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**Sample essays 2023**

**University of Pennsylvania**

# #0000FF's Joe Walsh

## Write about someone who has influenced your life or a time that you have experienced great change.

When life throws me a curve, I try to find an equation for the best-fit line. Actually, life never really throws me a perfect curve, only a series of data that resembles one. Most people are content by connecting these random dots, forming a rudimentary picture by which they interpolate a meaning. But to me, all of that unpredictable, theoretical thought never made as much sense as a good logarithmic function. My mind tries to think in absolutes, in binary, with little extraneous interpretation. I can handle 1's and 0's, but understanding the 2's is what takes effort. Life threw me a big '2' when my older brother passed away of cancer when I was just fourteen. My mind could not construct a logical way to feel. In an instant, my perfect, predictable world was turned upside-down. Feelings of confusion, regret, and sorrow swirled in my head, all of them unforeseen obstacles in my attempts to make a predictable world. Grasping for an answer, I struggled to keep afloat, grabbing any steady truth I could hold on to. I needed to take the zeros and ones of my mind and make a two, a task I could not fathom how to do at the time. What I didn't realize was that sometimes the answer is as simple as '10'. Looking to the life my brother led for inspiration, I saw his courage and strength in the face of adversity and found my ability to grow stronger. After having his leg amputated at the age of six as a result of his first bout with cancer, he lived oblivious to his handicap, continuing to golf, swim, ski, and succeed. In my brother's example, I learned, adapted, and grew stronger. I took the pieces of my binary thinking and constructed a two. Developing a sort of assembly code for my brain, I constructed a solid foundation for abstract thinking in my once absolute world.

Seeing the way this method of thought fit me, I took the binary foundation I started with and synthesized it into more intricate forms. Though I'll probably never be able to predict the actions of the stock market through patterns in pi, my system helps me to analyze the curves that life throws me. I can break down problems and work logically and efficiently towards the solution in ways I never thought possible. I am even able to understand and appreciate literature, a concept that was always just out of my grasp. To me, literature was a world where there was no right answer, no function to relate everything, just some random dots with an infinite number of ways to connect them. Now, instead of disregarding anything without an absolute solution, seeing only right and wrong, black and white, I can finally interpret with all the colors of the rainbow, from #FF0000 to #330066. I want to keep building this analytical knowledge, opening doors and solving problems with a delicate mix of reason and the abstract, connecting the dots in my own unique, yet logical way.

# Purpose of Education Anh Pham

## Choose your own topic

Nothing better epitomizes today's motto of learning than Aristotle's analysis of education, "The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet." It seems that the fruits of education have bloomed even greater and sweeter than ever before. The fruits are the incentives behind the ever-increasing literacy rates, and the temptations and lusts of the young population who is graduating more and more from college. Yet, in this tide of progressivism and in these spirits of intellectuality, who actually stops and wonders why he obsessively seeks a good education? And then, what is the real purpose of a prime education?

The most obvious answer inculcated in the minds of any respondent to these questions would be the predictable and hackneyed maxim of "Knowledge is power". With professions of doctors, lawyers, and any other vocations well-advertised in their propitious incomes, there is a clear protocol that all of the disciples must follow: the First Commandment, study hard, Second Commandment, do well on the SAT, Third Commandment enter top college, and finally, bear the sweetest fruits or rewards of education, money.

Personally, I am not willing to invest a lifetime into education if the ultimate reward is money. Money cannot be the fruits of my education, and, most importantly, the prime goal of my life; I believe in a higher purpose of education, a good education.

Now entering my senior year of high school, I have begun to understand the purpose of my education. Yes, as a consequence of a high-quality education, I will accrue some fiscal security in life. However, the purpose of my education, I know, is the satiation of my own relentless competitiveness and personal vindictiveness. As for the former, competitiveness constantly impels me to learn more and know more. I am constantly in motion, in mind and body, to improve to be the best in any fields of competition, whether intellectually or athletically. The minute I stop progressing intellectually, I feel as if I am already a thousand miles behind the increasingly savvy world. Hence, an intangible force constantly irks me to keep up with the best minds of my age. The latter goal of my education is the compensation for all that my parents had given up for the education of their children. I am indignant at circumstances that had left them with little options but to trade their prestige and wealth as doctors in their country for a much more humble emigrating life of financial insecurities and emotional distresses, all intended for a better education for their children. I cannot bear to see my mom serving for anybody and scrambling to save every penny, for she once was a well-respected doctor whom the maternal side of the entire community looked for guidance. I cannot bear to watch my dad dragging home day after day, trying to suppress his much damaged pride so his children wouldn't see his suffering. Nights go by and early mornings come, I would stumble upon clandestine conversations of my parents, in which my dad poured his heart out expressing his grief, for the barrier of language has forsaken him from his beloved profession. Though my dad is a doctor, everyday he struggles to climb over that language barrier, trying to fight against the tides of stereotypes, trying to earn the respect of his colleagues who continually belittle him for his lack of "Americanism", and trying, with all his age and the grays on his head, to earn a living. I can't hold back the anger and the tears when I think that the man, once so well-admired and revered in half a county for his dedication to his patients and his ingenuity in cardiology, has now been reduced to a mere supplicant of some novice doctor whom the man has the age and experience to be his superior scholar. And this is why I must pursue education with all that I feel, all that I know, and all that I can give. The fruits of my education will not be the gratification of wealth, but of the compensation of what my parents had lost: prestige, pride, and future.

For these very purposes of education, it is absolutely essential that I receive the best education in the country. Only then would I be able to satisfy my competitiveness and ameliorate the irreparable payment I am forever indebted to my bearers. If the purpose of education is one of only temporal satisfaction, then any quality education would suffice. But if the purpose of education is to heal and bandage the wounds of the past and the humilities of life, then I am willing to fully dedicate my entire life to that goal of education.

# Through the Earth and to the Sun - Chapter 12: The Battle for Subversion Shannon Maene

## (Personal Topic, taken from U. Penn Application) You have just completed your autobiography. Submit page 217.

Kurt Vonnegut's quintessential anthropological romp, Cat's Cradle. However, I trusted that then, unlike in the aforementioned novel, my "joining the natives" would not cause the world around me to come crashing down, or in that story's particular case, freezing up. I had lighted upon a society with bizarre customs based on what most would call a primitive mentality, and was strangely comfortable, free from the professional restraints of "proper investigation," a euphemism for appropriate distance. It was truly absurd that, in a time one and a quarter centuries removed from the staid Victorian Era, such a restrictive mentality could still exist in a science that was both devoted to the past and always on the cutting edge. Innovative ignorance.

Nevertheless, I was in absolute defiance of it when I joined the Jenginian natives in their political embroilment, which began soon after I settled in. In those days, the UN had not yet reassumed all its previous clout, and so some political leeway still existed for nascent industrial powers to assume an imperial streak and claim title to neighboring, newly separate nations. Whether it were for resources, labor, or land was irrelevant. The forces that be were absent, nor would they reemerge for some time, and so, in the absence of disciplinary means, it was the responsibility of the civilized world to do what was right: ostensibly pick a side, and then promptly ignore the conflict and allow the media to attend to the rest. As an anthropologist, I was supposed to remain politically uninvolved in the culture. I was there to understand the culture, experience it for a time, but certainly never to join it outright. At most, I should quietly promote the viewpoint of my origin nation, America, but otherwise just stay clear of the strife.

In my deliberation, I was reminded of Major T.E. Lawrence, who nearly became an enemy to his own people as he became the ultimate military ally of those whom he was to keep from muddling up Europe. The white man of the wilderness. An anthropologist does not understand a culture simply by reading its literature, talking to its people, examining its garbage, or tracking its migratory movements. An anthropologist is a gatekeeper, who stands in the doorway from one world to the next. Just as one is limited as he examines a far away body in the heavens, so too is a culture scientist: both can know no more than the most mechanical, superficial details, until he visits the very earth, and breathes the very air of that at which he gazes. I had to join the world of the Jenginian natives, not forsaking my own, but remaining perched on the tiny piece of land that connected the two.

Unfortunately, that earth was not American soil. When I ascended to a leadership position, I became an anomaly of sorts, focused on and grilled by the press. Who was this American, and what was he doing fighting on the wrong side? In my adherence to the Jenginian cause, I defied the American statement on the issue, which was to cede the land back to Chile. The natives had demonstrated their self-sufficiency; they had even the inklings of industry, in their rudimentary resource management. However, most important, they had necessity on their side: the Chilean government was in upheaval. A year, maybe two, and it would be far worse than at any time under General Augusto Pinochet fifty years before. This of course was why the Chilean military council had decided on the invasion of Jengini, as an essential repository of resources for the coming war machine. America was wrong this time.

For three months I attended tribal councils, and assisted in coordinating intertribal communication. One does not study disparate cultures of the last ten thousand years, and not ascertain that unity is the core of any successful society. Of course, with my turncoat ways, I had lost any capability of help from academic America. They had funding to worry about, a precious commodity besides, but one made very scarce once you have been identified as associating with subversives. Needless to say, mine had long since dried up, and my wife and I had taken up residence under the auspices of Jefe Jengui Catin, which proved advantageous compared to Calama for its accessibility to the chief, a major player in the tribal movement and...

**Nitro Jason Joo**

**First experiences can be defining. Cite a first experience that you had and explain its impact on you.**

I was sixteen years old, and scared of rollercoasters; this fear had followed me through adolescence and into young adulthood. "C'mon, let's go Joo. It'll be fun!" urged my hyperactive friend. Reluctantly I went to Six Flags with a few buddies, with the full intention of spending the entire day in the arcade.

When we arrived, my friends coaxed me into lining up for Nitro, the biggest rollercoaster in the park. I crept down the long line, realizing what I was in for. With a height of 230 feet and a top speed of 80 miles per hour, Nitro seemed an insurmountable obstacle. As I approached the front of the line, the tracks loomed ominously over me. Before I knew it, I was strapped into the front row. As the cars slowly ascended, I panicked. I didn't think I'd survive. I thought of every possible disastrous scenario until I was rudely interrupted by my friend who told me we were at the apex of the first drop. I peered over the edge and looked into the face of death. As the cars clicked forward, I shut my eyes and braced myself for the fall.

When the rollercoaster hurtled down, I screamed with everyone else. Just a few more seconds I told myself while I was mercilessly thrown into tight turns and corkscrews. After what seemed like an eternity in hell, the ride came to a stop and I quickly jumped off. That's when I realized that the ride had been exhilarating. Having braved the biggest and baddest coaster in the park, I set out to conquer others.

Thus began my first rollercoaster experience. Fast forward eighteen months and here I am, a year older and hopefully a year wiser. The obstacle I faced that summer was a physical one with a low risk of injury; the challenges I face now are mostly mental, with a high risk of failure. Strangely enough, when I compare these new challenges to Nitro, my mental image of the rollercoaster dwarfs any new ones, making it far easier to cope with them.

In the beginning of eleventh grade, my father urged me to take both AP Chemistry and Honors Physics, the two hardest science courses Portledge offers. I immediately recalled the tearful chemistry students and the whining physics students from the previous year and rejected my father's proposal, calling him crazy. After a weekend passed, however, I thought to myself, "I nearly shook hands with Death on Nitro. Doubling up on science should be almost fun in comparison." With the risk of being called a nerd, I can now admit that my double dose of science was, indeed, fun.

Now, whenever I'm confronted by a seemingly insurmountable task, I remember my mantra and boldly forge ahead. I don't know where I'd be today if it hadn't been for those fateful four minutes in the summer of 2004. I do know one thing, however: I'm applying to Penn fearelessly, fully cognizant of the possibility of failure, but willing to take the risk.

**Flushed Grapefruit Anonymous**

**You have just completed your 300-page autobiography. Please submit page 217.**

about how silly things can be so profound.

Today, there's another substitute in English class. He's a tall, balding, middle-aged man, who is yet to be another one of my victims. Once the tardy bell rings, he begins calling roll.

"Rachel Baker... Stephanie Carson... Uh, Di-Din--"

Here we go again.

You see, it's my name -- Dingyun. Dingyun Chan. My name plagues my whole existence. It labels me unmistakably as an Asian and singles me out wherever I go. My name alone creates a world of stuttering substitutes. It is an automatic, never-ending generator of ridicule and nicknames: Ding Dong, Dig-a-noo, and Dingyay, just to name a few. My name is universal -- it can be pronounced in absolutely every way that you please.

It all started in middle school when I found myself constantly dreading a teacher's absence. My stomach would twist and churn when the substitute began calling roll. I would flare up with a hundred and ten degree fever. Large beads of sweat would gush from my forehead. The back of my head would burn from the silent stares of my classmates.

What new pronunciation would I discover today?

"D-Den-yuen..."

My face flushed into a seasoned grapefruit.

"...Here."

An explosion of snickers and giggles and murmurs reverberated around me. "Sounds like a doorbell!" my classmates whispered. Tears pocketed my eyelids. I felt like an outcast -- a specimen pinned to the wall or scrutinized underneath a microscope. One of those bizarre bugs with the Latin name that no one could pronounce in science class. I secretly cursed my Chinese parents. What were they thinking? I'm born in America, on American soil; why name me otherwise?

I spent nights tossing and turning, wishing my name was Jessica or Ashley -- something American and simple. Soon, I became obsessed with a sort of all-around nomenclature and only one thought pervaded my existence: what's in a name?

I appealed to Mr. Webster:*n. 1. a word or a combination of words by which a person, place, idea, etc., is known or designated*. Still, I wasn't getting the picture. If a name is just words stuck together -- a label -- then where's the meaning in all this? Napoleon, the Holocaust, and Barney would otherwise be meaningless syllables, devoid of the thoughts and emotions that each person associates them with.

I had known for years that my name means "levelheaded" (Ding) and "hardworking" (yun). Prodded by disgust for my name, I gave my parents every reason to wish they'd take it back. I threatened to run away and live under the whirly slide in our neighborhood park. I threw random tantrums and refused to finish my peas. But, after a while, all of this was so tiring that I gave up. I turned to other solutions. However, when I Googled, I found out -- to my utter dismay -- that a legal name change was well beyond my allowance.

Barely eleven years old, I grudgingly withstood the weekly ridicule and turned a blind eye to my identity. However, as time passed, I found myself evolving, so to speak. And evolution is by no means quick. By learning about others with equally ethnic names, I slowly began to see that I was not alone in a fight against the wraths of "fresh-off-the-boat" parents. However, as I unearthed more and more about my cultural background and the conflicts my family faced during the Cultural Revolution, there was no longer any "fight" to conquer. It was no longer an issue between being either an egg roll (entirely Asian) or a banana (white on the inside, yellow on the outside). I am a fortune cookie -- made in America but as Asian as one could get. I have come to see my name as a mark of staying true to one's culture, my family's endurance, and its pride in being the lucky few to make it to America. I am no longer afraid of substitutes. No longer afraid of ridicule. No long afraid of saying, "Here." Or of those muffled laughs. Or of my name.

My friends and family know who I am -- not as two words but as a person -- and that is all that truly matters. In these years of embarrassment, my name has given me more than just a few nicknames, a title, or a Social Security number. It gave me character -- made me who I am. Through humiliation I gained modesty and the ability to withstand pressure. Through time I gained an appreciation for my name, both as an identity and as a culture.

Now I understand Mr. Webster's definition at last. In fact, a name is just a label and, in a way, a superficial accessory. But, this definition is also not enough. A name is unique, an idea, a collection of memories and thoughts, the link to a person, and holds meanings specific to each person who has one or knows another.

Finally I ask, who am I? I'm Dingyun Chan. I'm the funny, wacky, silly, smart, sharp, thoroughly-Asian, loud, dramatic, intelligent, crazy, hardworking, and levelheaded girl that I am. Thus, sitting in English class, I raise my hand and proudly (and loudly) say, "Here!" With that, there's only one of me -- both beyond the name and with it -- in the whole world.

Thus, with this newfound self, I was ready to face the next slice of life, the trauma and exhilaration of high

**My Dream Di Zhou**

**Describe the courses of study and unique characteristics of the University of Pennsylvania that most interest you. Why do these interests make you a good match for Penn?**

Twelve years from now, I hope to be a surgeon in a well-reputed hospital. Whether it's stitching up a wound or performing spinal cord operation, I will receive great satisfaction in knowing that every minute and hour of my job is dedicated to helping others. I want to be one of a few selected people who have been fortunate enough to be given the chance to use cutting edge technology such as implanting an artificial heart in a patient. The responsibility of taking care of another human being is great but an immense blessing.

Perhaps it's the family genes that have somehow turned most of my family into scientists and doctors or the late hours watching E.R, imagining myself as a doctor has always been the ultimate achievement to me. Yet, the one event that made me really consider being a doctor was the death of my grandpa when I was nine years old. To see him lying there in the hospital strapped to the IV lines and restrained to the bed brought my idyllic world crashing down. I remembered rushing to his side and staring at those dark piercing eyes looking back at me but unresponsively. In my nine year old mindset, I crossed my fingers and thought that he would be out of the hospital soon to take me to the park again. However, his body was failing as the days went and though I didn't know after couple years later, the cancer in his brain grew into his nerves instantly paralyzing his body to function. Then I felt powerless to help him get better but vowed to become a surgeon who will try to relieve other families from going through the same painful experience. At UPenn, I plan to volunteer at hospitals, clinics, and community centers assisting those in need. There's not a single day that I don't think of those gentle dark eyes and the promise that I made to myself seven years ago.

From an academic perspective, UPenn offers the most well rounded interdisciplinary study because I want to major in biochemistry and minor in biomedical engineering. Biochemistry provides a sturdy foundation for a career in medicine as the study focuses on the chemical reactions and processes that occur in a living organism. Having a biomedical engineering minor will benefit me greatly in the future, as this area of discipline seeks to understand the system of functions in the body in order to solve health problems. With an added dimension to my education, I will be more prepared for medical school.

Besides courses, I'm very much interested in doing some scientific research with a professor. The branch of neurology is so vast and there is much to discover about the workings of the brain. With the support of The Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowship, I would like to continue my research at the National Institute of Health on some aspect of neurology or schizophrenia. To be able to expand on what I have learned from the classrooms on the biological and chemical interactions of the brain and apply that knowledge to something more hands on makes exploring science that much more exciting.

I envision myself walking down Locus Walk discussing an interesting lecture with a friend and afterwards going to a nearby hospital where I can make a patient's day better. These four years will be the most rewarding years of my life as my values will be challenged and my perceptions of self and the world will be changed. As Benjamin Franklin said, "Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time; for that's the stuff life is made of." The possibilities and opportunities are endless, but it's what I do with them that matters the most.

**An Unforgettable Summer Amit Momaya**

**Write about a memorable/significant experience.**

What came first, science or technology?" asked a tall and husky figure, who was dressed in an unbuttoned and rather threadbare lab coat. My initial response was science because I reasoned that technology was the application of science. An articulated voice from the back of the room, however, soon refuted this idea and devised a cogent argument in favor of technology. The professor then formulated a rebuttal to both of these perspectives, and eventually succeeded in placing everyone in a state of quandary. This discussion signaled the advent of the myriad thought-provoking and challenging issues and applications that would arise during the summer I spent at the Georgia Governor's Honors Program.

Competition for admission into the program was fierce, even fiercer once in the program. Competition of the latter, however, did not exist with one another as it had during the selection process but rather within one's self. The program held a weekly competition for the science majors in which the professors would present seemingly impossible tasks to be completed within a few hours. On the first few competitions, which included constructing a rubber band powered car out of a few sundry items, I did not fare very well and felt vexed by the restrictions. However, one of my friends helped me learn new ways of tackling problems. He helped me realize that not all materials need to be used. He helped me see that the most obvious idea will not always be the most successful. He helped me start planning before acting. In effect, he helped me crawl out of my suffocating, conventional shell and change my way of thinking.

The final competition proved to stretch my mind to its greatest capacity. We were assigned the task of building a boat concocted from some cardboard, two garbage bags, and a roll of duck tape. At first thought, this project did not seem challenging at all, that is, until I discovered that two students would have to sit inside the boat and race across the swimming pool. This competition drew together many of the skills I had acquired during that summer, one of them being teamwork, something I had not learned the true meaning of until that summer. At school, "teamwork" would simply imply breaking the assignment into fragmentary pieces and assigning them to each member of the group. The activities at the program, however, soon expunged that fallacy and showed me that true teamwork requires the collaboration and unification of simultaneous ideas. Each team member would contribute his or her thoughts to every element of the boat. Resourcefulness was another determining factor in this last competition, as only one roll of duck tape would be provided and simply a few hours to build. Everything would need to be planned out meticulously beforehand because, once started, new materials could not be used if construction was botched. Other factors such as creativity, motivation, concentration, and ingenuity, when mixed in the right proportions, would produce a peerless boat, which is exactly what my team accomplished.

Not only did I learn from other students, but also from the astute professors. They were some of the best in their profession, with a true passion for teaching and understanding each student's strengths and weaknesses. Personally, I learned to desist accepting formulas and theorems at face value. The professors supplied us with the facts, and we were the ones to go out and research the concepts and proofs behind them. These skills have surfaced rather quickly, such as on the second day of AP BC Calculus, when the teacher asked us to memorize a formula. I, however, first asked for the proof. The other students groaned upon hearing this, but I grinned, knowing that eight months from now, they were the ones who would be cramming this seemingly senseless formula into their head before the AP exam.

I could fill an immense number of pages continuing to delineate what I learned that summer, but, if there was one thing to sum up everything, it would be the Rubik's Cube. When I first encountered this bemusing puzzle, I began by turning the cubes in random configurations, waiting for something to appear. However, I soon discovered that this is exactly where I went wrong-that is, nothing in life simply emerges on its own for you; instead, you have to search for it, sometimes at greater depths than ever before. By the middle of the program, I began to organize my thoughts and preplan so my configurations would make sense. At the beginning of that summer, my mind was fettered inside the cube as I cursorily searched for meanings. Nonetheless, as the summer crept to an end, I learned to organize, revise, concentrate, and not only think ahead, but also think differently. When the program concluded, I knew that I was no longer inside the cube but outside it.

**Professor Park Rachael Ji Yoon Kim**

**Name a Penn professor with whom you would like to study or conduct research and explain why. (1000 characters)**

Besides a general fancy for the written word, Professor Josephine Park of the English Department and I share interest in specialties like 20th century American literature. As a fellow Asian-American writer, Doctor Park’s emphasis on Asian-American authors would help me to learn about the works of my predecessors.

As manifest in her class “Asian-American Literature of War,” Doctor Park also features authors influenced by wartime. Because of my fascination with history, involvement in the War Stories Project, and grandparents’ connection to conflict, this course fits my character and background perfectly. In addition, my focus on poetry and poetics corresponds completely with Doctor Park’s class “Modern American Poetry.”

Aside from our mutual interests, Dr. Park’s aptitude as an instructor draws me to her classes and, of course, Penn itself. Having won two Faculty Teaching Awards, she is well known for her educating ability, and under her instruction, I’d be sure to thrive.

**Feeling I Belong Rachael Ji Yoon Kim**

**Describe the courses of study and the unique characteristics of the University of Pennsylvania that most interest you. Why do these interests make you a good match for Penn?**

As a young aficionado of poetry and prose, I would love more than anything to develop my skills through a disciplined and distinguished writing program, and Penn’s School of Arts and Sciences definitely offers just that. Believing that one must be a great reader before becoming a great writer, I indulge in books of every genre to expand my range of knowledge. Literature brings me a truly indescribable joy, and I wish to carry my fondness for reading and writing into my college major. Penn’s English Department is unique in that it provides the opportunity for students to place an emphasis on studies in creative writing, and through it, I want to channel my passion for poetry into academia.

As founder and president of our school’s Poetry Club, if accepted, I plan to visit the Kelly Writers House religiously as a way to satisfy my perpetual craving for remarkable literature. I can just picture myself grabbing a turkey and cheese sandwich with no mayonnaise at the 1920 Commons, then rushing off to the Kelly Writers House with an armful of books by Maya Angelou and Eric Schlosser. Gathered in a close circle of chairs, fellow literature lovers and I share professional works as well as our own daring lines of free verse, swap suggestions, compliments, and light-hearted laughs. During workshops, my very soul seeps steadily through an invisible tube from brain to ballpoint, the not-so-simple phenomenon of input-output producing painstakingly arranged ink on paper, a painting made of letters.

On my way to a morning class on modern American poetry, I pass Oldenberg’s famed Split Button and acknowledge Mr. Franklin sitting upright in his chair. After the lecture, Dr. Josephine Park and I conduct research by analyzing the influence of conflicts between America and East Asia on Asian-American texts. As part of the Penn family, I converse with colleagues, sisters and brothers that destiny forgot to give. Then, I tutor secondary school students about reading and writing through the outreach program “Teaching Literature in Community.” Having been featured in a myriad of written works and publishing my own collections, I roll up my sleeves and organize literary pieces in the weekly undergraduate magazine First Call. As evening rolls in, I bike to the Van Pelt Library, sit cross-legged in my favorite armchair, and complete the finishing touches on a Second World War paper.

Traveling to other parts of the City of Brotherly Love, study group friends and I order a few Philly Cheesesteaks from Pat’s King of Steaks for dinner. My roommate, with lips coated in frothy toothpaste, opens the door when I get back. After taking a shower, I dry my hair on a blue polka dot towel, sit on my bed, and chortle cheerfully while my roommate chatters about the highlights of her day. Then I read an article about the Penn Museum from The Daily Pennsylvanian. Turning off the lights and setting my alarm clock for 6:00am, I drape my jogging shorts and shirt on a chair for the morning. Before drifting off to sleep, I remember those final months of high school when I had submitted my application to Penn, and smile in the quiet of my room, happy to be here at last.

**Most Influential Teacher Anonymous**

**Topic: Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.**

She was the toughest; she was the best. She was also the most influential teacher I have ever had. Ms. William, my sixth grade teacher, was never one to settle for second-best. As a demanding teacher, she hadn’t always been popular. In fact, my classmates and I used to grumble frequently about her stringent standards. However, by continually challenging us, Ms. William instilled in us an enduring passion for learning.

I remember my first day in her class. While most teachers started the year with fun activities, Ms. William jumped straight into academics. After taking the attendance, she promptly started our first unit: Forces.

She narrated to us the story of Newton and the apple tree, and asked us why things always fell toward the Earth. She asked us many other questions – questions about natural phenomena that I had never thought about before. “Why do we see lightning before we hear thunder? How can we measure the speed of a falling object?” We learnt never to take things for granted. “Always, always, always question what you see. Do you understand why it happens?”

At first, I had a hard time understanding many of the concepts, and often stayed after class to learn more. Once, when I doubted that objects of different mass fell with the same acceleration, Ms. William and I conducted our own experiment with a pendulum to prove the theory. Throughout the year, whenever there was a concept or theory I did not understand, Ms. William would encourage me to research or carry out an experiment by myself. Under her guidance, I entered In doing so, she not only taught me to become inquisitive about the world, and also gave me the tools to explore it.

Another gift that Ms. William gave me was an appreciation of literature. Before I met her, I had always stubbornly rejected as true literature any book that was not written by Enid Blyton. To me, there was nothing that could be better than the adventures of the Famous Five. But as the list of Enid Blyton “To Read” books grew shorter, I started hunting around for other novels to entertain me. I decided to take a look at the Reading List Ms. William had compiled. I still remember picking up Oliver Twist from the library shelf and looking at it skeptically. Today, I’m glad I had listened to Ms. William, for she not only introduced me to the world of Oliver and Fagin, but also that of Huckleberry Finn, Uncle Tom, the BFG, Lucy, Edmund, Susan and Peter. I remember coming to school early one morning, hardly able to contain my excitement, to tell Ms. William that I had finally finished all the books on her Reading List. She smiled in her usual way, and promptly gave me a second List.

Although it’s been six years since I last saw Ms. William, her legacy lives on even today. Every time I read a particularly interesting book, I’d record it in my Reading List. My hope is to one day visit her, and to show her my new Reading Lists. I want her to know how much she has helped me to grow, and how much she has inspired me.

Canadian poet and essayist Irving Layton wrote in his essay The Role of the Teacher that “It is usually from a gifted teacher that a child catches his first glimpse of harmony or wisdom and gets his first hint of the intellectual adventure which may engage him for the rest of his life.”

Ms. William was that teacher for me.

**Why I Love Debating Anonymous**

**Supplementary Topic: Describe an activity of the greatest importance to you**

We are sitting in an empty classroom, two hours after school has ended. Our hands are scribbling furiously across the page, trying to catch up with our torrent of ideas. It is the week before the debate final, and we are doing a dress rehearsal. The topic is child discipline.

“No, no, no. Cut that part out.” Someone suggests, “Give examples. Give alternatives. We must convince the adjudicators that force is unnecessary. That’s our goal.”

We nod in unison. But no, someone disagrees.

“Remember, ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child’. What are our rebuttals for that?”

And so it goes on. We are animated in our discussion, all with different opinions. We sit in a circle, taking turns to speak, trying to keep some semblance of civilization. However, disorder soon sets in as we start conjecturing about the other team’s approach. We are selfish people, all trying to be heard, and all raising our voice until this din becomes unsupportable. But we love the chaos, where ideas, opinions, and counter-opinions intermingle and unite into a product of coherence and clarity. We watch, we listen, we criticize, and we support one another’s arguments. We help our teammates on the finer points of rebuttals, and give feedbacks to their speeches.

I love debating. It gave me my best friend, it introduced me to the works of Raphael, and it instilled in me perceptiveness that I am able to use every day. It has made me realize that there are always many sides to an argument, and that you can never form an opinion without seeing all sides. Debating has also taught me to argue for my own beliefs, but at the same time, to be more receptive to others’ ideas. It has made me work as much as 10 hours a week, slogging through mountains of information and condensing all that into a 6-minute speech. There have been times when I have felt like quitting, when I became so frustrated after countless writings and re-writings that I had just wanted to turn off the lights and go to sleep. There have been times when I was physically exhausted or just mentally worn out. It was during those times that thoughts of defeat crept into my mind. But in the end, I pulled through. I reminded myself of my team and of my love for this activity. I kept going and I’m proud of that.

I look around at my team members. Some look frustrated, some look excited, and some look nervous. Some are arguing, and some are jotting down notes. But in our words and our actions, there is one thing that connects us all: it’s why we are here in this room at five thirty in the afternoon. It’s the passion.

I love my team.

I love debating.

**Obedience to Authority Blace Barker Houle**

**Write about a piece of literature and its meaning to you.**

I never thought that I could be made to do someone serious harm until I read Obedience to Authority by Stanley Milgram. The book describes the Milgram experiment, in which ordinary people were made to believe that they were doing something potentially harmful to another human being for the purposes of a scientific experiment. Despite an obvious moral dilemma, a vast majority of subjects could not diverge from the wishes of the authority figure. The greatest revelation I had after reading this was that I was potentially no different than any of those test subjects.

This is not to say that I believe I am weak, or that I follow instructions blindly. It is merely recognition that there is a mechanism that exists within all individuals which governs our behavior, and that mechanism is not always in our control. Obedience is necessary if one wishes to function in a society, but it can become problematic when it is manipulated by a malevolent authority. It is very rare that I would have the occasion to exercise my free will in the face of a malevolent authority figure, nor would that be a good time to flex my emotional muscles for the first time. However, there are elements of obedience which I encounter daily that provide the perfect opportunity for self improvement. By recognizing these opportunities, I now feel confident that I will be able to listen to my conscience, rather than authority, when the two are in discord.

One pattern that the author observed was that subjects who were interviewed after the experiment came up with a multitude of ways to distance themselves from the task they were told to perform. They placed the responsibility on the authority figure, or even on their “victim” for making mistakes. This phenomenon of removing oneself from a situation occurs frequently in life, and it can be a dangerous habit to fall in to. From my understanding of sports psychology I know that the mind often protects itself from stress by placing too much emphasis on external influences.

As a fencer, some of my most regrettable losses occurred when I saw my good fortunes shifting, and in a desperate attempt to protect my ego, I became obsessed with factors that were outside of my control, and allowed them to rule my behavior. One instance in particular was at the 2009 Junior Olympics. I was sick the week prior and had not fully recovered before the event. I had a difficult path in the elimination round, and I was worried that I would not have the stamina to continue. My first bout was not the most difficult, and I should have been able to handle it. Regrettably, I was not just fencing the bout itself; I was also wrestling with my sickness, the anticipation of harder bouts still to come, and the stress of how my performance would be viewed. If I had focused only on the bout, I might have had a chance, but in reality I lost before it was even over. I let the fate of that bout slip out of my hands to protect myself from emotional stress. That was just another way of submitting to an internalized authority, which existed in the stress of competition, when it went against my best interests. When I should have faced the difficult circumstances and fully applied myself I became emotionally detached and let the situation play out.

There might not have been anyone telling me to dwell on irrelevant distractions, but the same mechanism that helped distance test subjects from their task in the Milgram experiment was in play when I began to lose mental focus in competition. I allowed internalized fear to determine my actions, which is just as bad as submitting blindly to a more tangible authority. The cure for this, I realized later, was easy to recognize, although far from simple to execute. I am aspiring to live with a philosophy that I must be accountable for everything I do, that the buck stops with me, and that no one or nothing else can ever be responsible for my behavior.

Other test subjects in the Milgram experiment became focused on their task so thoroughly that they blocked out what it was that they were actually doing. They performed their job as they were asked, asking the right questions and pressing the correct buttons as necessary; they were so exclusively focused on their physical actions that they did not need to think about what the consequences really were. These test subjects reminded me of something I was taught in driver’s ed, of all classes: that I should look far down the road instead of what is right in front of me. Similarly, in my life, I realize that I need to look at the big picture. I am currently in the phase of my life where I am seeking further education. This is an important part of my life, but it does not end there. My education is crucial, but only to prepare me for an exciting and fulfilling career, but that career is even less significant than the kind of life I hope to lead and the type of person I want to be. While I begin thinking about these intermediate steps, I have been keeping in my mind what is really important to me—living a fulfilling life doing something I enjoy with people I love. When my focus is on that goal, the intermediate difficulties that present themselves along the way seem less ominous and I know that I am heading in the right direction.

I do not claim to be perfect in my ability to resist these behavioral patterns, but I am aware of them and working on them wherever they appear. Obedience to Authority did not change me in any way, but it provided me with a new perspective. When I confront a decision I am able to see it in terms of obedience, and I can make a stronger choice. For me, this means the difference between setting the course of my life or having it decided for me, and between staying true to myself versus being lost and confused. I can take hold of my future confident that, no matter what I do, I will be the one who is ultimately responsible.

# Another Door Opens Anonymous

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

It was our last scrimmage game before the start of the 2009 Valparaiso girls’ varsity basketball season. The clock counted down not only the time left in the game but also how many seconds I had left playing on my basketball team before I told the coach of my decision not to try out for the team that year. Though my parents always supported me in my pursuits, they gave preference to my quitting basketball, a sport I participated in for the preceding nine years. Instead, they advised me to devote all my time developing into a more talented tennis player.

The thought “to quit or not to quit” haunted me night and day. It was a major risk to quit one sport to see if I could make the varsity team in another. Increasing the risk was the fact that I had only started playing tennis the previous year. When the decision-making time came, I decided to alter my priorities and quit basketball. Though I encompass a melancholic feeling every time I watch my former teammates play a basketball game, I never expected all the serendipitous things that came from making that decision.

After the scrimmage I expressed my thoughts: “Coach, this is probably one of the hardest things I’ve had to do because never have I quit a team or backed down from any challenge, but I am not going to try out for the team this year. This has nothing to do with the way you coach. I just feel that I should focus on improving my tennis skills and studying for my challenging classes.”

Coach then responded in a way I did not expect him to, stating, “Natalie, I respect you very much for talking to me about this. I understand your decision, and though we wish you would still be a part of this team, I’m glad you have your priorities straight, and I know you will succeed.”

After that, many rewards came to me. Due to playing sports my whole life, I have learned how to manage my time competently, and after quitting basketball I acquired more time to study and join additional clubs. More time to volunteer at my Greek Orthodox Church also became available. In addition to the long hours spent with schooling and academic or community clubs, I found time to practice tennis relentlessly over the winter, mastering the fundamentals and showing the coach my improvements. There were difficulties I encountered with the current varsity players and their parents thinking I would never improve enough to play at the varsity level, but after practicing long hours, I proved the doubters wrong and became a passionate leader on the varsity tennis team. I worked up to playing at number one doubles and competing at semi-state with my partner. Quitting the basketball team really showed me how much I loved tennis and how important my schooling is to me. It also created a closer-knit family with my parents supporting me at every match, tournament, and title.

As well as playing tennis, I began working at a chiropractic clinic after school. Before obtaining a job at the clinic, the only course of work I had previously had was working as a nanny to a few neighbors and mowing their lawns in the summer. I was eager to begin working at an office and learn the behind-the-scenes aspects of the medical field and how it is intertwined with lawyers and court cases. The medical field and laws have always interested me immensely, and it is wonderful to be able to learn all about that everyday and be a part of the process before cases get sent from lawyers to clients and before the doctors’ work on their patients. Additionally, I have learned various aspects of the insurance world and how to deal professionally with patients. Being part of a professional world every afternoon opened up my eyes to numerous new aspects of life as an adult and helped me become an even more organized, mature, and well-rounded person.

Alexander Graham Bell once stated, “As one door closes another one opens.” There have been times in my life when one thing ends and something greater will come out of it, but none to the extent of what became of my “closing the door” to basketball. Amazingly, making one small decision to alter my priorities presented abundant opportunities showing me possibilities of what I wish to accomplish before, during, and after college. It proved to me how important tennis, my job, and my schoolwork is, and how committed I am when I set my mind to something.

**Robotics Brainstorming Mark Ulrich**

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

Waving our banner wildly, we counted down the seconds, not at the homecoming game, but rather the 2009 FIRST Robotics Competition Kickoff. With only six weeks to build, wire, and program a 120-pound machine, my team jumped headfirst into brainstorming. Our options included a robot that hoarded the purple and orange Moon Rocks, shot them into enemy goals, or rolled them into air locks . . . with unlimited mechanical and software solutions for each strategy. As captain, I led the brainstorming effort and concentrated on getting everyone’s ideas on the table while also keeping discussion moving forward. We soon narrowed our options down to two strategies: one an elegant ball dumper, the other a superlative shooter.

“Our team has never been more prepared to shoot for the moon.”

“A rotating turret will present a significant technical accomplishment."

“None of the other ‘bots will know what hit them.”

The idea of a shooter inspired my teammates, but I knew a simpler robot could score faster by dumping many balls simultaneously.

That night I struggled to decide if I should aggressively advocate for the more effective strategy. I dialed a few teammates and heard the excitement in their voices when they discussed the shooter. I paced endlessly and reflected on my experience with robotics, a passion I had pursued since joining Lego League in 5th grade. I had joined the Southwest Robotics Team during its rookie year in 2006. At the beginning of my sophomore year, when I became the head captain, we had only six members including myself. Now we had 26 members and a network of mentors and sponsors; we had raised over $45,000. I had worked with the larger FIRST community to test a new control system and taught programming seminars for FIRST members at Washburn High and the University of Minnesota. To interest potential young inventors, I had organized demonstrations at public high schools and The Bakken Museum of Electricity and Life. FIRST Robotics meant more to me than a competition; it brought together and inspired people to produce innovation.

Perhaps I could have prolonged discussions, swayed others to my opinion, and my team would have reluctantly built a simple, effective robot. But after weighing the relative merits of process and product and the crucial importance of team dynamics, I embraced the strategy that would generate enthusiasm on the team, wow the crowd, and score sporadically.

That build season we had more fun than ever before. We challenged ourselves to find innovative design solutions to the inherent complexities of lofty strategy. I led the programming effort to become one of a handful of teams able to autonomously track the moving targets and differentiate between friend and foe using the onboard camera. The robot looked magnificent; everyone competed for the chance to drive it. We were proud of our accomplishment.

At the North Star Regional, our members rushed around the pits, offering technical support to less experienced teams and telling everyone about our robot. The two-person drive team struggled to control our robot’s many spinning sprockets and whirring wheels. Although simple ball dumpers outscored us and advanced to Nationals, my decision to look at the bigger picture instead of game details unified our team, and everyone moved forward with a better understanding of strategy for future years. At the awards ceremony the announcer read, “The judging panel may encounter a team whose unique efforts, performance, or dynamics merit recognition, yet doesn't fit into any of the existing categories . . . [The Judge’s Award goes to Southwest Robotics] for their exceptionally strong system design and true team spirit with a positive refreshing attitude.”

# Pipo Sara Claro Piwko

## Tell us about someone who has made a difference in your life.

I’ve lived with my grandparents all my life. My grandfather, whom I call “Pipo,” is like a father to me, and he is absolutely, no-doubt-about-it my favorite person in the world. He is intrigued by everything academic and has a photographic memory. He can do math in his head without pencil or paper and he knows about every incident in world history. All my life, he’s encouraged me to be the smartest person I can be. When I was five, he taught me how to read the poetry of José Martí. When I was 13, we memorized the capitals of all the countries in the world together. When I was 15 years old, Pipo made a comment in the car on our way to school that changed everything for me. As the radio news blared from the speakers, he absentmindedly remarked something along the lines of, “There are a million things happening in the world today, and every one of these stations only knows about Castro and what he ate for dinner yesterday.”

To understand how intensely his words affected me, you have to understand our relationship. I didn’t meet my biological father until I was seven years old, but, to me, Pipo is my real dad. Pipo was there for my piano recitals. He was there for every scraped knee and every paper cut with a bandage ready. When I moved to the United States with my mom, Pipo was the one who gave up his position as Head of the Textile Industry and very comfortable life, who convinced my grandma to leave Cuba and follow us to a foreign country. His devotion to me is only challenged by my own admiration of him. When I was small, I lived on his every word, and now that I’m older, he and I are incessantly discussing our diverse point of views on politics and current affairs.

I've been engulfed in the world of mass communications since before I could walk because my grandfather watches, reads, and listens to the news 24 hours a day- literally. He has the radio news on all night as he half-sleeps. He's always complained about "yellow journalism" and how reporters love to scandalize their stories, meanwhile avoiding the crucially important things. His seemingly insignificant comment about Castro made me realize all the opportunities that reporters might pass up by concerning themselves with canards. At that moment, I felt as though it were up to me to become an honest reporter whom news-philes like Pipo can trust with delivering accurate information. Ever since then, I’ve taken every reporting opportunity I’ve come across, like becoming an intern at the Miami Herald and participating in a journalism summer program at BU, and I am set on continuing that trend by going to school at a great university. I want to be able to repay Pipo for everything he sacrificed to watch me grow up by becoming a renowned and respected journalist.

**A Fork Rose Tran**

**Write page 217 of your 300-page autobiography. (UPenn's application)**

I have encountered a fork. Should I again submit to my father’s demands as I am sent to the kitchen to serve or should I refuse and risk tainting my role as the ideal Vietnamese daughter? I succumb, and fetch a repulsive-smelling platter of duck, over-roasted with a gross crunchy charcoal skin. As I politely weave through the throng of guests, most of whom look at me for a daughter-in-law, I consider dropping the dish, hoping that my father’s cultural inflexibility would shatter along with the porcelain. Gripped by this evanescent desire to rebel, I consider discarding all items that might as well have been labeled “another expectation.” The Rich Dad, Poor Dad Bible of financial success is tossed in the overfilled pail of extracted duck bones, and the piano is broken into kindle. As the ivory keys crumble to ash, the ballet ribbons, the swim meet medals, the forty-dollar SAT guides, the TI-89 calculators, and the fencing foils are all thrown into those flames as well. Maybe, I could seek relief and liberation from my father’s standards that have churned me as if I just dizzily stepped out of the washing machine.

But who would I be without those heartening expectations of his? Along with scheduled college Open Houses and weekly issues of Time magazine, I would toss out canoeing excursions down the Naugatuck River, family hikes up Mount Washington, and camping trips to Lake George, all eagerly planned by my father for our simple pleasure. I would also mistakenly toss out the birthday cakes of ice cream, his clichéd yet memorable lines from his Life’s Little Instructions book, a visit to Disney World when fifteen, and a kiss on the head every time he came home late at night, tired from work. These parts are essential to my existence; they have granted me the priceless qualities comprising who I am.

Even if, in frustration, I tried to sacrifice the good with the bad, could I? While abandoning all the pressures that my father has placed on me, I would likely try to regain this role of Atlas. Remaining this muscleman in the compact body of five feet, I realized my father’s expectations shape me into a determined competitor in a race for success. I am left with a desire to overcome obstacles, of which athletics, recitals, and SAT’s are ultimately building blocks. Maybe, striving is part of me, where the successes I earn boost my confidence. In the back of my mind, this assurance is enhanced by the realization that my father truly cared. Through all the enrichment programs and camaraderie of new acquaintances, he has given to me friendships and the ability to cope with any conflict.

Only recently able to comprehend the traits he developed within me, I recognize that it is due to my father’s expectations that I am prepared for my future. Processing this realization, I successfully reach the dining room table and place the main course slightly off center so the men at the far end could reach more easily. I sit down next to my father and pick up my chopsticks after all my elders have.

**Maybe I Could Be... Rose Tran**

**Describe the courses of study and the unique characteristics of the University of Pennsylvania that most interest you. Why do these interests make you a good match for Penn?**

Maybe, I could be the next Lorene Cary, whose novel, The Price of a Child was selected to unite the city under the 2003 “One Book, One Philadelphia” project. Maybe, I could be one of the few students who stay up until three in the morning trying to piece together the Daily Pennsylvanian, or maybe I could take part in the closely-knit community of Kelly Writers House. Maybe, above all, I could explore my interests in words by studying English and Creative Writing, Comparative Literature and Communication at Penn.

At Penn, I can explore the power and beauty of words. Starting in second grade when I received a savings bond for my story about pandas and continuing through recent AP Language and Literature courses, I know that I really enjoy writing. Penn’s renowned faculty and courses like Lise Funderburg’s Creative Nonfiction Writing will allow me to articulate my thoughts in the most creative and persuasive way possible. I have also glimpsed the power of communication from crafting a presentation for the Mayor of Bridgeport and the City Council on urban school enrichment programs. With this taste of how powerful I can make words, I want to apply my interests as a potential reporter or columnist for the Daily Pennsylvanian. With options ranging from the Kelly Writers House to tutoring kids for the Center for Community Partnerships, Penn offers endless chances to involve myself in the community while engaging and extending my communication skills.

Raised in a diverse city, I was always exposed to different cultures, languages, and beliefs, creating in me an appreciation for cultural differences. After teaching elementary students about multiculturalism through literature as a participant in the American Connection Program, I look forward to classes from Jewish studies to East Asian Languages that would enhance my own understanding of multiculturalism. At Penn, studying different cultures is as important as living among students of unique backgrounds. Philadelphia’s economic, geographical and racial variety of people attracts me most. To meet students from suburbia, farm areas, foreign countries, and the inner city like me only enhances my understanding of others’ experiences and grants me well roundedness. I want to be part of Penn where these students are similarly understanding to differences because everyone is so unique themselves. Especially because writing and communication involve an acceptance and comprehension of people, I trust I can combine my interests in multiculturalism with my academic studies in writing, English and communication. At Penn, I know my writing can be fueled by its diversity, making my writing relatable to everyone.

Penn would also allow me to study, volunteer, and explore in an urban, diverse environment. I would anticipate seeing Philly’s favorite Hubbard Street Dance Chicago or Diane Reeves performing a holiday concert in the Irvine Auditorium. In a city where there is always something to do, I look forward to being in awe and inspiration. Even if inspiration arrives through reading the paper at the terminal, eating Philly cheese steak, or cheering Penn fencing on, I’ll consider myself blessed. Because I am very familiar to the hustle and bustle of city life, I could only thrive in the diverse city of Philadelphia, soon calling it home. Also, because I have more branched out interests in competitive fencing and classical piano, I could spend my time exploring local theatres, campus games, restaurants, and befriending the Philadelphians. As a diverse school in the most historically rich city in America, Penn always presents issues to write about, to learn about, to be part of. From jazz clubs to street shows, Philly’s diverse metropolitan environment readily inspires exploration, writing, and fun. Prepared with pen and paper, I am ready to be inspired.

**Setting Sail Anonymous**

**Consider the books you have read in the last year or two either for school or for leisure. Please discuss the way in which one of them changed your understanding of the world, other people, or yourself.**

I am a traveler, continually guided and inspired by the Homeric hero Odysseus while leading a life marked by departures and subsequent beginnings. The first journey began on November 9th, 2000, when my family and I left China in pursuit of bountiful opportunities in the “beautiful country,” the direct translation of “America.” Though eight years have passed by, the emotions imparted by the departure still resonate within me. Like Odysseus, whose goodbyes with Greece filled him with apprehension, as a young child, I too was doubtful about the life ahead after the initial excitement had subsided. Gradually, through overcoming minor struggles, such as joining in a game of Four Square instead of collecting pebbles in solitude at recess, to more significant ones including presenting my first oral book report in front of my fifth grade classmates, I now realize that my farewell has instilled in me an eagerness to embrace opportunities and a more enthusiastic and courageous attitude towards new experiences.

Odysseus’ parting with his homeland is comparable to my own, yet it is the Achaean’s persevering character that truly inspires me. Despite conflicting forces that beleaguer Odysseus, the hero triumphs at last. Circe’s and Calypso’s seductions fail to erase the familial devotion of Odysseus, who is ultimately disillusioned and continues his journey. Equally admirably, the hero gives Elpenor, a young man who dies after falling off of Circe’s roof, a proper burial to relieve him from afterlife sufferings. Odysseus’ loyal and dutiful temperament has impacted me in ways I did not anticipate: seven years after the initial journey, departure, accompanied by arrival, once again steered me away from the constancy of life. In the summer of 2007, my father relocated to another state. Several months later, my sister, the Telemachus of our family, was born. With responsibility and strong will, I have learned to successfully balance personal pursuits and familial duties, equally significant and meaningful aspects of my life. Although both my father’s relocation and my sister’s birth were unanticipated events, I have gained valuable perspective from them. Through these experiences, I have come to realize that the beauty of life lies in unforeseen events; which if treated with an open-mind, are not obstacles but rather opportunities for maturity and growth.

Interestingly, much of Odysseus’ impact on me also derives from other characters’ actions in Homer’s epic. Though the hero’s own capabilities are undeniable, his ultimate homecoming cannot be attributed to his brilliance and fortitude alone. A myriad of other characters, including the goddess Athena, the god Hermes, and King Alcinous of the Phaeacians, come to Odysseus’ aid throughout his journey. Moreover, the faithful Eumaeus, a shepherd, Eurycleia, a servant, and Argos, Odysseus’ dog, remain unchanged for twenty years, anticipating Odysseus’ return despite rumors of his death. Although these supporting characters are not gloriously portrayed, their roles in the hero’s homecoming are no less significant than that of his own. Due to this awareness, I am more appreciative of the support and encouragement of family, teachers, and friends and try to provide others the same assistance. In certain ways, we are all Odysseus; we are all his helpers. Throughout his eventful and at times misfortunate travels, the protagonist evolves from a man of hubris to one of more humility. Odysseus’ transformation epitomizes my fundamental belief in the duality of man’s strength and fragility and demonstrates the essentiality of both self-reliance and interdependence.

As the sea wind awakens from its hibernation and the tranquil tides evolve into charged waters, I look forward to the future. But unlike the fated odyssey of the Achaean hero, which ended twenty years after his departure from Ithaca, my own is a continuum because life’s kaleidoscopic endeavors are endless. Wherever the next journey may lead, I will embrace opportunities, as did Odysseus, with the same intellectual and thoughtful fervor essential to the attainment of wisdom. A zealous voyager in ceaseless pursuit of knowledge, insight, and growth, I am, once again, ready to set sail.

**The Power of Exposure Anonymous**

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

It’s 107 degrees and the sun’s hot rays are beating down on a family trekking through the busy streets of Dhaka. People, rickshaws, and goats alike are all rushing off to reach their respective destinations. As the parents of the family encourage their two daughters through the maze of bodies, the younger of the two whines for an ice cold mango lassee to alleviate the unbearable heat. They finally reach the car, breathing a sigh of relief as they enter the refreshingly cool vehicle, and as they begin to talk about their plans for the day, a traffic jam forms ahead of them. But of course, being in Bangladesh on vacation, this is no ordinary traffic jam; it starts because a rickshaw swerves into a jeep in order to avoid hitting a family of chickens crossing the road. With the entire street covered in debris from the crash, people impatiently honk from their cars to get an ambulance there faster. Half an hour passes by and it still has not arrived, and the little girl is still craving a mango lassee. Begrudgingly, her father agrees to go buy her one. They leave the car and the mother is left with her older daughter. As they sit in the car, the girl begins to drift off to sleep…when she is suddenly startled by a rapping knock on her window. Her head snaps around, and her jaw drops at the sight outside of the car.

Seeing that I was only ten years old, it is understandable that I screamed when I saw what stood outside my window that day in Bangladesh. Immediately, just from looking at them, I knew that the two men standing there begging for spare change were unlike every other person I had ever seen doing the same thing. For starters, one was perched on the others shoulders; strange, but at second glance, I realized that it was because he had no legs. The other man? He had no arms. Both were wearing ragged clothing and were truly all skin and bones, with their shoulder bones sharply jutting out of their bodies.

I leaped into my mother’s arms and instantly felt guilty, for the looks of utter misery on the men’s faces drooped even lower. Never had I ever felt a stronger need to give a person some sort of compensation, because it was in plain sight that these people truly needed it. Begging my mother for permission to give them some spare change, she allowed me to do so. I opened my tiny clasp purse my grandmother had made me and looked into my modest collection of Bangladeshi coins I had collected thus far on our vacation. At that point in my life, I had been collecting foreign coins for many years, and coveted every single one that went into my collection. I thought hard about what was more important; expanding my already extensive assortment of coins, or giving these men a few dollars to buy themselves some source of strongly needed nourishment.

When we returned back home to America later that summer and I told my best friend all about my vacation, she was astounded that I had decided to give my coins to two complete strangers. My other friends agreed, that they would have just kept it for themselves, and told the men to ask someone else. They all asked why I had made such a decision, and at the time, I told them that I simply felt it was the right thing to do. However, it was the plain fact that I had physically encountered poverty, right in front of my face, that had driven me to make that choice.

In my life, I constantly hear of impoverished people from third world countries who go hungry for days, live in scant housing, and are more prone to disease than any average person living in America. I’ve seen programs on television that show such people who are much less fortunate than me, and naturally, it saddens me to know that they will never have the opportunities that I am privileged to have in my own life. However, despite the fact that I know that these kinds of situations exist in the world, it never really hit me until that day that was I on vacation with my family in Bangladesh, at the young age of ten. I knew, when we first arrived in the Dhaka airport, that this would not be like any other vacation we had been on.

My family has traveled quite a bit in the past, and Bangladesh was unlike any of the other countries we've been to, because the extremes were plainly manifested right in front of our eyes. We visited the villages, where sheep and cows roamed the streets, and the thick air smelled of ghee and straw bales. And we spent time in the city, in which the crowded, pebbly streets were occupied by people walking, bustling along in rickshaws, and rumbling by in cars. In both of these parts of the country, the poor were everywhere. It was impossible to not encounter a beggar on the side of the street every five minutes, and it was equally impossible to not be shocked at the extreme poverty-stricken conditions that you saw them living in. Children with enormous tumors protruding from their bodies played on the streets, people missing limbs – like the two men – made their way around with no assistance from passersby, and elderly citizens took their time limping through the maze of bodies in the packed, sweltering city. I had always known that poverty existed, and I knew that it was awful; but to see it right in front of my very eyes? That really hit home. And it made me realize just how terrible some people have it, making me feel guilty for all of the blessings that I have in my own life. Constant running water, food, shelter, clothes. All of these things that I had taken for granted my entire life, suddenly became privileges that other people would give anything to have in the smallest amounts.

That day, I rolled down my window slowly and reached my tiny, plump hand out to the man perched on the other’s shoulders. He spread out his bony, wrinkled fingers with his palm out, and in it I placed one, two, three shiny dollars coins. I looked up to him and when our eyes finally met, his thin lips curled into a grin I would never have imagined would have fit on his thin, hollowed out face. Giving both men a genuine smile in return, it was ironic that the emptiness in my little purse was the complete opposite of the gratifying feeling that was growing inside of me, expanding until I couldn’t stop smiling.

Since that experience, I have been a strong believer of the idea that being physically exposed to a concept is far more effective than simply being told of it, or watching it on the other side of a television screen. I’ve incorporated this philosophy into all aspects of my life; when I work in the summers at a day camp on a local farm, I constantly use animal and plant encounters as learning opportunities for the children, instead of simply having discussions about them or reading a book. I now stop and appreciate moments that make me love the life I’ve been given, instead of disregarding them as nothing special. I’ve learned to appreciate life as it comes, because I now realize that once-in-a-lifetime experiences are given to us a lot more often than we think they do.

**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.

**The Little Things Molly Brothers**

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

As I'm sitting criss-cross on my bed, my cats curl up beside me, purring quietly. There's music playing in the background softly, the melodious kind that floats through the air. It's so calming that eventually I don't realize there's music playing at all. My door is closed and the only sound aside from my music is the rumbling of the air conditioning unit outside of my window. For the most part my room is picked up; the only item out of place is a pair of sneakers in the middle of the floor that I had thrown off as soon as I returned home. For the first time since my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer, I’m able to reflect on the positive rather than the negative--what to glean from the experience, what lessons to carry on with me.

I'm grateful for a clear mind; no lingering fear penetrates the calm, nor do unfinished responsibilities worry me. Thoughts of whether my mom would make it through this recent chemo treatment don’t interrupt the full breath in. My mental checklist, “dishes-geometry-vacuum-cookdinner-readchapter15-englishessay-shower-checkonmom-sleep”, doesn't repeat itself in my head in monotonous rhythm as my lungs deflate and the breath escapes into the room. Nothing. The serenity feels so unfamiliar, but I welcome it as an old friend.

I'm grateful for the ability to give big bear hugs. Nowadays, I can walk up to my mom and fully encase myself in her warmth and love. Until a year ago, she was too weak for even a flimsy one-armed hug. First it was her chemo, making her nauseous all the time. With no break, the radiation made her skin tender to the touch, fresh with burns. Over the next year and a half, multiple surgeries left her body bruised and sore. Being able to say “I love you” means the world, but being able to physically show that love through a strong embrace means so much more.

I'm grateful for tears. William Faulkner once said, “Given the choice between the experience of pain and nothing, I would choose pain.” The pain of seeing my mother struggle through breast cancer and the stress it placed on me personally was difficult to get through, but my life would not be as fulfilled and my appreciation of the little things in life not as great if I hadn’t fought my way through it to the other side.

**Moving Molly Brothers**

**Ben Franklin once said, “All mankind is divided into three classes: those that are immovable, those that are movable, and those that move.”Which are you?(Please answer in 300-500 words.)**

From the first day, one thing became painfully obvious--if I didn’t get moving, I would get run over. It started off easy; I made sure to travel in the right direction. The tempo was slow. It was a cinch to fix a mistake without being noticed or running into another marcher. Eight steps forward, eight steps back. Stay in line with the people in front of me. Simple. But then the tempo sped up, everyone started moving in different directions from different places on the field, a crowd was cheering from the stands, I had to play music from memory, I was eighteen inches taller because of that huge, sparkly plume on top of my hat, and if I made a wrong move, I could have a trombone slide hitting the back of my head.

As a marcher on the field, I was responsible for only myself. If I knew my spot in the show, I had succeeded. It was easy to give myself a pat on the back and call it a day--I’d done my job, right? Yes, but there’s a perspective beyond that. I may have been moving, all of my own accord and on the right pathway, but I had no sense of the effect my movements had on the people around me or how they contributed to the marching show as a whole. That was the drum major’s job, not mine.

But now I am the drum major and that is my job. Up on the podium, I can pick out every member of the band by name, and I see each of them learn to march their spot in the show. I see everyone’s effort to get their part right and fix their mistakes. Just like them, I have my part to learn. I memorize tempo and time changes, cues and salutes, all aspects of my personal, present success. However, unlike members of the band, I have a responsibility to see the greater goal. It’s my job to understand how their movements work together and contribute to success as a band and not just success as an individual.

Taking the experience and lessons learned as a drum major, I will move not only with confidence and conviction, but I will also strive to perceive how my movements will impact the world around me as well as my future successes.

# A Penn Education Molly Brothers

## A Penn education provides a liberal arts and sciences foundation across multiple disciplines with a practical emphasis in one of four undergraduate schools: the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Engineering and Applied Science, the School of Nursing, or the Wharton School.Given the undergraduate school to which you are applying, please discuss how you will engage academically at Penn.(Please answer in 300 words or less.)

“The main part of intellectual education is not the acquisition of facts but learning how to make facts live,” said Oliver Wendell Holmes. Anyone can pass a history test by memorizing the facts. Anyone can follow an essay format and make an A. Anyone can watch a PowerPoint and take notes. That’s the easy part, the part anyone can slough through, the unrewarding part. The real fruits of learning come from understanding the significance of the facts and applying them to all levels of thinking, allowing one to perceive the world around them in a new way.

While I’m at Penn, I want to be involved with the people, the city, and the culture, all contributing to the fulfilling experience a great education will bring me. I’m excited about the opportunities presented to me at Penn. There are so many that it’s difficult to decide between the different paths I could pursue. I’m considering a major in either History or Anthropology. Everyone in the world is experiencing this moment right now, but studying history allows me a glimpse into a previous time, a different culture, a new perspective. However, I’d also like to be involved in music, one of my great passions, and medicine, my career interest. One of the unique opportunities that makes Penn such an attractive option is the Integrated Studies Program through the Ben Franklin Scholars Seminars. With such differing interests, ISP will provide the environment where I can intertwine what I learn into a well-rounded and disciplined “big idea”.

I can acquire the facts necessary to obtain the diploma I need at practically any college in the country, but with a Penn education I will thrive and push boundaries in all facets of life.

**Why Penn? Anonymous**

**“The Admissions Committee would like to learn why you are a good fit for your undergraduate school choice (College of Arts and Sciences, School of Nursing, The Wharton School, or Penn Engineering). Please tell us about specific academic, service, and/or research opportunities at the University of Pennsylvania that resonate with your background, interests, and goals."**

Standing alone on the stage I faced the spotlight shining on my glistening bald head. The make up artist had done a brilliant job of adding a grim and menacing guise to my face. No, I wasn’t losing any hair at this tender age but I had shaved my head voluntarily to add depth to my character. It wasn’t normal for a junior to shout at seniors or make a mockery of their doings. On stage, I wasn’t the sincere boarding school student giving umpteen hours to perfect dialogues; I was my character.

Acting in stage productions gives me the leeway to divorce myself from my personality in the real world and take on the demeanor of a scripted character, with his own background, dreams and aspirations. From the sympathetic principal of a high school to the ruthless bully, from the flamboyant chairman of a firm to the overweight shy girl, I adopt the characteristics of these fictitious beings and give them life. Having followed and admired Stanislavski’s method acting and emotion memory, I feel I have lived many lives in my short span of seventeen years in the shoes of the many characters I have played. At Penn’s College of Arts and Sciences, I want to seize opportunities to evolve new personalities while remaining true to myself.

Most importantly academically, I intend to explore diverse subjects and try new roles as I have done on stage. As a budding diplomat in the high school community, I want to involve myself in the recently established Penn Program for Opinion Research and Election Studies through the Fox Leadership program, and join the Undergraduate Assembly to voice my opinions. Having spoken to Professor Nagel of the Political Science department, I was delighted to note the opportunities to integrate my interests in public policy and citizenship in an academic field of study through the senior research project. Like my strolls on the steps of the theater while reciting my lines, I imagine walking through the mature tree lined central pathway, Locust Walk, while recollecting Professor Merlo’s last ECON 232 class on the impact of voting procedures on government, with one of my peers. It would be an intellectually stimulating experience for me to add to Professor Lapinski’s class on voting and media at Penn contrasted with the pluralistic and rather rowdy democracy in India. Exploring the role of a diplomat, I would join the International Affairs Association in order to satisfy my desire for knowledge about diplomacy in global politics and further contribute to ILMUNC held annually.

My desire to develop diverse facets of my intellectual persona attracts me to the integrated studies program at Penn, which will help me pursue my interests in political science and economics while simultaneously satisfying my interests in philosophy and film. If, given an opportunity, I would be glad to try the Study Abroad program to France to garner a wider experience of different systems for a semester or carry out independent research projects in political economy. My desire to attend Penn magnifies as I learn of the possibility of juggling a plethora of opportunities while pursuing my academic endeavors. I imagine myself as the fierce sports fan, painted in red and blue and cheering for the Quakers at the Palestra, or as the fine dining connoisseur daring to risk, pleasing my palate at Penn’s Gastronomy Club?

My curiosity and inquisitiveness constantly drive me to add new chapters to my ‘acting journey’. I crave academic pursuits and I can already see myself adding new ‘lives’ to my present life through the myriad opportunities present at Penn. In the small town experience in the midst of the vibrant city of Philadelphia, I sincerely believe that I can add to the rich mix, which is the Penn experience.

**Looking Down Anonymous**

**Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?**

Above the clouds, on the peak of the mountain, I stand, overlooking the vast silhouette of slopes and trees, contemplating the infinite possibilities of routes to take.

I watch other skiers play “follow the leader” down the groomed trails, repeating someone else’s path over and over again. The rusty “Off-Piste Area” sign on the side beckons me past the frozen orange rope. This is my destination. Seeing not a single skier and no fresh tracks to lead the way, I thrust myself off the ledge, down the welcoming abyss. In front of me, trees appear out of the mist. I turn and swerve briskly to avoid collision. Out here, nothing is set. There are no boundaries. I need to make all the right calls. I am knee deep in fresh powder, plowing down the mountain. My heart is bursting out of my chest. I push down hard to one side, turn, and stop. Such split-second decisions in the backcountry are the difference between an amazing run and a frantic tumble to the bottom.

Pausing to catch my breath halfway down the mountain, I look back up, seeing the path that I carved through the trees, the path that I created. Looking down, I contemplate what new path I will soon create. Spotting a patch of undisturbed powder, I take off in that direction. My skis are the first to touch the snow, the first to carve the path. I can turn left or slide right, go between trees or over logs. The pure snow and equally pure freedom lead to new challenges, new drops, and new exhilaration. I look down the slope, and decide how to make the best of it. I could glide between vegetation or dig through deep powder and drops. These different elements of the slope define the skier.

Speeding down the mountain, I whirl fine powdered snow up and around myself, into my face as I ski through. Our army of skiers, boring through the snow, seems unstoppable, wielding fervor and amazement. Leading the pack, I’m not exactly sure of where we are, but I’m certain of what we’re doing and where we’re going. Pushing on, we brave through the blinding blizzard, dodge the trees, and swiftly leap across the drops, nearing the frontier.

Traversing the edge of the mountain, I see things from different perspectives, and I feel different. I could have followed the groomed snow made by another man, but instead, I created the path that led me here, I made all the turns that brought me here, I led myself here. With the small town at the bottom coming into misty but sweeping view, we’ve succeeded. I triumph, sitting near the edge, sipping on a lukewarm but soon to be ice-cold canned coffee, and appreciating this moment. This moment challenges me to exude confidence and enterprise in all areas of my life, to strike out into the mist and defy boundaries. I can envision the finish line and my end goal, but the process is not clearly defined. Diving into the haze is the only way to discover such opportunities, such sparks of creativity that would render a ski run, or any pursuit, amazing.

**Why not UPenn Kamran Shaikh**

**Why UPenn?**

While opportunity cost is what we must give up in order to attain what we desire, I’m sure that there is no opportunity cost of attending Penn. From research, volunteering, and publications to distinct majors, the opportunity cost of Penn is nothing compared to that of any other university. The University of Pennsylvania’s research in bioinformatics is the forerunner of treatments of diseases like Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s and even Sickle Cell Anemia. We’ve all heard of Captain America and the super-soldier serum that made him invincible. At Penn, that science fiction may become a reality. Most recently, Penn scientists transformed neurons into astrocytes in order to protect human brains from concussions. Rather than utilizing pluripotent stem cells, Penn scientists transformed one cell directly into another. Their innovative ideas have provided alternative approaches to the ethical challenges involved in stem cell research. In fact, Penn scientists even regrew cartilage and restored eyesight in humans, rebutting what was deemed impossible in the last decade. One particular professor, Michael Lampson, focuses on cell division and segregation errors that are associated with human cancer, developmental diseases and infertility.

At Penn, I would be able to study under Lampson to develop an understanding of the causes of cancer. Also, Penn offers the Biophysics major—which only a handful of colleges feature. Because of Biophysicists, thousands of physicians can access the MRI, the ECG, kidney dialysis and artificial pacemakers. Biophysicists even modeled DNA—the molecule responsible for our very existence. It’s this kind of research that I’d like to pursue at Penn. I wish to participate in the Biomedical Engineering Society, an organization which seeks to expose biomedical techniques and other aspects of biomedical engineering outside of the classroom. As a Biophysicist, I would delve into the nano-medicine used to diagnose and treat cancer. Even off campus, the Penn Neuroscience Society raises awareness of Alzheimer’s Disease and Parkinson’s Diseases in the greater Philadelphia community. Given my interest in neurodegenerative disorders, I would run informational seminars or present lectures to the public about the latest updates on the diseases. Additionally, I would organize ethical and medical decision-making programs for individuals with Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s in Philadelphia.

Outside of studying Biology, I would contribute to publications at the University of Pennsylvania, such as Penn Science: The Journal of Undergraduate Research. Although the journal mostly focuses on nanotechnology and the research of professors, students can also submit undergraduate research papers. Maybe the mislabeling of sushi or the misplacement of genetically modified organisms is prevalent in Philadelphia. There’s always some way for Molecular Biology to muckrake fraud. Finally, to further my involvement in international affairs, I’d like to contribute to the Penn Society for International Development, especially by teaching a development curriculum at Bodine High School. With all the time I’ve spent at Model UN and the Refugee Center, I’ve gained a true understanding of global poverty and conflicts. At Penn, I would lead discussions about the Implications of US Involvement in Global Affairs and Warfare between natives of Central Africa.

From world-renowned professors and their revolutionary research on biotechnology and bioinformatics to student journals and international goals, I would give up nothing to attend Penn. Instead, I would gain everything by attending a school with unlimited opportunities.

**The Balcony Anonymous**

**Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?**

This is the balcony that extends into infinite dimensions. Inside: paintings and the smell of dusk. Lined against the tiled walls are canvases both void and filled. A soft light overhead. There is something extremely calming about occupying this platform, transforming it into surreal dimensions. In the studio I am expanding both into my mind space and the concrete space of my artwork.

Very often, a friend would read my poetry, view my paintings, and ask:*what was your inspiration? What draws it all together?*

I am never really sure how to answer. To be honest, I have never found any conceptual disparity between visual art and the written form. My urge to create, or express, is like letting out a breath of air. And by creating art, I am able to crystallize that exhalation and preserve it forever. When I paint, language and brushstrokes coalesce into the same motive: to translate my cognitive abstractions into concrete expressions. To tentatively let you into my mind space, this is the trance-like state I fall into when creating: the sky is a stretch of watercolor spreading into little streams, telegraph poles streamlining my ideas into electric currents, reverberating into houses; electric wires gone loose. And beside the overarching landscape, materializes the side portrait of my mother. The silhouette of a slender arm, then the shoulder's precise curvature.

Some people say that art is cathartic. That statement is only half-true. In the very beginning, creating each artwork is like wrestling forever with an unknown contender who seems to come from the realm of artistic perfection. Even when my artwork is finally polished and displayed under the glowing light of art exhibitions, I am not lost in the applause. Interlaced with each brushstroke and each nuance of color is the memory of a self-limitation I've been able to conquer. Thus, out of all the artworks I've ever made, the ones I value the most are not necessarily the most aesthetically successful, but are the ones in which, like a war hero, I battled through to claim victory. In those rare, precious moments, when transfixed by the wild waltz of my imagination, I would feel as if I've reached the apex of divinity. Existing in between the initial concept and the unclaimed, unchartered space of the blank canvas, I've never stopped believing that a secret awaits--perhaps the truth to the wholeness of life, the interconnected beauty of the entire cosmos.

The balcony door opens: I step away from its light, covered in paint. But I do not hurry to wash the colors off my skin. Instead, I let these chaotic remnants of my arduous creations stay, because after hours upon hours inching towards an artistic ideal, my body becomes at one with these brushstrokes, and I am no longer alone.

**The Powerful Combination Jonathan Monahemi**

**Explain how you will use this program to explore your interest in business, engineering, and the intersection of the two. It is helpful to identify potential engineering and business paths available at Penn. (400-650 words)**

From the time of dispatch, an EMT has approximately 120 seconds to get to the patient before life expectancy begins to drop. A fire engine has the luxury of 600 seconds before the number of alarms doubles and triples. These estimates do not include any additional adversities that might occur such as traffic, weather, and communication failure.

How do you begin to save lives if any of your machinery is archaic? As a volunteer fireman and EMT trainee, I have witnessed the obstacles that can possibly hinder saving a life. In my short time with the Great Neck Vigilant Fire Company, I have already begun to outline prototypes to help my colleagues and my community members ensure both efficiency and the highest order of care. The M&T Program will make my success possible because, unlike a double major in business and engineering, the M&T Program integrates management and technology into one complementary curriculum.

My current foray into the combination of business and engineering has been to redesign the standard hose and personal protective equipment that firemen use. Before the hose even attaches to the hydrant, a fireman must endure lifting and unraveling approximately two hundred pounds, most of this weight accounted for by the antiquated nylon covering. My colleagues and I found ourselves fatigued and immersed in sweat before we even fastened our last buckles and rushed into the blaze, due to the rising temperature under our turnout coats and bunker pants. Fire and EMS departments, most of which are hindered by financial cutbacks of their own, need modernization in order to save more lives. A few seconds is all it takes to determine life or death.

By supplying me with an extensive understanding of engineering, the M&T Program will perfect my ideas and help to effect their transition from the drawing board into real products; after all, the technological aspect of the program is geared towards innovation and invention. Through Penn Engineering Undergraduate Research and the M&T Innovative Fund, I can delve deeper into the science behind the problematic aspects of emergency services, thus allowing me to further understand the problems and develop more effective solutions. Furthermore, a solid business does not just rely on one product and then rest on that product’s laurels. Each product gives birth to a family of new ideas and designs. The hose and equipment are just the first steps in a series of rehabilitation measures to bolster the fire service and EMS.

With unique opportunities at M&T, such as Bioengineering 400, I will earn important exposure to real-life problems in medicine through my hours in the clinic. Shadowing physicians will allow me to gain valuable feedback on new ideas for EMS innovations as well as gaining new ideas for products. Although the technology side of my future company will be strong, I must maintain a strong business plan to ensure that my products positively affect Fire and EMS agencies throughout the world. The longevity of a company and its products relies on the company’s ability to capture market share, allocate resources efficiently, and manage employees to their highest potential, thus requiring a unique business mind leading the way.

In order to effectively capture the market and the country with their products, inventors and innovators must become powerful entrepreneurs through efficient management techniques and a mastery of economics. Equipped with a Wharton education, Penn Engineering students become unstoppable at accomplishing their dreams. With concentrations in Management, specializing in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, I can bring my products to the next level because I will possess the ability to develop flexible and individualized techniques for my industry while ensuring that every aspect of my company is optimized.

**Social Welfare and the College of UPenn Anonymous**

**Why Penn?**

When I was eight, as my father and I were walking down an ordinary street in Bangladesh, we passed several street vendors, all shoeless, dirty, and tattered. I halted. “Dad,” I whispered, tugging on his arm. “Do they earn enough to eat?”

My shock at such blatant disparity hadn’t dissipated by the time I’d enrolled in microeconomics junior year. Our class was engaged in a realistic game in which all 127 students managed simulated firms. Very quickly, I’d grown into the largest firm in the class. I’d become so profitable, in fact, that I had sufficient cash to purchase all of the input units for October. *But what about others who have worked just as hard as I have?* I wondered. If I prevented them from producing in October, many of their firms would be crippled, and some would go bankrupt. Sure, it was only a simulation, but it didn’t matter. I refused to corner the market. Instead, I continued to strategize other ways of doing business without harming other firms. To my amazement, by the end of that term, I’d not only made the most profit, but I’d also created a far more constructive environment for others. It was then that my passion for social welfare was solidified.

Today, I can’t think of a better place to study social welfare than Penn. I’m impressed with Penn’s commitment to both deepening intellectual understanding and utilizing knowledge to profoundly benefit others. I plan to major in mathematical economics, which will provide me the foundation I need to go on and create powerful change. I love that economics courses like Social Choice Theory emphasize that mathematics is the only language powerful enough to make deep progress in addressing social welfare issues. Also, knowing that I’d have the opportunity to study under professors like Dirk Krueger, who has done much research in this arena, shows me that I’d gain incredible knowledge through courses and interactions with my professors.

Penn’s One University policy would allow me to delve into my study of economics from multiple angles so that I can gain an in-depth understanding of economic social impact. It would be an amazing opportunity to take Wharton courses such as impact investing, or to study under accomplished professors like Jacob Gray, whose work underscores the resources provided to the Penn community for research. I could also take courses in Penn’s engineering school, allowing me to explore the NETS major, which analyzes real world issues with a quantitative mindset. Additionally, Penn’s foundational approaches would ensure that I obtain knowledge that will enhance my understanding of a wider range of social issues.

I also look forward to getting involved in The Institute for Economic Research and Penn’s Undergraduate Economics Society. Both would afford me opportunities to conduct research with professors such as George Mailath and Andrew Postlewaite. I greatly admire their joint paper on “Social Assets,” which brilliantly presents a model that takes into account not just economic factors, but social as well—something I know to be vitally important to the health of any economy and community. Through researching at Penn, I’d gain valuable insight into real social welfare issues that I wouldn’t attain through coursework alone.

Outside of classes, I’d love to take part in the winning tradition of Penn’s club soccer team, further pursue economics through the Turner Social Impact Society, and join Penn’s Undergraduate Math Society. I also plan to get involved in the local community. From educating low-income youth about personal finance in the Moneythink club to teaching 3rd and 4th graders in the Philly area to swim in Penn’s “We Can Swim!” program, I’d easily find ways to utilize my strengths to help others. I can’t think of a university I’d be prouder to call my alma mater, or a better place to continue bridging the social sciences and social responsibility.

**Redefining My Purpose Through Slam Poetry Anonymous**

**Describe the world you come from; for example, your family, clubs, school, community, city, or town. How has that world shaped your dreams and aspirations?**

The stage lights burst open, blinding and white. I trembled. I was at the citywide poetry slam, Verselandia, about to perform in front of hundreds.

Earlier in the month, I had qualified through my high school’s contest, which I had signed up for because, “Hey, there might be free cookies!” (There were not.) At the time, I didn’t know much about spoken word artistry except from street performers (this was downtown Portland, after all). But I practiced in front of my mirror, my friends, and my faithful stuffed animals. Ultimately, I placed first at school.

At Verselandia, I watched others deliver lyrics about abuse, racism, and feminism. A few talked about their LGBTQ+ identities; one addressed bisexual erasure, which I could personally relate to. Slowly, I realized that writing didn’t serve just as a cathartic outlet; it could startle others into empathy and create awareness. When my turn came, I delivered lines like “Your heritage is more than an exotic enigma.” Afterwards, several of my Chinese-American classmates told me they could relate. I realized that my writing had the power to give these experiences visibility, which in turn might help erase damaging yet common preconceptions about my ethnicity.

As a Portland Youth Poet Ambassador, I have opportunities to not only promote creative writing, but also advocate for social equality. This is the narrative I live. Through poetry, I want to depict not only a narrative from a person of color, but also a narrative of a queer person of color--a perspective too often neglected the media, but too important for me ever to remain silent.

# What I Learned from Synchronized Swimming 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.

When I was ten months old, I grabbed onto the coffee table and hauled myself up, arms shaking, fists clenched, knees wobbling; ten minutes later, much to my parents’ dismay, I was sprinting around the house, choppy bangs flapping in the wind like sails. When I was 17 months old, my grandmother wondered how such a short and round child could invariably evade her grasp. And when I was three years old, I decided that my toddler brother would become my (somewhat limp) wrestling partner. It then dawned on my parents that I had both too much energy and a predisposition to trip over nothing, a dangerous combination under any circumstances. Apparently, I needed some way to expel my extra vigor while also not becoming a safety liability. And so, at the age of six, I joined my local synchronized swimming team.

The first few years in the sport were uncomfortable, as I seemed to have no rhythm or natural understanding of how to contort my body into any graceful positions. Were it not for my logic-defying natural buoyancy, I would have been even more of a safety hazard. I was shy and awkward, and I couldn’t seem to understand what I needed to convey to the judges. My lack of emotional connectivity was so rigid that my teammates had to resort to screaming the word “underwear” at me in an attempt to get me to smile. For years, my struggles against any show of vulnerability persisted both in and out of the pool, with teachers and coaches alike commenting “good work, but would love to see more engagement.”

In synchronized swimming, engagement with the audience is the heart of the sport. It represents the pursuit towards finally convincing others that no, my lungs are not on fire, no, I can’t feel the sixty-seven bobby pins stuck straight into my scalp, and yes, I’m perfectly fine, thank you very much. It is the art of displaying all the complexities of movement of any gymnast or dancer while also actively trying not to drown. Bit by bit, the intricacies of the sport started to break down this emotional wall I had built up. The sensation of music flowing around me, the feeling of cool water against my skin, the sight of my teammates’ faces, all helped me realize the full extent of my perseverance and emotion. Looking back on my years of training, I realize that the important things about synchronized swimming for me were not just the sport itself. It became the lens through which I now see the world, and the basis for my continued maturation.

Growing up with the sport as such an intrinsic part of my development, I learned to apply the lessons from each practice to my life outside the pool. My permanent bruises from getting kicked in the shins by my teammates cultivated my ability to work with others. Pushing myself to kick a little harder and reach a little farther on every lap taught me about the importance of determination. My desire to help others developed through mentoring the younger girls on the team, and later presented itself in my volunteering and community service work. Placing 11th at a competition that selected the top 10 girls for the U.S. National Team taught me how to handle failure, and how to turn a devastating situation into a poignant and educational one. The next year, hearing the lushness of the national anthem as we won gold for the U.S., I realized that my earlier heartbreak had actually motivated me to work harder towards my dreams. For me, synchronized swimming isn’t about the glittery swimsuits and dramatic makeup. It’s about the lifelong friendships formed, the resolution and drive that are enriched from each practice, and, when the going gets tough, the ability to grit your teeth and smile in the face of everything else.

# You Are Beautiful Anonymous

## What is something you have done to improve your community?

A few days ago, I watched a video titled “People React to Being Called Beautiful,” made by a student, Shea Glover. She filmed various other students and told them she was “taking photos of things [she] find[s] beautiful.” The various reactions are surprising to say the least. Most students laughed and smiled. Other responses are more heartbreaking.

One girl gives a small smile then looks down and bites her lip.

Another covers her face, deeming herself unworthy for the camera.

A boy asks, “Are you serious?”

It’s obvious that none of these subjects were used to hearing this kind of compliment; that really pulled at my heartstrings. It also reminded me of the romanticized culture of teenage life, filled with angst and a desire to “fit in.”

And it reminded me of when I first sought out to create a school newspaper. The disapproval of peers can be a crushing force, one that can stifle ideas. I had heard stories about newspapers at other schools: “No one really reads it, honestly,” confided a friend. “It’s mostly run by the English teacher and just features random short stories and essays”. And yes, most students aren’t terribly interesting in reading other students’ English assignments, but the generally negative opinion had helped to kill it even faster.

So I told another friend about my idea.“It’s a terrible idea,” she proclaimed. “Our school doesn’t have any school spirit. No one’s going to read it.” I struggled to find a response. “But don’t you even want to try?” “Not really. Good luck,” she said, already walking away, chewing her gum.

But I was persistent. I gathered a small team of seven others who were at willing to join me in my venture. My mission was simple: to bring more awareness about the happenings of our school to the students. Inertia, though, is not just a physics concept to be applied to moving masses. Our first issue was released to a great storm of no publicity at all. It had suffered a worse fate than condemnation; it was simply ignored.

Over the next few months, we would have countless Skype calls and many revisions of our plan. How would we attract readers? Going further than that, we realized that we needed to expand electronically, and be as legitimate as an actual newspaper. A Facebook page, a YouTube channel, a website, and an Instagram profile have all popped up. We began selling advertising space to local businesses to generate revenue. Our creation, The Pinetreae Post, has expanded to include investigative journalism, such as a feature on the issue of overworked counselors.

Slowly, student interest began to build. We successfully shed off the “cringey” label we had worked so laboriously to avoid. Students started to contact us, asking for their pieces to be put in the next issue. If my paper could speak for itself, it would confirm the necessity of going against the grain, of the reliability of hard work - would confirm the idea that, instead of opinions shaping our ideas, our ideas can end up shaping opinions.

**The Third Shot Steven Michael Wang**

**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.**

On any given dusky afternoon, I find myself asking the pressing question: Will I make it a third time in a row? I raise my arms, examine a dulled orange orb clinging to my aching, sweaty palms, and squint at the near-invisible net. Far from aspiring to become an NBA player, I use my recreational basketball skills as a daily relaxing ritual. I fall into a rhythm, a fluctuating combination of layups, free throws, and outbursts: "3...2...1!" I imagine shooting the game-winning basket in the last seconds of my coliseum game. But, no matter how tired I am, my workouts always end the same: three baskets in a row. Of course nobody is there to enforce this law, but it feels wrong to leave without accomplishing this arguably foolish task.

My tendency to set arbitrary goals serves as a sort of closure for me. Seeing the third basketball swish through the net evokes such a euphoric feeling; it represents a consistent end. I admit it - I need closure. I enjoy stories with a beginning and ending; I furiously research movies that end with cliffhangers after watching them; I demand answers to unsolved problems: Is there a universal cure for cancer? How can we stop aging? Where do we come from? It thrills and perplexes me that explanations currently unperceivable to the human mind will someday answer such questions. Therefore, I approach each pursuit as a basketball challenge I have to complete: knowing I will miss many shots along the way, I will persist until I make my magical three and reach a conclusion that satisfies.

While the third swish of the net is always an enjoyable sound, my true satisfaction from this self-imposed three-shot test stems from the journey the basketball takes: the perfect backspin, the initial angling of the shot, and the beautiful arc of the ball's trajectory. Likewise, the most meaningful aspect of my search for closure lies not in the actual discovery of the truth, but in the arduous journey of reaching such a conclusion. It's within these journeys that I expand my perspectives and understand new viewpoints through interactions with other individuals. In my search for technological ways to alleviate human suffering, for example, I've started to question the meaning of "impossible" after interacting with Mick Ebeling, an inventor who 3D prints prosthetic limbs. Like every three-shot challenge, no pursuit I undertake is ever the same. I have the opportunity to stretch my perspectives to great lengths in any direction I choose, to learn from the untapped memories and experiences of unique individuals. It all exists within the journey.

So will I make three-in-a-row tonight? I raise the basketball up in the air and fling it with calculated force. As I watch the illuminating orange sphere twirl in the air, I remember that my need for closure transcends the final conclusions I reach. Each question I seek to answer holds a journey, an arduous mid-region to traverse, that will inevitably expand my viewpoints, values, and beliefs. The ball swivels on the rim before finally dropping into the white mesh. A day's journey has ended; a new one has just begun.

# The Seeds of My Career Anonymous

## How will you explore your intellectual and academic interests at the University of Pennsylvania? Please answer this question given the specific undergraduate school to which you are applying.

Terminalia bentzoe, known as ‘benjoin’ in my local vernacular, is a plant endemic to Mauritius. In the past, local people would use its leaves to make decoctions against the common cold but unfortunately, this subspecies is today vulnerable in its natural habitat. Certainly, we do not want this plant to become extinct. After all, what if it hides biomedical secrets? As a chemical and biomolecular engineer, I will be able to work towards uncovering such secrets. My interest in Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering stems from my aspiration to develop new drugs to treat incurable diseases and improve healthcare around the world. Penn School of Engineering not only offers a compelling combination of the features I deem most important as part of my future university experience but will also provide me with myriad opportunities to render this very journey adventurous and exciting.  
  
I want to major in Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering and follow a concentration in Pharmaceutics and Biotechnology with the Drug Discovery and Development (CBE 562), Drug Delivery (CBE 564) and Pharmaceutical Manufacturing (CBE 553) courses, amongst others. As I am eager to be part of the exciting future of nanoparticles, I am interested in a minor in Nanotechnology. Indeed, the big potential of the very small perhaps lays the foundation for the next medical breakthroughs that will bring about innovation in healthcare technologies. However, the Engineering Entrepreneurship minor also appeals to me as it will equip me with the skills I need to be able to hopefully set up my own research company one day. In the long term, I intend to explore the biomedical potential of the lesser-known living biological labs, i.e. plants, especially in tropical islands like my own country and work on cost-effective methods of drug production in order to democratise access to medicines.  
  
Apart from its world-class academic programs, I also chose Penn’s School of Engineering because of the unparalleled research opportunities it offers to undergraduates. The encouragement which professors at Penn give to their students when it comes to research is indeed inspiring. I am thus enthusiastically looking forward to take part in research projects in the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, with a particular interest in ‘Advanced Materials and Nanotechnology’. Moreover, as a sophomore, I would like to apply for the Rachleff Scholars Program as it will enable me to acquire valuable hands-on research experience and essential skills such as problem-solving and data analysis.  
  
I will continue to explore my academic interests outside of the classroom by engaging in Service Learning projects which will be an interesting way for me to apply the knowledge I will gain to the real world. I would love to form part of the Penn Engineering Without Borders (PennEWB) organization and take part in sustainable projects aimed at improving the standard of living of people in developing communities. Additionally, taking part in an international engineering project will allow me to view the world through a new lens and will better prepare me for a career in the global workplace. As a feminist, I also want to form part of Penn chapter of the Society of Women Engineers and help to advance women in engineering since even in the twenty-first century, engineering is still a field where women are under-represented.  
  
It is said that for every disease known to mankind, there is a plant to cure it. As for Terminalia Bentzoe, who knows that it may contain the solution to one of the current biggest global challenges, that is, antibiotic resistance? An education at Penn’s School of Engineering coupled with Penn’s robust liberal arts program will allow me to answer such questions and dedicate myself to the welfare of humanity as an engineer.

# My Kind of Leadership Anonymous

## Please describe a time in which you displayed leadership.

I dip my upper body to form an acute angle with my lap, unsticking my shirt from the sweat on my chest. My throat burns almost as if I had eaten an entire ghost pepper. I knew this was going to happen—I had run with my students yesterday as well.

For one hundred hours of volunteering every summer as a teacher in the outskirts of Beijing, I’m the one in charge. The other teachers just watched the students—I chose to run alongside them. “It’s so hot”, the other volunteers told me. “Why would you ever do that to yourself?” I asked them, “Why would you make your students run if you can’t even do it?” And so, I chose to run alongside them, because to me they were more than just students. We were a team, and if they could bear with something, then I would show them that I could too. I wanted to lead a group that respected and loved me, rather than one that feared me.

I always imagined leadership as someone above everyone else. I imagined speeches from a podium, and orders given by one to the many. I imagined presidents, army generals, and sometimes, even superheroes—all the things that I’d never be. Yet now, as a volunteer teacher, I was a leader too. Leadership isn’t standing up above everyone else—it’s helping everyone around you stand up with you. Leadership isn’t command—it’s influence. To me, a leader only exists in the minds and hearts of those who are inspired to follow.

# Holistically Healthy Anonymous

## How will you explore your intellectual and academic interests at the University of Pennsylvania? Please answer this question given the specific undergraduate school to which you are applying.

His cell phone rang again. Sighing, my father ducked his head apologetically before excusing himself to pick up the call. It was the hospital calling to inform that a patient—an elderly undocumented immigrant—had returned to the emergency room yet again. Fearing her illegal status would be revealed, she delayed seeking the treatment my father had prescribed until her conditions became so severe that she finally went to the emergency room.

It had never occurred to me that a profession so deeply rooted in empirical evidence could also be impacted by ethical, political and demographical factors. But when I began working at my father’s clinic as a receptionist, I started to notice the way medicine linked so many different subjects together to provide a tailored treatment for each patient. The woman with type 2 diabetes was prescribed insulin supplements so she could taste-test her pastries. The veteran with back pain who loved glassblowing was advised a surgery so he wouldn’t have to continuously take pain medication due to his active lifestyle. As I spent more time at the clinic, I saw how my father incorporated snippets of unique patient information into each treatment.

In high school, I studied “Transcultural Healthcare” which analyzed systems of health as well as the variables that affected them in different societies so that patients of all backgrounds could be treated appropriately. With my knowledge from Transcultural and my experiences from working in a clinic, I hope to bring a unique perspective to Penn and build upon my own experiences with those of other—a desire easily accomplished with Penn’s emphasis on interdisciplinary learning. Penn even asks that students fulfill a Cross-Cultural Analysis Requirement in its Foundational Approaches to ensure that students are well-versed in cultures and communities outside of their own, a necessity I realized after studying Transcultural. While many may view the General Education requirement as a hassle, I see it as an advantage, a stepping stone that will provide me the grounds to explore new subject matter and use them to adapt to any concentration within health, whether it be ethics, policy-making, research or even technology.

At Penn, I want to major in the Health and Societies to study medicine in a broader context and understand its impacts on individuals and their communities. I’m extremely excited to enroll in ABCS like HSOC335-401 Healthy Schools when I can collaborate with students from the Political Science department to synthesize our varying perspectives to best improve health in West Philadelphia schools. This is just one of the many opportunities Penn offers for students to thrive outside of a traditional classroom and transform the information they’ve acquired to tangible solutions. The College of Arts and Sciences will push me to grow but also support me through my experimentations and endeavors.

At the College of Arts and Sciences, I will have all the resources necessary for me to achieve and expand my intellectual interests at my disposal. It is at the College of Arts and Sciences that I will integrate what I’ve learned with what I can apply. It is at the College of Arts and Sciences where I will be able to participate in discourse with students of varying disciplines who can provide new insights into the world we share. And it is at the College of Arts and Sciences where I will foster my ability to think critically and creatively to propose new ideas and solutions towards society’s greatest challenges.

# Spirited 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 an airline that describes its seating as “cozy,” Spirit Airlines had remarkably good legroom. After stowing my overhead luggage, I fished out the latest edition of The Economist and buckled up for the (hopefully comfortable) flight to the National Catholic Forensic League (NCFL) Tournament in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

The Economist isn’t exactly perfect in-flight entertainment, but it’s the bread and butter of any extemper (speech and debate lingo for anyone who competes in extemporaneous speech). Extemporaneous speech draws from a wide range of global headlines-- everything from Uber to the Kremlin --, and The Economist covers them all. Magazines such as The Economist form the backbone of any good extemp speech.

Not even Spirit Airline’s lack of complimentary in-flight peanuts could dull my enthusiasm as I left for Ft. Lauderdale. However, as the lone competitor from my school, I also felt a hint of unease. Unlike our competition, my school’s team didn’t have any funding or a coach. Our team was small and entirely self-taught. Nobody on my team had ever done extemp before, so I didn’t have anyone to guide me. I was incredibly thankful to even have the chance to compete with nationally ranked teams.

Being sandwiched in the middle seat for four hours has a way of putting things into perspective. Early on I struggled with my speech delivery and analysis. Without any mentor, I looked online to find guidance and information. I learned a lot, but I still found that I hit barriers at tournaments. My hand gestures made me look like I was signalling traffic, and I spent more time looking at my feet than at the judge. My speech structure was broken and discordant. But I continued to try to improve. I gave speeches to my mirror to monitor my eye contact and gestures, and I recorded each speech to analyze my volume and tone. Still, I lacked the analysis and mastery of content that other students possessed. Without a large team to back me, I gave speeches to my family and researched by myself.

However I still suffered setbacks. My first national speech and debate tournament was the Harvard Invitational. Despite my lack of experience and coaching, I managed to make it to the double octofinalist round and break into the top 96 competitors. However, I received poor ranks during my double octofinalist round and I dropped out of the tournament. At that moment I realized that I needed to get serious about speech and turn my interest into a passion. I redoubled the amount effort that I put in towards my content, structure and delivery.

I took a MOOC (Massively Open Online Course) about public speaking and attended summer camp at the George Mason Institute of Forensics during my sophomore year summer. At camp, I learned the fundamentals of speech substructure and delivery that I hadn’t had the opportunity to learn myself. Eventually, after a lot of work and sweat, I began to improve.

As the plane began its descent, I put away my magazine and prepared to land. In just a few hours, I would be enjoying the lush tropical beaches of Florida by spending my days holed up in a university library answering questions about Saudi petropolitics. I’d finally see the national extempers I had been dying to meet (as it turns out, they weren’t dying to meet me) and compete with students from all across the nation.

I managed to make it to the semifinals of the NCFL Tournament. Although I didn’t get to soak in any of the Florida sun, I did get the validation that I had been looking for-- the validation that hard work, determination, and perseverance can lead someone to their goals, no matter what they start with.

# Building Robots, Breaking Barriers Anonymous

## 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 looked down at the robot before me. I had spent weeks and weeks programming and building it, putting in countless hours of concentration. Then I looked up at my robotics teacher, excitedly, as he tested it himself — and it worked perfectly. The robot moved as the camera identified the colors correctly and gave the proper responses. I was thrilled. Then, his attention moved from the robot over to my partner sitting next to me. He had hardly helped at all with the project, and when I had talked to the teacher about him, I was shrugged away. My teacher extended his arm for a handshake and told him, “My, what an excellent job you have done.”

Needless to say, I was furious. This wasn’t the first time that my teacher had belittled my efforts in the class - “Robotics is not for girls, sweetheart,” he had directly told me - but it was the final project of the class and my eighth grade heart was so excited about it. Even worse was at the end of the year, when the technology department - headed by the same teacher - gave its Student of the Year award to my male partner, who was credited for my efforts that somehow were not mine because of my gender.

I immediately went to the school board, writing a letter explaining my predicament- the effort I had put in, the sexism I had faced, the recognition I was robbed of. I poured myself out onto that paper, and then waited weeks for a response. I was certain that they would have applauded me for standing up and persevering. Finally, when it came, I tore open the envelope with enthusiasm, and saw their response. As I read it, my attitude turned from excited to confused, and then to discouraged. They had not seen a problem and had not wanted to pursue it. “Mr. E is a good individual,” it read. “Perhaps you simply misunderstood him.”

That day, I was forced to realize an uncomfortable fate. As a queer girl from a low income family, I was going to face discrimination no matter where I went in life. It was an inevitable fact. As much as I could try to ignore it with hopeless optimism, I wouldn’t be able to fix it all. I realized that I was just going to have to try harder throughout my life to surpass discrimination.

However, acceptance of discrimination does not mean that we can stop fighting for equal treatment. If anything, this event has inspired me to push harder. I picked up a pen and paper and started writing about discrimination in my own community. I started conversations about the role that inequality has in our schools. I kept going, and I am very grateful that I had. Quite simply, we have a long road ahead of us before we can ensure equality, but this road can still be travelled. We need to keep trying harder. We need to keep pushing discrimination. We need to tell young girls to keep building robots.

# When problems arise, I solve them using copper fittings Pat cummins

## 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 first discovered this versatile building material as a seven-year-old visiting my father's HVAC shop. While waiting for him to finish working one night, I wandered from the modestly finished space at the front of the building to the shop in back, which featured high ceilings and imposing stacks of shelves. I was fascinated by the dusty machines with tubes, knobs, and old cracked nozzles. When Dad found me shoulder-deep in the scrap copper bin--which I later referred to as "the world's coolest trash can"--he determined that it was time to teach me to solder. Thirty minutes later, armed with a bowl haircut, a pair of safety glasses, and a healthy dose of self-confidence, I was ready to take on the world.

From then on, my childhood was a patchwork of failures. I fell into a constant cycle of thinking, designing, building, and rethinking. Common Christmas wish list items included drafting supplies and architectural stencils. Each childhood interest led me back to the shop, where I figured out a way to build it from copper fittings. Learning to play trombone inspired me to design my own instrument. After a faulty mouthpiece and soldering mistakes ruined three prototypes, "The Plumbone," an instrument that could play three distinct notes, became my first successful creation. When a middle school acids and bases project called for building a paper maché volcano, I built a cannon instead. Though my first model failed to "erupt," my second sprayed its contents so far that it left a swath of dead grass in my lawn. While the grass grew back, I built a soapbox car entirely out of copper and steel strut channel only to find myself claiming last place in the annual "Soapbox Derby." Noting that the lightest cars accelerated quickest, I rebuilt my car, replacing steel with PVC pipe, and took second the next year. Having navigated around so many obstacles, I imagined that I could build anything so long as I had copper fittings.

As I matured, however, I began to drift away from my old standby. While attempting increasingly abstract projects, I grew frustrated by the limitations of copper fittings. It felt like the end of an era when I decided to build one last copper item, a small creature that I gifted to my dad.

Leaving the familiarity of copper behind felt like entering a new, entirely foreign world. Embracing the freedom and uncertainty of Python, I began coding my newest idea: a game called "Dive." While the concept proved exhaustingly ambitious, success seemed imminent as I stitched my project together, patch by patch. Yet when I looked through my computer one morning, I realized that "Dive" was gone, wiped inadvertently during a visit to the Apple store. I stared in disbelief at the blank computer screen, wondering if my vision was lost forever.

At this pivotal moment, I realized why copper fittings represent such an important part of my childhood. When my cannon refused to fire correctly, I learned something new about propulsion. When I soldered my instruments incorrectly, I refined my technique. Had I given up every time an idea failed, I would not have learned from my mistakes, and more importantly, I would not have found success. Even if I never solder again, the lessons I learned from copper fittings are the lessons that will guide me through life.

Losing "Dive" remains difficult to accept, yet excitement about the potential in a new game quickly overshadowed my disappointment. Years of faulty designs and unfortunate accidents have taught me to revise my methods, but not my goals, in the face of failure. With a confidence that only arises after realizing that success was just out of reach and finding the audacity to reach further, I set out to make "Dive 2.0," the best game you'll ever play.

# Huntsman Program: Chinese Foreign Investment Anonymous

## Discuss a current international issue, which demonstrates how international affairs and business intersect and explain how the Huntsman curriculum might assist to resolve the issue.

Bottled water. Houses. Waste management. Cows.

The past few years has seen a rise in Chinese investment overseas. Spearheading the movement towards further globalisation in the wake of the United States’ increasing protectionism, China is boosting direct foreign investment through Chinese companies, many of which are state-owned. This trend aligns with China’s vision for more connectivity and cooperation in global development. Regions such as New Zealand are ideal investment hotspots with their abundance of sought-after resources: China occupies the seat as the largest trading partner for both of these countries. Also on the table are farms, water, infrastructure, and property. Notably, China’s surge in overseas investments points to its overarching political aims of consolidating its position as a global superpower.

However, while the increase of Chinese foreign investments spells out positive economic benefits for the target country, this is often dampened by underlying political tensions. The rise in nationalism has left people apprehensive about the merits of foreign investment, stoking fears of jobs being outsourced and ownership being “stolen” by foreigners. In New Zealand, there is a disproportionate amount of sensitivity surrounding Chinese investment. Living in Auckland, I’ve heard countless complaints (questionable though they are) of the Chinese driving up our property market.

Uneasy feelings are further exacerbated by the cultural differences between China and its investment destinations in the Pacific. Chinese companies must adapt and operate under higher levels of accountability and transparency overseas - more perhaps, than they can get away with in China. There are also clashes in ideals, such as the tradeoff between expansion through investments and environmental damage. For countries like New Zealand and Australia, where the environment is a significant appeal, this may lead to governments restricting foreign investment, thus decreasing mutual economic benefits.

It is evident that utmost care must be taken when navigating the issue of Chinese foreign investment, and this is where I believe the Huntsman Programme bridges the overwhelmingly political gap in understanding/agreeance between China and the Pacific. The Area Studies courses at a premier Chinese university like Peking University will enable us to grasp the cultural context of Chinese actions; in particular, the Advanced Chinese Studies program at Peking University offers pertinent courses such as History of Twentieth Century Sino-Foreign Relations which can provide insight into historical precedents and relations that may have influenced current Chinese strategies in development. Concurrently, they give better understanding of potential sensitivities which we can take into consideration when advising potential courses of action.

Additionally, the flexible Huntsman curriculum balances learning through hindsight in history based courses with courses broaching contemporary issues taught by professors who are actively contributing to the field. I’m excited to attend lectures like Professor Stephen Golub’s Nations, Politics, Markets which will equip us with better skills to assuage unjustified public fears and raise any concerns that may readjust the Pacific’s position on Chinese foreign investment. Ultimately, I’m excited to not only pick the brains of my professor, but also my diverse classmates, each with their unique Huntsman curriculum and experiences.

# The Ride On! Project Paolo Nasr

## Describe a problem you’ve solved or a problem you’d like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma-anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

The ladder is broken - the socioeconomic ladder of Ghana that is. There are several missing rungs, leaving a large gap between the first few steps and those leading towards the top. This disparity makes it difficult for underprivileged Ghanaians to improve their lots. Every day, on our 20-minute drive to school, I am reminded of those missing rungs as the car whizzes by students who are on their own 90-minute journey to school. They take so much time preparing for and traveling to school that they arrive late, hungry, thirsty, and end up too tired to concentrate. Naturally, their education suffers. Often, some lose the energy or motivation to go to school. Others drop out of school once they see there are other ways they can help their family. So much for the “Africa Rising” narrative and for education being a tool for upward mobility.

My interest in the socioeconomic gap stemmed from the realization that, in my opinion, it is the main factor keeping the country from achieving its full potential. In recent years, Ghana’s culture has become a force to be reckoned with; its music, fashion, and art reaching global standards. Growing up on Ghanaian soil, I developed a national pride that found me cheering alongside other Ghanaians at sporting events, playing Ghanaian music to the confusion of my American friends, and feeling a deep sense of achievement whenever the country made some kind of progress. If this gap is one of the major things keeping us from rising, I want to do something about it.

The trigger came whilst doing some research about NGOs in Ghana for a documentary assigned to me in my humanities class. My documentary focused on the Village Bicycle Project, which supplies bicycles to isolated villages in Ghana and Sierra Leone. When filming the documentary, I realized how a single bicycle could drastically improve a person’s livelihood. It dawned on me that cycling to school would solve several of the problems that these kids had. I gathered a small group of friends from school and I called the endeavor Ride On! We wanted to empower students in need, not pity them. Our specific aim was to donate bicycles to students who lived the farthest away from school. In the first phase of the project, I hosted a fundraising raffle and was able to donate 25 bicycles, each with a helmet and pump, to students at the La Yahousha Junior High School. Frankly, I was emotional about the prospect of what the bicycles would do for the students and what they would be able to achieve. I realized that this project had the potential to strengthen the Ghanaian community if done right. In this moment I began thinking of the future of Ride On!

Since our initial donation, we donated another 25 bicycles to students at La Yahousha. We have built a strong bond with this school and have decided to focus our efforts there for the time being. Living in Ghana, I have the opportunity to expand Ride On! and follow-up on the schools we work with to ensure that the project is sustainable. I have created a documentary that tells the story of Ride On! in the hope that this will draw more attention to the project. In order to make this project more sustainable, my goal for the long-term is to turn it into a foundation which would be run by a club at my school. The club would continue to donate bicycles, as well as work closely with the schools receiving them to ensure that the students are truly benefitting from them. My greatest wish is that with the implementation of the club, I can contribute to the repair of the socioeconomic ladder. As Ghana continues to develop, I want all Ghanaians to progress up the ladder with it.

# Why Penn? Paolo Nasr

## How will you explore your intellectual and academic interests at the University of Pennsylvania? Please answer this question given the specific undergraduate school to which you are applying. (400-650 words)

Although my areas of interest are broad, I am certain of my passion for creativity and design. My ability to think creatively is not only in the visual aesthetic of things, but in using innovative and unorthodox methods of problem solving as well. Ultimately, two paths lay before me—using my knowledge and skills in practical applications such as architecture and graphic design as well as producing innovative ideas in humanities, languages, and sciences—and I love both. I expect to find the necessary guidance in converging these paths through the liberal arts education of the College of Arts & Sciences.

The liberal arts curriculum at the College will give me a breadth of opportunities to thoroughly explore my interests. I believe that learning from a variety of subject areas is of great value to me in a liberal arts education, and Penn acknowledges that we can learn more by creating links between these subjects. Indeed, the Visual Studies major at the College will allow me to draw knowledge from other disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, art history, fine arts, and architecture. The Philosophy of Perception course connects theories of perception with philosophy so that I could better understand why we see and understand things the way we do.

Another opportunity that excites me is the Penn Integrates Knowledge (PIK) program which will allow me to learn from professors who have extensive knowledge in multiple subject areas. One professor I may benefit from, especially if I decide to major in Visual Studies, is Dr. Barbara Mellers. From a design point of view, Dr. Mellers' knowledge in psychology and marketing could help me understand how visuals can influence consumer behavior. From a more personal perspective, my experience with design and visuals has mainly related to practical applications. However, learning from professors such as Dr. Mellers will strengthen my theoretical knowledge of the impact of design and visuals.

As for extracurricular activities at Penn, I hope to join the newly-established Kinetic @Penn. I have had some experience with applying design and innovative thinking to solve real world problems due to a college product design course at the Parsons School of Design. During the course, I redesigned the packaging for berry farmers at the Union Square Greenmarket. I created a product that would protect the produce from flies and insects; allow for several berry cartons to be stacked; and would keep the produce from spilling out if the carton toppled over in shopping bags. The end result was a biodegradable, reusable, lightweight lid that could easily be fastened to the cartons which the farmers already used. I am eager to see how I could contribute to a club such as Kinetic and how I could work with others to develop original, effective solutions.

Before my course at Parsons, in the summer of 2015, I spent one month at the University of Pennsylvania taking pre-college courses in sculpture and graphic design. These courses reaffirmed my passion for art and design, especially when applied in the real world. The sculpture course taught me the beauty of the process and the method, as opposed to the final product only. And my course in graphic design taught me the power of communicating an idea through design.

All in all, Penn’s intellectual resources - coupled with my energy, focus, creativity, and the standards to which I always hold myself when doing things - mean that I will be able to build myself a varied and advanced skill set during my time at the university. Moreover, thanks to the varied courses of study at Penn, the potential ‘triggers of inspiration’ are endless and will help me decide which creative path I want to pursue.

# Yellow Courier Van 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.

My dad's yellow courier van has been a part of my life ever since I was born. Every day before light floods the sky, I would hear its engine rumble as my dad headed to work. After school, I would sit in the passenger seat while he finished his courier run. The smell of cheap coffee scented the van and its radio would buzz with the day's news. I used to peer out of its wide side window as the sky blued and the buildings zoomed by, taking in all the sounds from outside. The trip always evoked a sense of yearning, a desire to see more of the world I could only glance through my window. It therefore drew on a paradoxical significance in my mind. It represented an opening to the outside world and the promise of new experiences but also a glass barrier between them and myself, even more unbridgeable since the handle that opened the window was usually jammed.

Others were always ecstatic at the sight of the bulky, yellow van. Everyone, eager to either give or receive the day's mail, would meet my dad with a smile. Only I would neglect to smile as the van rolled up towards the school gate. My thirteen-year-old self wished for a less conspicuous car. Like most people on the cusp of adolescence, all I wanted to do was blend in. Consequently, I would draw the cover on the window seeking refuge, but the trade-off was that behind this screen I could neither be part of the world nor receive the gifts that it had to offer. Since then, I've come to realize that conforming can be a discredit to a life fully lived.

I used to think of the courier van as an oppressive, yellow cage and an eternal source of adolescent embarrassment; but eventually I realized that it was and still is an integral part of my journey and who I am. In my early years, it ushered in a thirst to see more of the world. Years later, it delivered lessons in humility and gratitude. I grew and became a more diverse passenger and so did the route of the van. Its route, not tethered to the strict delivery and recovery of parcels, has evolved through the years to transport its most demanding parcel to youth council meetings, netball games and debating competitions. Without my dad's unflinching support and hard work, I would never have reached all those destinations that would yield invaluable experiences and vital opportunities for growth.

It never mattered whether the rain was drumming on the metal roof or whether the sun blazed relentlessly on the yellow van. We would traverse the main road for a few minutes at a time before having to stop and deliver a few parcels. And then this process, consistent as clockwork, would repeat. My dad, carrying us on his van like a medieval knight on his horse, would ensure that, rain or shine, peril or calm, he completed his day's route, I never missed an opportunity and that we would always reach our destination together.

My dad bought a new van at the end of my first year of high school in 2011. The shade of yellow is as bright as ever, and the new van even outsizes the last. Now the passenger window works fine as well. The van has changed and so have I, but the most important part, the driver, remains the same. He is the real engine that makes all this possible. I will always be grateful to that enormous yellow van that has shaped my outlook on life and will remain a significant part of my journey, but now I am eager to carve out my own path, never forgetting that rain or shine, opportunities and new experiences can always be reached.

# Speechtime Revelations Anonymous

## Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

“The U.S. and China should work to unify the Koreas.”

Eight minutes left.

As I walk to the podium, I present myself as a confident junior. Yet in my mind, I am still a freshman, stammering through my first speech, unnerved by the seven pairs of eyes peering at me.Is my posture straight? Yes. Is my hair too messy? I fixed it. Is my dress wrinkled? Probably. Could they see the beads of sweat on my forehead? Hopefully not. Does my voice sound weird?I shrink behind my screen and stumble through the words. Am I saying the wrong thing? This checklist was a ritual in every presentation I gave.

“North Korea is close to collapse.”

Seven minutes.

My overconfident junior self scoffs at this checklist. She convinces herself that they are saying the wrong thing. The opponent’s suit is wrinkled. His hair is messy too. She convinces herself that she is considerably better than he is. As the junior’s self-assuredness begins to overpower the speech, the freshman’s nervousness extinguishes that confidence. My voice cracks.

“The plan leads to Korean security.”

Six minutes.

The opponent’s argument is valid – he pointed out that Korean unification was implausible with the sheer number of refugees in North Korea. How had I not thought of that? My freshman voice rings loudly in my head. The sheer magnitude of the relocation effort would put Korea into a position of weakness and isolation.

“The plan boosts Korean economy.”

Five.

My junior voice pushes back: I understand my opponent’s point even better than he does. Korea wants to expand their middle power; they want unification. I make my voice louder, and speed through the list of Korea’s renewable energy achievements. The nervousness from past minutes fuels my speed reading; the confidence feeds my assuredness in the benefits of green economy. I can utilize this nervous energy to propel my argument.

“The US and China are key.”

Four.

My nervousness reminds me that a good speech must convince my audience; I can’t assume my argument alone can do the job. I think about other arguments, and the audience appears once again. The judge isn’t listening, entertaining himself with pen cap flipping. My opponent is passionately doodling on his desk. The small entertainments of writing utensils displace the issues of human rights and nuclear threats in North Korea. My voice gets quieter. Does my argument make sense?

“Without unification, war is a threat.”

Three.

I use the junior’s confidence to convince myself that my argument is coherent. The idea is implausible: there are too many factors required to achieve unification. Yet, the paragraphs detailing the process of unification have been successful in the past. My contentions overpower the opponent’s retaliations. I know he will inevitably forget to respond to one of the points, and I will make my case for why there is a moral obligation to unify the Koreas.

“North Korea pervasively violates human rights.”

Two.

The junior has learned to harness the freshman’s nerves, helping her rattle off arguments detailing why immediate action is necessary.

“Reconciliation is possible.”

One.

Right now, the Koreas cannot be unified, but with the energy of the junior propelled by the nervousness of the freshman, I can finally articulate why Korean unification is vital. The freshman’s uncertainty and the junior’s overconfidence work in perfect harmony to form a holistic understanding of my approach to challenges. This round is only a small part of my life; I will give similar speeches, I will go through the same emotions, but now, the freshman and the junior can coordinate to triumph over the challenge. Thus, within an eight-minute speech, I have learned to harness the nervous and confident energies within myself, enhancing my ability to succeed, not only during a debate round, but throughout the numerous resolutions in my life.

# Why UPenn? Anonymous

## Why UPenn?

I caress the hot mug and take a sip, letting the creamy liquid linger on my tongue. I slowly lower the mug and inhale, allowing the exotic aroma to invade my body. My overstimulated senses beg for more coffee, and intoxicating joy pulses through my veins when I take a second sip. I want to attend a university that makes my brain thirst for information, a school that replicates the heady cocktail of passion and excitement that I experience when I savor my first few drops of coffee. With its uniqueness and flexibility, the University of Pennsylvania can fulfill my wish.

Growing up, I have dabbled in numerous subjects, from forensics and epidemiology to philosophy and psychology. My eclectic interests have resulted in various aspirations, from becoming a Gordon Ramsay-inspired professional chef to a doctor. At some schools, students with diverse interests face disadvantages, but the University of Pennsylvania understands that studying from multiple perspectives enhances success in an ever-changing world. Penn also operates based on "structured choice" which gives me the opportunity to explore my interests. Currently, I plan to study biology at the College of Arts and Sciences, but I will have the opportunity to take classes, conduct research, attain a degree from one of Penn’s other colleges, and pursue minors in subjects that intrigue me, from economics and foreign languages to psychology and chemistry. Penn's interdisciplinary program will also introduce me to riveting topics that I would never have encountered if I had chosen a major-oriented class schedule at a different university.

As at other universities, I will build a reservoir of knowledge by attending classes at the University of Pennsylvania, but I will also continue to learn and discover outside of the classroom in Philadelphia's dynamic environment. With an eclectic collection of masterpieces ranging from Dennis Oppenheim’s Wave Fronts to Claes Oldenburg’s iconic Split Button on Penn's campus as well as works by renowned artists such as Andy Warhol at the Institute of Contemporary Art, there are abundant opportunities to explore. The numerous food trucks and cafes in Philadelphia also provide locations for diverse people to meet and exchange or challenge ideas. Personally, I would love to gain perspective from other people at local cafes and food trucks because I could never reject food's seductive call and the prospect of an intellectually-stimulating conversation.In addition to stellar academics, I also want to attend a college that embraces Vietnamese culture through its student organizations. As a Vietnamese-American, I recently started to appreciate my family’s celebration of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year; Tet Trung Thu, the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival; and national remembrance days. I want a community where I can share my these fascinating aspects of my culture and learn about Vietnamese customs that my family no longer practices. I have dreamed of belonging to the PAACH and Penn’s Vietnamese Students’ Association, where I might perform Vietnamese fan dancing for the cultural show or bond with other students over a bowl of pho.

Just as impressive is UPenn's commitment to community service, which gives students an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with people outside of campus and further their learning outside of the classroom. I profoundly value the impact of community service because I depended on the local food pantries and the Salvation Army to provide the supplies, support, and care that I needed throughout my childhood. Because I feel genuinely blessed by the generosity of the people in my community, I have always wanted to bestow the same blessing on future generations of underprivileged people, especially children. I will participate in PennReach to mentor disadvantaged students at local high schools and prepare them for college, and I will also join Penn Project One to help homeless and impoverished people in the Philadelphia community. These opportunities to find the sense of community, identity, and diversity that I desire makes the University of Pennsylvania perfect for me.

# UPenn Essay Anonymous

## How will you explore your intellectual and academic interests at the University of Pennsylvania? Please answer this question given the specific undergraduate school to which you are applying

Wandering my way through Woodland Walk, I not only found a home at the University of Pennsylvania, but also found clarity within the path I will be striving for in the next four years and beyond. Having dealt with my father passing away at 13, this experience has led me into the pathway of medicine. After being afforded the opportunity the opportunity to volunteer at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, I was assured that this place was the only university that would let me feel as though I am worth every possible fiber in my body, no matter where I come from, or what struggles I have dealt with.

The College of Arts and Sciences will be the starting place in my journey to becoming the doctor I have strived to be. With an intended major of Biological Basis of Behavior, I plan to use this path to create a gateway of options into a the biological world of how we as humans work and connect, to eventually find that connection within medicine. The human connection is what our lives fundamentally revolve around, and as a future doctor, having the ability to understand and connect with this type of human interaction will be detrimental in my success with my patients, specifically children. After meeting with Professor Fevzi Daldal this past summer, both my heart and brain have been set on studying the Biological Sciences at Penn. When speaking with Dr. Daldal, the countless research opportunities and passion that was discussed proved to me that I needed to get to the lab and start my work.

If afforded the opportunity to be part of Penn’s Class of 2022, my first and most important goal would be to participate in research with Dr. Wood regarding child behavior. I believe that this is the perfect opportunity to begin my understanding of the human experience. Having been that kid who used to only associated medicine and hospitals with my father’s illness, I know how difficult it can be to be in an environment where you are surrounded by constant uncertainty. Thus, this experience has led me to the desire of researching the brain of a child, the most purest forms of cognitive mentality. When I acquire that knowledge, a multitude of other routes to go about continuing my exploration of the human brain and biological sciences will come to life.In terms of intellectual interests, music was what kept me going when my father was sick. I would turn on a song, and sing my heart out until I could no longer do so. For this reason, I believe that music can serve an even better purpose to those who are struggling with health issues. Using the research resources provided by Penn, I plan to conduct a study based off the cognitive effects of music on the brain.

I believe that studying the mental effect of music on the brain can advance the medical field using methodology that has yet to be considered. Studying the interworks and biology behind how our brains perceive music will be the perfect cumulation of ideologies in regard to what I want to do with my life. With that, I plan to bring a new perspective on the logistics within medical field at Penn. A perspective that is: through the human connection made in medicine, we are unstoppable. The medical field will be advanced in ways unseen before because of our new understanding of how the brain functions. The ultimate goal with this perspective and opportunity would be to find a tie between the human connection and the medical sciences. I believe to have found that connection within myself throughout my time volunteering at Penn, and I want to recreate that feeling for my patients in the future.

# Jaggery Shyla Singh

## "The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience? (Common App essay)

The alarm heralding the dawn becomes redundant as a mix of dread and excitement has kept me up all night. It’s 5 am. Today I will compete in my third Junior National Equestrian Championship in Pune at the National Defence Academy.

I’ve determined that today will be different. My first Junior National in Kolkata in 2014 began and ended catastrophically. I leased a horse, Legal Steps, who I rode for the first time a day before the championship. It was an unwise step, as I didn’t have the chance to connect with him. The day of the competition, Legal Steps bolted towards the surrounding woods. Did he sense my fear? Despite managing to get control of him, I realised the futility of continuing as he would remain uncooperative. Withdrawing from the event, I lost all confidence.

Yet, when peers suggested that I was fearful, that perhaps this transpired because I was a girl, I found these explanations unsatisfactory. I began recognising the root cause of the catastrophe: I had forgotten my primary motivation for riding, my love of horses. Perhaps my Kolkata debacle stemmed from overlooking this true essence of equestrianism? Riding the leased horse, I had felt like a novice. I had forgone establishing a connection with Legal Steps, focusing only on competing rather than understanding him. The Kolkata experience led to the realisation that I was riding mechanically, simply to win.

Seeing this from the sidelines, my coach, Mrs Sodhi, told my father that to move forward, I had to rekindle my bond with horses. The initial step in the rehabilitation process was buying my own horse, Lodrino, a gorgeous dark bay Holsteiner gelding. Lodrino was crucial in my return to winning ways.

I first met him with a welcome gift of jaggery (unrefined sugar) in my outstretched palm. He not only accepted it with unbridled enthusiasm but also butted my shoulder for more. I was besotted! The first time I rode him, I knew he was special. Every movement bespoke a perfect balance between elegance, power and control. Trust is the key element in controlling a 1200-pound animal with just leg pressure or a rein-tug. I sensed that I could trust Lodrino. But could he trust me? I spent the first few months intuitively understanding his responses and his endearing idiosyncrasies: that he would never advance in a lesson without a “jaggery inducement,” for example. I also discovered him to be the quintessential thespian, invariably putting on a show before an audience. He started responding to my aids and taught me to love horses and competing again. This happened only once our relationship blossomed into a close bond.

Together we enjoyed pre-competition rituals, such as my braiding his hair the night before competitions. Lodrino knows when he is competing and is a prima donna in the show arena. Even if a laggard during practice, the chime of the start bell in the competing arena brought out the actor in him! Often, when I was unable to give an aid fast enough, he preempted it and began executing the movement. And as I saluted the judges after a dressage competition, Lodrino bobbed his head, thanking the judges and stealing my thunder! My deepening relationship with Lodrino had me focus on something beyond technique or peer opinion: on the profound truth that there is no bond stronger than that between a horse and its rider.

Today, pre-show jitters dissolve into thin air as I sit on Lodrino. He reassures me. Much has changed over the eight years I’ve been competing. In Pune, I focus on winning to affirm my progress from someone too afraid to compete to someone whose passion drives her to excel in equestrianism.

My third Junior Nationals culminates in victory. Lodrino and I win together: our amazing bond is the overarching reason for my tasting success again!

# Common Application Essay - "Underground Home" 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.

Grasping my father’s hand, I descended the steps into the vast underworld. We were Phileas Fogg and Passepartout, documenting five hundred destinations, each neatly cataloged in a manilla notebook, one by one in our memories.

In the eight years I called New York City my home, rarely did I find my fascination to be the abundance of carefully curated museums or the marvels of engineering that soared far into the sky. These features are, after all, ubiquitous among the financial capitals of the world. My love and nostalgia are anchored instead by the hundreds of miles of steel laid beneath the aboveground commotion, a circulatory system delivering millions of red blood cells to the extremities of the five boroughs. In a city unparalleled by its diversity in race, religion, and socioeconomic status, the subway united us all as a utility as vital to the dynamicity of our lives as the beating of our hearts.

Stand clear of the closing doors, please.

Two hundred miles away, I can still feel the urgent authority commanded by this single sentence, whose alliteration and isochronous rhythm elevated it from monotony to become the icon of the MTA. Played on the intercoms of each of the 36 lines moments before the crisp snapping shut of the doors, Charlie Pellet’s voice furnished my frenzied life a much-needed consistency. Despite being packed like a sardine during rush hour, I nearly looked forward to the dreaded delays: Ladies and gentlemen, he would begin, with a solemnity resembling Reagan’s following the Challenger disaster, we are being held momentarily by the train’s dispatcher. His air of mystery led me to envision a villain barricaded in the front of the train who was whimsically toying with the lives of his hostages.

Ay, arriba y arriba!

On the rarely punctual Saturday morning 7 train delivering me to oil painting lessons in Flushing, I could always depend on the presence of a band of Mexican accordionists and guitarists. While their cowboy hats and leather boots resonated a culture across the world from that of the Asian grandmothers and their rolling grocery trolleys, the moment they leapt into their emotive norteño music, we brushed aside the clash of cultures and bonded over the American immigrant experience. Although I understood as much Spanish as they did Chinese, music became our common denominator; though this was their sustenance, the vitality and bravado in their performance brought forth the pride they held for their heritage.

Is this the express train to Brooklyn?

I was constantly observant of the diversity of faces that enveloped me; with the transit map firmly implanted in my head, the web of rainbow lines a network of veins, I longed to help disoriented tourists find their way to the Central Park Boathouse or their audition at Juilliard. I attempted vainly to identify nuanced accents in their voices, and in failure appreciated a synopsis of their backgrounds and experiences. When I heard that the sensational mummy exhibit of the Museum of Natural History had underwhelmed them, I directed them to the Transit Museum, a physical archive of what allowed for the mass urbanization of the city and the evolution of its culture.

Today, I watch with horror as the MTA gives in to the tides of the twenty-first century, refurbishing the emerald green beacons and tiled murals with monstrosities of concrete and steel. The announcements that braved September 11 are losing to the demand for efficiency; to appease the city that never sleeps, the MTA has shortened them to sentence fragments delivered with bland uniformity. More transit police are patrolling the cars not just on the lookout for ‘suspicious packages,’ but in pursuit of the cowboy musicians for violating arbitrary MTA regulations. And with interactive kiosks replacing the befuddled, dated paper maps, my wayfinding services are no longer of use.

The subway of my memories, however, will never change.

# The Stage Anonymous

## Describe a place of environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

Arriving three hours early to the venue before the scheduled start of a performance can mean many things. Perhaps you are a member of the performance or you may be determined to secure a great place or seat. You could even be tailgating! However, upon entering the Cecil Jacobs Auditorium through the back entrance with my fellow performers, I can assure you that I did not need a seat and I was definitely not tailgating. I was about to be on stage during a dance recital: a place where I am perfectly content.

Of the three different areas of the stage namely, downstage, the “Wings” and backstage, Downstage is my favourite. Yet, you cannot get to one without passing through the other- a rite of passage almost. Put together, you have an experience leading from an adrenaline rush to giddy anticipation to a final mind wiping bliss.

Getting downstage can be as complicated as a chassé, running leap or tumbling pass or as simple as walking calmly to assume position before the front curtain lifts. The dim and blinking fluorescent lights from backstage are replaced by bright multi colored stage lights, bearing down and warming me whilst calming my nerves. The characteristic black and grey speckled carpet of backstage is replaced with highly polished dark brown wood. It is an empty canvas waiting to be painted with moving bodies and striking props. The paradox of the stage: incorporating beauty and excitement yet a calm emptiness.

As the music starts, thoughts stop, and body movements start, almost involuntarily. The lack of friction between my shoes and the floor allows my feet to take me on a winding journey across the stage. Musical tones guide my movements; my feet, never in the same place to long, my arms, swinging and creating perfectly timed formations with my fellow dancers, my torso, bending and winding. As I meet the eyes of an engrossed audience member I am happy. I am simply living in the magic and music. Anticipation is replaced with confidence and pride. The magical moments live until they pass on, too soon, with the dimming lights, fading music and falling curtains.

Dancing on stage is like experiencing love. The stage lights are engulfing like a warm hug. As the audience takes in your energy and emotion, they give you their undivided attention. The music moves and guides my limbs at its will. Fellow dancers surrounding me, we struggle and win against complex choreography to form beautiful formations and tell heartfelt stories.

I had always been a lover of dance. Body movements, whether they are telling a story or simply showing off art is a joy for me. Yet, growing up I was always timid and shy. The stage was not a place for me as I often experienced crippling nerves from stage fright. However the first time I was onstage during my dance recital, I can’t remember being fearful or shy at any moment. I longed to give the audience the best performance I could. I was free and confident in an environment where I had previously been too afraid to be seen. While dancing on stage, I am one with my creativity. It is an environment where I am unafraid to be my unaltered self which means so much to me.

# Humanity of a Face Katherine Lee

## Common App Personal Statement

My pencil sketches of human head sculptures filled countless pads of paper. Desperately, I tried to recreate in each face the intangible aspects of emotion that continuously eluded me. I drew faces over and over, telling myself that with more practice, I could eventually master it. I had to: if every head I drew seemed mask-like and dead, I couldn’t call myself an artist. Portraiture is a prerequisite.

There is something ineffable about the human face, a quality I never seemed able to capture.

I learned the formula for drawing faces; I dutifully practiced breaking the head in half with a thin line, using that demarcation for the bottom half of the eyes. In the space between the eyes and the tip of the chin, I always found the midway point, dedicating it to the small groove of skin between the nose and mouth. Beyond these basic measurements, I had also learned the ideal percentage of the eye to be filled by the iris, the precise angle at which the lips ought to curve, and the specific shape of the nostrils. As I assembled my carefully sketched pieces into a face, however, the technique that went into each feature faded. My disappointing faces lay inanimate on the paper. Why?

I knew that the recipe for drawing faces was well-tested and reliable. My pencil face drawings were meticulously sketched, and technically precise. Still, as my art teacher noted, “...they all look a little…”

“Flat?” I asked, frowning at my sketchbook.

“Kind of,” he said slowly, paging through the dozens of portraits I’d attempted. “I think what you need to do is forget the formula. Remember: art is more than a snapshot of real life. Art needs to be better.”

My teacher gave me Nicolai Fechin portraits to emulate, and I trained myself to identify the focus points of emotion on the face. On Fechin’s portrait of a little girl, I saw how the tiniest bend in her eyebrow conveyed disapproval. On his portrait of an African woman, hope radiated from the slightest upturn of her lips. The happiness of a man with a moustache, meanwhile, was obvious from the asymmetrical crinkles around his eyes.I noticed that these portraits strayed from the formula: the nostrils were slimmer, and the iris filled less than 75% of the eye, contrary to the formula that was carved into my memory.

A realization hit me: irregularities create expression, and that, in turn, imparts the emotion of a face. Endlessly measuring and practicing individual facial features was futile if what I hoped to show were the dimensions of feelings and experiences etched into skin and muscle and bone. As I learned to allow imperfection in a portrait, I also began to understand what art really was: a simultaneous thrust against rigid rules and a venture into what life might look like if those rules didn’t exist.

The most beloved artists were rule-breakers: Van Gogh, with his intense color and visible brushstrokes, was considered reckless and raucous, anathema to the Academy. During Van Gogh’s time, Biblical paintings lined the walls of museums, but he painted haunting self-portraits and childishly exuberant landscapes, ignoring innumerable baby Jesuses and casting aside scenes of battling angels.

I thought of Van Gogh as I began to synonymize portraiture with the absence of rules. Humans have constructed countless methodologies and rules to organize the world. Still, the most central aspects of humanity – love, fear, hope, suffering, virtue, patience – are emotional; none of these qualities can be captured in a theory or an equation. The beauty of a face is often thought to be its proximity to symmetry, a concept that pleases the eye. But true beauty is earned – by experience and history.

Life wears on us, and renders us imperfect, even damaged. In capturing this damage and its subsequent healing, I finally learned how to portray the ineffable humanity of a face.

# Packet of Tissue Anonymous

## Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

“You are going to a boarding school in Singapore,” said my parents one day.

The decision to send me off to boarding school came as a surprise for my family’s acquaintances. It came as a shock to me --- especially since I did not even know what the boarding school would be like. Even with people questioning the situation, my parents stood firmly on their ground. I, on the other hand, was ecstatic about the new environment I was going to be a part of. Being an only child, my friends were like my siblings. What they learned from their older siblings, I learned from them. They have always been the roots of my personal growth. To have more of them was a marvelling experience.

Moving to Singapore was a huge whirlwind of “new.”There was no one telling me when to shower, when to go out, what to eat, and what to do. For the first time in my life, I felt in control of my time and space. But that did not last too long. “Don’t spend too much money on Starbucks”, “Don’t eat too much McDonalds.” Don’t. Don’t Don’t. The speed of the internet connection would have found it hard to catch up with the speed of my parents’ instructions. Their instructions have always been rooted at one thing: financial planning. I did not understand why they were worried. Even so, I did what they asked: kept track of my spendings. Gradually, I became more sympathetic of their concerns. Sympathy, I learned, is a foundational experience for personal growth. My parents wanted me to understand the value of money --- and the hard work required to obtain it.

“How much for a packet of tissue?,” I asked an old lady. In Singapore, it is common for the elderly to work past their years to support themselves. “A dollar. Where you from?” I explained to her that I was from Myanmar, and that I was here for boarding school. Eager to strike a conversation, she told me about her life from the time she worked at a restaurant to being a single mother. “You so lucky. Thank your parents. I did not have any education. So look at me: I am selling tissues at 63.” And so I bought all the tissues she had to sell. All I wanted was a packet of tissues. But I got a valuable life lesson to appreciate what I have and to try harder. Personal growth came to me in many forms, including a packet of tissue.

# A Brown Christmas 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’m so excited! Tomorrow is Eid!”

“Eid? What are you talking about?”

I was flabbergasted. Eid was my whole life, what I eagerly anticipated all year long, and yet my classmate didn’t even know what it was! My 7-year-old mind couldn’t comprehend this.

“Well, you pray in the morning, visit everyone’s houses, do your henna…” But her face remained expressionless. I was speaking in a foreign tongue. “It’s like Christmas but for Muslims.”

“Oh!” Her face lit up in recognition. “Does Santa bring you presents too?”

Welcome to the life of a Muslim Bengali living in a predominantly white, Christian neighborhood. A life of being constantly misunderstood. People assume I’m Indian and are baffled when I clarify that I’m actually Bangladeshi. “Isn’t that the same thing?” Sure, if being British is the same thing as being American. Although India and Bangladesh were once united, they have long since separated and developed unique cultures. It’s easy to lump unfamiliar things into the same category if we don’t bother to examine the differences. In school when we study African or Latin American governments, we stamp them all as “corrupt,” masking years of individual histories and political thought.

When studying foreign governments we adopt binary thinking, viewing political structures as good or bad, black or white when in reality they are every shade in between. We showcase our own democracy as the blueprint for the rest of the world while other styles of government are automatically wrong. Casting them aside as “other” deprives us of the chance to learn and grow from them. Rather, understanding and appreciating their differences can broaden our minds and introduce new elements into our own government.

This certainly has been true in my experience. Growing up, I felt like I had a split personality: one part of me wore skinny jeans and t-shirts, drank caramel coffee and watched Friends, while the other part preferred traditional salwar kameezes, drank chai and watched Bengali soap operas. Partitioning my life emphasized that I had two separate identities when in reality they are inextricably intertwined. I’m a Bengali-American; the hyphen bridges two very different cultures together to form one unique background.

My experiences taught me to embrace differences because I embody differences. I’ve seen and simultaneously lived in two worlds. I understand that different isn’t weird or scary, it’s just different. My personal diversity makes me open-minded and willing to study the “other,” the foreign governments we dance around in class, because I want to learn from other people’s experiences.

At school, I lead Diversity Club where we openly discuss our backgrounds: ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender, and other factors. Each spring, we travel to the middle school and encourage children to question their misconceptions. Why do we make snap judgments about others? Why can’t we move past our prejudices instead and learn from each other? By appreciating one another’s cultures, we find unity in our diversity.

On top of simply understanding distinctions, I observe similarities between cultures as well. In class, my teachers talk about the Revolutionary War. At home, my parents talk about the Bangladeshi Independence War. My teachers tell me colonists were furious about the ban on free assembly. My parents tell me Bangladeshis were outraged over the ban on their mother tongue. My whole life I’ve been hearing these stories and drawing these parallels to the point where I believe that history is a repetition of the same stories, the same patterns. We are each a square in this patchwork quilt we call society; the colors may be different, but the fabric is the same.

My story revolves around two beautifully distinct cultures. In one chapter, I attend a school friends’ Secret Santa party, drinking hot chocolate and decorating gingerbread men. But if you turn the page, those same friends and I are watching a Bollywood movie and frying samosas, finding solidarity in a divided world.

# The Dragon and I Anonymous

## Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realizationthat sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

It felt like performing dental work on an apprehensive clam without any gloves; the ridges of the Dragon’s bony mouth scraped combatively against my knuckles as it swallowed its treasure. “I cannot imagine the faces of the horrified crowd behind me,” I pondered privately, “Could my parents show their faces here ever again?” This did not matter for me now. That Dragon iguana and I were the happiest beings on the beach for that sweet, beautifully disgusting moment.

Taking a pride in my heritage, I relish the yearly trips my parents and I take to visit my father’s family in Puerto Rico. From the quaint, vividly colored buildings in Old San Juan to the tropical, harmonious cries of coquí frogs and the breezy, palm tree studded beaches lining Santurce, the surreality of the island is enchanting. I hold great respect for the biodiversity that accompanies a tropical island, and I consider this respect an integral part of shaping the way I pursue a career.

Being scientifically fascinated with animals, I seek my dream career of helping the health and survival of various animals. Over the years, my basement has slowly transformed to a research laboratory, with glass tanks and screened enclosures shining glassy, round eyes at their viewers. Focusing my love for animals on exotic species such as amphibians, reptiles, and fish, I consider this passion an emulation of the fascination for wildlife that originated with my trips to Puerto Rico.

Having an impressive range of biodiversity in terms of fish, coral, and land animals, I consider the coasts of Puerto Rico to be the El Yunque of the ocean. An iconic animal for the coasts of Puerto Rico, the green iguana has always been for me an animal of elegance, stature, and power. With a head enameled with green, eyes shining like obsidian, a tail full of spines, feet full of fine scales, and claws like poison darts, the iguana looks like one to call Godzilla its little brother. Inspiring innumerable products and logos in Puerto Rico, the iguana is the undisputed King of all lizards.

And yet I challenged the King. Upon a patch of grass under a palm, I spotted a fierce-looking male iguana, the obvious Head of the Dragons. The sheer length of the Dragon and the curvature of the knife-like serrations that made up his reptilian mohawk told me the creature was an old lizard, unlikely to respond well to a curious human.

I made an adventure out of the Dragon I saw staring me down from his throne. How does one go about approaching the King of lizards? I climbed down to my knees, gradually descending to the grass to pay respect eye-to-eye with the now-curious King. I tore a piece of a soggy bread roll and held it in my finger tips, extending it slowly towards the direction of the King as a king would a sword to a knight. I was lucky to have been the hand to catch a stale roll thrown into the water of the ocean. But was my hand worthy of being the King’s grail?

I suddenly recalled all the instances when my grandmother would warn a boyish me not to go outside: there was an iguana near in the backyard, and it would cut me with its spiny tail. Something had jolted me out of these memories. I was lying in the grass hand feeding a wild green iguana, and the day could not have been better. I was hooked; I knew from then on that I had something special with the animals that I was fascinated with, and I even gained the King’s permission to pursue my passions in the process.

# 7500 or 6 to 7 Anonymous

## How will you explore your intellectual and academic interests at the University of Pennsylvania? Please answer this question given the specific undergraduate school to which you are applying (College of Arts and Sciences, School of Nursing, The Wharton School, or Penn Engineering).

6, 7, and 7500: Behold the three numbers that will define my academics at the University of Pennsylvania College of Arts and Sciences! I explore what I love to learn no only through the classes on path to a major, but also through the innumerable opportunities presented by research, internships, and friends I will make in Philly and abroad.

6: Penn’s Six Foundational Approaches will ensure I blossom in any academic endeavor I undertake. I have a heart for exploring, especially in the realm of learning and new experiences. This heart for adventure inspires me to explore the world of animals and their biological roles and functions. Boasting a basement “laboratory” of six enclosures housing various reptilian and aquatic fauna, exotic animals have a special place in my passion and inspire me to follow the career path of veterinary. Still my love of art and science does not discriminate: I love the complexities of biology, the magical certainty of chemistry, and even the interpretive science that makes music sound splendid. With so many paths to ecstatically follow, I plan to embrace the College’s Six Approaches to prosper on any path I trek.

7: Using Penn’s Seven Sectors of Knowledge, I will continue challenging myself in topics beyond my most familiar. I enjoy learning for the sake of learning, especially when the information is new. Of course I can use the Sectors to expand upon my knowledge in my favorites, but I can also thrive on a University of Pennsylvania caliber experience with other disciplines. With a wide variety of courses in high school, I enjoy learning all fields of knowledge. With Sectors in core disciplines such as history and the natural sciences as well as specialized studies such as the living and physical worlds, I will apply myself to subjects that both interest me and have yet to catch my attention. I admire how the Seven Sectors are a course requirement at Penn since it demands students to broaden their experiences with all facets of academics. For a student like me who takes the toughest honors and AP classes in each subject, the Seven Sectors is just the thing to let me explore my interests of all levels of rigor.

7500: At my Catholic all-boys high school, I am glad that I can learn with and befriend those who share common traits with me, but I also bear a great curiosity for meeting people of other walks of life. When I attended Penn Summer Prep, not only did I experience a taste of dorm life and walking to lectures, I also realized how spectacularly Penn fulfills its calling to bring all kinds of people together. I hold in great esteem the truth that meeting people from all over the world sharpens one’s sense of location and culture. My two Penn Prep roommates were from Vermont and Hong Kong. I was fascinated to learn that Vermont has more to it than trees and maple syrup and that Hong Kong has some degree of oxygen! I was also happy to reveal to them that Snooki and the Jersey Shore plague was merely a phase for us Jerseyans. At Penn’s College of Arts and Science, I’m thrilled to meet 7500 comrades who, while unique in their own ways, will all contribute to form a united troop of scholars to inspire and teach each other beyond the classroom.

# A Turtle in a Cross Country Race Anonymous

## Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

Bang! I am deafened by the sound of a gunshot, and suddenly I see hundreds of fourth-graders sprinting towards me. I am temporarily mesmerized by the massive blob of energy consisting of tiny legs moving in unison and tight fists swinging with determination. Right as I am about to be trampled, a row of bright orange cones prompts the leaders of the group to turn the corner. I am then swept back into reality as I remember my job for the day: I am a turtle in a cross country race.

As a turtle, it is my responsibility to run alongside the stragglers of the race to ensure that they eventually make it through the finish line, no matter how long it takes them to get there. Thus, after the last clump of children passes me, my work begins. I jump in behind them and begin to run. After the first minute or so has elapsed, the faces that once consisted of determination begin to fade into expressions of exhaustion. That is when I know I must step in. “You are doing amazing! I’m right here with you! You can do this!” My words elicit a response in the form of slightly faster steps from most children in the group and possibly an eye roll from a few.

As the race progresses, I continue my encouragement and urge the less exhausted runners to attempt to push ahead. This eventually thins out the back group until I am left with three girls who begin to walk. I exclaim that we are almost there and that I believe in them, but they only glance at me with discouraged looks. We walk for a moment as I remind them that it’s fine to take breaks as long as they never give up. Finishing, no matter how long it takes them to get there, is what matters. They should be proud of themselves.

With that said, the finish line comes into view. A pathway lined with brightly colored flags glistening in the sunlight brings back the determination on the girls’ faces. Together, they sprint to the end as I watch with satisfaction that they were able to persevere. I then slow to a stop and begin to prepare for the next race.

As I move back to my starting position, I remember my experience helping out with these meets during my freshman year. I was enthusiastic about my newly discovered speed so I only volunteered as a rabbit, leading the quickest group of kids through the race. I was excited for the opportunity to mentor the future generation of great runners, but I didn’t give much thought to the ones who would be at the back of the group. However, I have since learned that there is so much meaning and fulfillment that comes with helping those who are struggling.

Just as I love helping children tackle the challenge that is cross country races, I also want to help kids overcome their medical challenges as well. There are so many children who have fallen behind in the race of life due to medical circumstances out of their control. I want to be able to stand up for those kids and help them to persevere, similar to how I have been able to encourage kids through my experience as a turtle. This desire has led me to start a club at school where we send encouraging handmade cards to hospitalized children with the hope of bringing a smile to their faces.

AIn the future, I plan to expand my ability to help by becoming a pediatric nurse practitioner. I want to help young patients recover so that they are free to accomplish anything that they set their minds to, whether that be simply having fun, excelling in school or even competing in a cross country race.

# Mother Cow Erica Messics

## Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others. 250-650 words.

A cow gave birth and I watched. Staring from the window of our stopped car, I experienced two beginnings that day: the small bovine life and my future. Both emerged when I was only 10 years old and cruising along the twisting roads of rural Maryland. While my country-bound aunt and cousin were barely phased, the scene struck my young and sheltered eyes. Along with a whirlwind of emotions, the unrestrained act of parturition triggered a feeling of warmth I will never forget.

Years later I learned in biology that all women are biologically nurturing, physically and emotionally. What did that mean? At that point in my life, I could truly make no connection. My idea of femininity was locked in what society had shown me thus far. Femininity was wearing dresses, applying makeup, cheerleading, and giggling near the most popular jock in the entire middle school. In other words, things I did not exactly partake in.

But as I sat in the classroom, I didn’t think about my gender or how I relate to what society considers to be female. Rather, the discussion brought me back to that hot car, parked in front of that special birthing cow. I witnessed the essence of biological femininity as that cow radiated love and affection to her calf immediately after his arrival into the world. The cow represented the epitome of femininity: nurturement and selflessness.

As I have considered the idea of “biological femininity”, I have for years questioned how I fit in with that term. Admittedly, I stray far from the stereotypical female. However, according to developmental neuroscience, evolutionary biology, and studies of sex-based cognitive differences, I am empathetic and intuitive, and prefer language over logic— and that was all I needed. Through the birth of a calf, I realized that I did not need to be interested in “girl things” to be a girl. I did not need a characterized maternal figure to show me how to be a young lady. I certainly did not need a man to tell me how to be a woman. The qualities I possess internally give me all the femininity I need to be a female. There was no definition beyond that, nothing society could paint. That, I believed, was absolutely beautiful.

The future is female. Now that I am beginning to understand the fluidity of femininity, hearing those words empowers me. There are endless ways to live the female experience, no one experience more valid than another. Creativity, intuition, kindness, and love are the roots of femininity, while whatever blooms is up to the individual. With my roots firmly planted, I only need the opportunity to grow to create my future.

When I began thinking of a future field of study and career, I didn’t hesitate; I knew I wanted to work with women. After my struggle with femininity, nothing else intrigued me more. The birth of the cow seven years ago was my inciting incident. My story must include the love, warmth, and beauty of that day. To be a part of the birth story of others entering this world and to study the life and love that preceded is my goal. Eventually, through whatever it takes, I will become an OB/GYN so I can work with women daily, helping teenagers through puberty and educating on sexuality, supporting women through their personal challenges, and assisting in the life-changing act of childbirth. I am dedicated to the future of women.

A cow gave birth and I watched. That experience helped me to become the powerful, strong-minded, and passionate young woman I am today. In pursuing a doctorate I hope to encourage and guide other women to be their own best self and show through my actions and story that there is no one version of womanhood that is “right”, perhaps influencing a new generation.

# Salt: A Passage of Growth Corbin Lubianski

## Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

I grasped the empty, plastic one-gallon container within my right hand as I strolled towards the salty waters of the Gulf of Mexico, trying not to gain others' attention nor look awkward. It would seem unusual and strange to others when they see a 16-year-old boy collecting murky, saltwater from the ocean, but to me, this was the first step in my long-awaited plan to harvest salt.

Mark Kurlansky composed a historical account of salt in “Salt: A World History.” This book came to me in the form of a dreaded summer assignment for AP World History. I was given the choice of four books with their own topic: bananas, wine, spices, and salt. I did not pick salt for its dullness; I only picked it because I wanted to pick the challenging book to impress my first AP teacher as the book was the longest of the four. Yet, I did not know how inspirational and intriguing the book would become to me.

I read of the role that salt has played in the forming of civilizations. I read how civilizations gathered and harvested different types of salt. I read how civilizations applied salt to their diets and recipes. I read how salt has shaped modern history. Lastly, I read how salt has impacted the human race and our history. I was so curious and obsessed that I even bought another book: “Salted: A Manifesto on the World’s Most Essential Mineral.” In the book that Mark Bitterman wrote, he notes all the things one should know about salt: its chemical complexity, various types of salt, recipes, and harvesting methods. Throughout reading both books, I couldn’t help but think about businesses I could start harvesting salt by the coast and selling artisan salts to the community. It may seem strange that someone who lives 150 miles from the coast would formulate such ideas, but I was obsessed with the only rock that we eat: salt.

So I made a plan. Each summer, my family takes a three-day vacation to the coast where we usually go swimming in the ocean and explore the coast of Texas. I was to gather as much seawater as possible to conduct my own harvest of salt. I obtained four gallons of saltwater with those one-gallon plastic bottles that I walked across the beach. Once I got home, I straight-away poured a gallon into a bucket and set it into the sun. I applied many lessons and advice that the books noted: impurities, sun evaporation techniques, timing, salt crystallization. A week later, I held two ounces of salt in my hand: a reward for my efforts and obsession.

I once thought that I was a man of no passions with only a few interests. With salt, I have realized other passions and interests by venturing outside of my comfort zone. My obsession and interest of salt have dared me to lead me to new experiences, like awkwardly gathering saltwater in front of people at the coast.

# In Front of My Eyes Anonymous

## The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

“When are you coming home?” I anxiously asked my mother over the phone.

Home for Christmas break, I grew tired of playing with my two-year-old brother while my parents worked. Glen was adopted domestically from a Bengali and Puerto Rican family, and though initially I couldn’t understand my parents’ reasoning for adopting him, I accepted him into our family. My parents believe in generosity, always teaching me to be open to strangers; thankfully, they practiced more than they preached, and bringing my brother into our family offered a valuable lesson in compassion. As my relationship with Glen blossomed, I understood that caring for others is its own reward – I cherish my memories of watching him grow. Now older, I fully understand and appreciate my parents’ decisions as they’ve helped guide my journey.

In high school, I actively sought opportunities to help others. As a member of the Mission Club, I assisted with various campaigns; as a volunteer for (town) Elementary School, I tutored third to eighth graders; and as a volunteer at (town) Library, I helped staff run activities for children and read books to our youngest visitors. While traveling to Mexico, my family visited Casa Hogar, a network of small orphanages to donate essentials. At one orphanage, we caused a small commotion among the children who came to see their visitors up close, while in the corner my little brother played with another boy. Giving each other a variety of special handshakes, their interaction was a beautiful moment that reminded me of the power of human connection.

Still, I didn’t believe I was doing enough. Already a CPR-certified lifeguard, I thought bigger and committed to joining (hospital name) as a Junior EMT. I was immediately intrigued when I saw a local posting to recruit volunteers. I reached out and learned that the schedule would be grueling and the workload difficult – exactly my type of challenge.

On my first day, I was overwhelmed with instructions and tasks. Still, after obtaining my uniform and finding that my duty officer, Kaitlyn, was fully committed to my training, I felt comforted, knowing that learning to execute my responsibilities efficiently and accurately would be a process. After months spent learning codes of conduct, EMS charts, and lifesaving techniques, I was ready to take the EMT oath: “Be it pledged as an Emergency Medical Technician, I will follow that regimen which, according to my ability and judgment, I consider for the benefit of patients.” Most important were the words “for the benefit of patients” – as the responsibilities accumulated, I understood why on my first day Kaitlyn told me the experience would be rewarding. There is no better feeling than saving a life and knowing that the late nights I spent on call were for the benefit of my community.

There have been challenges as well. A few months ago, we responded to a call at a pediatric rehabilitation center. A boy my age went into cardiac arrest, and after struggling while we conducted CPR and other lifesaving measures, he passed away. I remember his date of birth and his father on the phone in agony. As an EMT, this experience will probably haunt me the most. I take my oath seriously, recognizing that it has no qualifiers – I’ve worked to help people of all races, socioeconomic backgrounds, insurance statuses, and immigration statuses because I so strongly believe in the sanctity of all life. Seeing him pass away was tough, but I am comforted knowing that I used all my training to help try to save his life, and I’ll continue to use that training to help anyone around me. Ultimately, I have my parents and Glen to thank for putting me on this path. I’ve learned unconditional compassion, a skill that will accompany me as I explore the intersection of engineering and medicine to continue to care for others.