace in writing, and continue to let it speak for me.

To paraphrase James Baldwin, the things that hurt one most often help one most. I came into the United States as a six year old girl who hid behind her stutter and struggled to find her voice. Today, however, I can proudly say that stuttering has enriched my life. By taking my handicap in hand, I have learned how to find value in my voice and in myself.

# 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.

# Breaking Stereotypes (Studying with Fatima Al-Fihri)Minha Khan

## At Williams we believe that bringing together students and professors in small groups produces extraordinary academic outcomes. Our distinctive Oxford-style tutorial classes—in which two students are guided by a professor in deep exploration of a single topic—are a prime example. Each week the students take turns developing independent work—an essay, a problem set, a piece of art—and critiquing their partner's work. Focused on close reading, writing, and oral defense of ideas, more than 60 tutorials a year are offered across the curriculum, with titles like "Aesthetic Outrage," "Financial Crises: Causes and Cures," and "Genome Sciences: At the Cutting Edge.” Imagine yourself in a tutorial at Williams. Of anyone in the world, whom would you choose to be the other student in the class, and why? (Please limit your response to 300 words.)

Fatima Al-Fihri: a woman who lived in the ninth century, and the founder of the world’s oldest university.

In a time when educated women were looked down upon and ridiculed, she broke all social barriers and founded the University of Qarawiyyin. It takes great dedication and strength to be able to fight the crowd and create something so essential that it changes the history of the world. Only an individual of great intelligence and bravery could have managed what she did.

Decades later, it still remains a challenge to live as an educated Muslim woman of color.

Growing up, social biases were like boulders in my way - even when I wanted to achieve the simplest of things. My gender, my religion, the way I dressed were often considered more important than my ideas and thoughts. I had to fight to be heard, I had to work hard to be taken seriously. To learn alongside a woman who faced difficulties far greater than I did and still managed to leave such a long-lasting positive mark on this world would be an honor. As an academic and a revolutionary, she’s an inspiration to me.

The work we would create would be greater than our identities as women, as Muslims, as people of color. It would go beyond the social structures that define how a person should act based on the color of their skin or their reproductive organs. The work we would create would reach out to humanity, reach out to the people; a reminder that even when the world stands against you and tells you that you weren’t born for greatness, you and the work you leave behind can still find your place amongst the stars.

# Just Keep Folding Mark Kellerman

## 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.

Having explored the myths from ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt, my curiosity was piqued in eighth grade by a simple legend from Japanese lore. If you fold one thousand paper cranes, the gods will grant you one wish. I took it as a challenge. My previous forays into origami had ended poorly, but I was so excited to begin my quest that this detail seemed inconsequential. My art teacher loaned me a piece of origami paper and, armed with an online tutorial, my quest began. Like an early prototype of the airplane, I ascended towards my dreams for a glorious moment before nose-diving into the ground. The first crane was a disastrous failure of wrinkly lines and torn paper. Too embarrassed to ask for another, I turned to my stack of Post-it notes. By the third attempt, I ended up with a sticky pink paper crane. Holding that delicate bird, I was flooded with triumph and elation.

The first two hundred cranes were all crafted from Post-it notes. Armed with a pack of highlighters, I decorated each piece of paper individually. I folded cranes at home, between classes, and in the car. My fingers were permanently sticky from the glue I scraped off every square. Slowly, my collection grew: first ten, then fifty, then one hundred. Before the task could become monotonous, I started experimenting. How small was it possible for a crane to be? Smaller than a golf ball? Smaller than a dime? Small enough to sit on the end of a pencil? Any size was attainable. I could make a crane smaller than almost any arbitrary form of measurement. Soon I could finish a crane in fifty seconds or with my eyes closed. Anything square and foldable became my medium. Paper towels, candy wrappers, and aluminum foil joined my vibrant menagerie of carefully folded paper. I was unstoppable; that wish was as good as mine.

By six hundred cranes, the increasing demands of high school academics caused my pace to slow. I despaired. I wouldn’t let this be another ambitious project that I couldn’t finish.

My cranes mattered to me. As an outlet for expression, they served as a way to defuse frustration and sadness, and a source of pride and joy. Their creation allows me to bring beauty to the world and to find a sense of order in the bustle and chaos of life. There is a lot of beauty to be found in tiny things. I’m reminded that little gestures have a lot of meaning. I have given away cranes to my friends as a pick-me-up on bad days, and I have made cranes to commemorate people, such as the dark green crane I made the day my grandmother died. They are a symbol of hope to remind me what I have accomplished.

So, I pushed myself to keep working and to keep folding one crane at a time. My determination paid off, and in the summer after sophomore year, my passion was reinvigorated. One month before the end of junior year, I folded my thousandth paper crane. As I leaned over the open drawer brimming with origami pieces in a multitude of sizes and colors, I felt a rush of satisfaction and triumph. Not only was 1,000 cranes an achievement in its own right, but I proved to myself that I can finish what I start.

The world is filled with big numbers. College tuition, monthly rent, and car prices deal in the many thousands. Those figures are incomprehensible to someone who has never interacted with anything so large, and I wanted to understand them. A thousand will never simply be a number to me: it is hundreds upon hundreds of hand-folded cranes combined with years of effort.

So what did I wish for? It turns out, I didn’t need the wish. I learned I have the power to make things happen for myself.