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**Sample essays 2017**

**Worcester Polytechnic Institute**

# Finding My Purpose Anonymous

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

As I walked through the door there she stood, staring into oblivion with a dazed look on her face. Alice was my first Adaptive student, and the only discernible sound that she emitted was "ribbit." I was intrigued, but not surprised, because the training I had received beforehand had led me to consider the "abnormal" normal. I reviewed her file, but it told me nothing, because it was filled with misinformation (like claiming that this five foot tall woman wore a men's size eleven snowboard boot). I fit the rest of her gear based on my discretion, and since I had been snowboarding for over thirteen years at that point, I was confident in my decisions.

Then, it was finally time to hit the slopes.

Once we walked out the door, Alice started to tremble while ribbiting in horror, as if the snow was a monster hiding in her closet. Calming her nerves with words was pointless, so I resorted to penguin sliding and playing with the fluffy stuff to prove that the trail meant no harm. Suddenly her eyes widened and a smirk caught her face, at which point I figured that it was now or never. I told her to "feed the alligator to the snake," which is an expression Adaptive instructors use to describe strapping on a pair of snowboard bindings. Unfortunately, I was not making sense to her, so I went back to the charades and imitated an alligator's mouth with my arms, chomping down on her snowboard as if it were the ladder strap. The smirk came back and she understood. Alice was strapped in, ready to go.

Once Alice was up, she latched onto me for dear life; for her, I was the only thing protecting her from the white behemoth. Hand in hand we inched downhill, as I watched a look of excitement dissolve any apprehension that lingered in her eyes. Her smirk morphed into a smile, just as her "ribbits" came to express a new sense of confidence and satisfaction. No actual words were ever spoken, but her facial expressions told me that this previously unnerved student of mine felt triumphant both physically and emotionally. She ambitiously shifted her weight, hoping to turn and make the ride more exhilarating. That's when it fell apart, though. She left her comfort zone and panicked, pushing her edge into the ground, stopping the board but not her body. As she fell forward and began to anticipate a horrid death from the snowy Goliath, I caught her. Relief suddenly overcame her consternation, because I was her rock, and she realized that I would never let anything happen to her. Alice regained her balance, ribbitted in assurance, and continued to shred.

Eventually the sun faded behind the mountain and we made our way back through the door. She hugged me and gratefully said, "Ribbit," just as I will thank my parents after I graduate high school (in different words, of course). For the first time in my life I was the mentor, the one who fought off fear. I understood the responsibilities that came with fulfilling the role of protecting and comforting Alice. Guiding Alice through a seemingly insurmountable challenge, just as my parents guided me through life, revealed a new sense of fulfillment and gave me a purpose beyond being another snowboarding teenager. Adaptive became my life that year, and from then on it has propelled me to help people experience life's full potential, despite any obstacle.

# Getting Back in the Driver's Seat Kristina Jones

## 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.

It was three o’clock in the afternoon. My first race was full of middle-aged men, and the decals on their cars weren’t all stickers like mine. They had been painted professionally. But paint jobs don’t impact speed and, to my advantage, I had the new LO-206 engine. No one else believed it was faster than their Clone motors, but I had tested it with my dad. My times were consistently two seconds faster. I had put on the new body panels. I’d squeezed tennis balls all month to build my hand strength, and the car had a brand new engine. I’d even come to the track with my dad to practice. The car was pink and purple with oil stains on the bumper.

This was my first qualifier at Carolina Motorsports Park, a road course, so it was asphalt-based and had a variety of turns. Fortunately, I really only had to worry about a few turns, like Turn 5, which was almost a 180-degree turn. I tended to slow down too much and go too far out. Turn 13 was the worst. It was the slowest corner and the sharpest turn on the track; I had spun off the track many times in that corner. I put on the ensemble of safety equipment required by the competition: helmet, neck brace, fireproof suit, close-toed shoes, and rib protector. People had died racing these karts before. I couldn’t take any chances. I was four back from the first set of cars on the left side. Technically seventh place. My dad motioned for me to get in my seat. He pulled the cord on the engine to start my machine and gave me a thumbs up. I pressed the gas pedal; the rumble from my engine magnified. The race began.

I came in last that day.

Racing is a strange animal. I started racing at the age of 10 in the All-American Soapbox Derby. I made it to Akron three times and finished my last year nationally ranked 8th in the Master’s division. When I transitioned to the Google Gravity Games, I broke the record for fastest time. Then, I returned the next year and beat my previous time; I still hold the record for fastest run.

For most of my life, things have come easily to me. Math. English. Music. I seem to have a knack for all of it. But it is impossible to succeed in karting without failing first. I wasn’t disappointed at the end of my first race. I was the only teenager and the only female in the contest. By the end of the race, I was hanging with the pack. I didn’t wreck. My driving was clean. My times had improved by over a second since the beginning of the race.

Racing has been a part of my life since I was a toddler and my dad was building a go-kart in our basement. Whether it’s soap box derby, Gravity Games, or go-karts, I enjoy the time I spend working on my own car, getting ready for the next race. I’ve gone from barely knowing what a screwdriver was to welding support beams for my steering wheel and making my own tool to calibrate axles. To some, this never-ending improvement may be demoralizing. For me, it’s all part of the fun.

The best thing I can do in racing, and in life, is improve. No one cares about my age, my gender, or how many trophies I’ve won in the past. I just have to take the wheel and do the best I can. Eventually, I’ll make it to the top.