**Why do you want to teach mathematics?**

Recently, a close friend asked me to describe times in my life when I have felt “alive”—excited, motivated, happy, or generally fulfilled by what I was doing. These experiences, she assured me, would help me to see my strengths and better understand the types of careers in which I would be most successful. Reflecting on these times led me to completely alter my current career path toward economic academia in pursuit of a career that is better suited to my strengths in leadership and my desire to invest in the lives of others. While there are many times in my life where I felt “alive”, two specific experiences illustrate an especially clear picture of why I feel called to education.

Perhaps the most challenging of these experiences came during the summer of 2008 when I spent five weeks living in Quito, Ecuador, and working in a school for underprivileged, orphaned, and mentally/physically disabled children. I knew I wanted to travel to a Spanish-speaking country and volunteer in some capacity. But, I was not prepared for what lie ahead of me in Quito. I lived with an Ecuadorian family who spoke no English and spent the weekdays working at *Fundación Esperanza* (Camp Hope Ecuador), where I helped teach first grade in the morning and worked with children with Cerebral Palsy in the afternoon. Though I could speak Spanish conversationally, I experienced quite a shock when my duties put me in front of a classroom of children. *Fundación Esperanza* expected me to teach and not “just” teach, but teach in Spanish and often without the lead teacher or an assigned lesson plan. But wow--it was an incredible experience. I actively invested in the lives of these children. I could see real progress (albeit small) in their language skills and desire to learn after only five weeks. They looked to me for knowledge and even companionship. I felt incredibly honored to give them skills they can use the rest of their lives and memories that I hope, like I do, they will cherish forever. . Even with the challenges posed by unmotivated or misbehaving children, I felt like I successfully adapted and gave something back to each student in the class. When I think back to my time in Ecuador, I remember feeling “full” and “complete”--as if Iwas exactly where I should be -- with these kids, changing their lives. At the end of day, exhaustion weighing me down, I always felt completely alive--as if I did something real that made a difference in the lives of the kids who impacted my life in ways they will never truly understand.

Every Monday, I prepare and serve breakfast at a local medical facility for the homeless in Washington, D.C. When I am there--I feel completely alive. Each week when I walk in the doors of the facility, I feel energized (despite the early hour) and excited about even the most mundane of tasks--making toast, boiling eggs, or even washing dishes. I see many of the same guys in the facility from week to week, and their smiles of recognition and thankfulness keep me coming back. It breaks my heart to know that I cannot fix all the problems in their lives. But, I know that with every meal I serve, I, in some small, way provide opportunity at a better life for these men. When I leave the facility after breakfast, I feel complete and fully alive because I have contributed to something much bigger than myself or personal success. I invest weekly in the lives of others and understand the very tangible effects of my service, even when they are not always evident in the short term.

Through these experiences, I discovered that my desire to become a teacher correlates directly to my desire to use my education to serve my community. However, my specific desire to teach mathematics is much more practical: I enjoy math; I have very strong academic training in mathematics from my professional, undergraduate studies, and post graduate course work; and I believe strongly that Math is the absolute most important academic tool for achieving success in any endeavor. In October, I took a day off work and shadowed mathematics courses at D.C. Prep’s Edgewood Middle School campus. At DC Prep, I did not sit at the back of the classroom asa passive observer--I got involved with the students. I assisted them with the lesson and in-class mathematics work, and experienced the reward of watching a student understand a concept that he swore he, “just wasn’t going to get.” As I was leaving, an eighth grader tugged on my shirt to tell me, “Ms. Boiles, I think you would make an excellent math teacher.”

I have heard honest accounts of both the challenges I will likely face in a D.C. public school math classroom and the personal rewards that can come through working in some of the roughest areas of the city. After all of this, I have no doubt that I belong in the classroom, and more specifically, in a D.C. public school teaching mathematics. Washington D.C. is *my* city; it is *my* community; and I want to provide its students with the very best education D.C. can offer.

GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR PEOPLE READING MY PERSONAL STATEMENT:

* Should I provide any more evidence of my leadership skills, confidence, and ability to lead/manage a classroom? Or should I just leave that to my recommendation letter writers? If I put it in the personal statement, any idea where it should go?
  + Leave that to the letters of rec. If they want to see more leadership they can look at your resume and “extra-curriculars.”
* Does my personal statement answer the question of why I want to teach mathematics?
  + Yes, I think you could strengthen this aspect by adding a summary paragraph at the end. Say something like… what began with a young lady teaching strangers in a foreign country has led to this professional seeking a career change—to serve my neighbor… something like that. You’re the one whose passionate about this. Make it your own. Make it stand out. You have to JUMP off the page. This is your opportunity to stand out from all of the other candidates. DO IT!
* Can you “see” me in the personal statement—or could it have been written by anyone? If its too generic, how do you think I could let a little more of myself shine through?
  + It’s definitely not generic. I do however think that more passion could strengthen your statement. That passion is what will separate you from someone who just wants to do this to go to grad school. Don’t be afraid to be vulnerable. You have to take risks to get anywhere in life. You know that—otherwise you wouldn’t be applying for this program.