

College Application Essay Topics

- Describe a significant interest or experience that has special meaning for you.
- How have you grown and developed over the years?
- Life is short. Why do you want to spend 5 or 6 years at a particular university or college?
- What do you plan to do with your college degree?
- Why have you chosen this career or profession?
- What are your long-term career goals?
- How is the degree necessary for the fulfillment of your goals?
- Does any specific attribute, quality or skill distinguish you from everyone else? How did you develop this attribute?
- What are the reasons for your interests? Analyze your childhood. How were your interests shaped from your upbringing?
- How would your friends characterize you? Look at yourself from the outside.
- Have you experienced a moment of epiphany, as if your eyes were opened to something you were previously blind to? Describe this moment and your perceptions about it.
- What are your dreams of the future? Now looking back at everything you have done what you would to change?
- Where do you see yourself, career wise, 10 years from now?
- Of everything in the world what would you like to be doing right now? Where would you like to be the most? Who would you prefer to be with at this moment?
- What is a mission you are accomplishing on the earth?
- What is your approach to life? Reveal your life philosophy.
- What was the most difficult time in your life? How did you overcome these difficulties?
- How did your perspective on life change as a result of the difficulty?
- Describe your most rewarding experience.
- How have all your acquired experiences shaped your career goals?
- Have you ever met with "Triumph and Disaster"? How did you meet those two impostors? Can you tell that you have faced them in a worthy manner?
- Have you ever struggled for something and failed? How did you respond? Have you experienced a feeling of disappointment and dissatisfaction of yourself?
- Imagine yourself being an actor/actress. Tell about your feelings before the opening night of the performance where you play the title role.
- Evaluate a significant experience, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
- An intellectual experience that has mattered to you.
- Philosophy of Learning.
- Talk about how a person can change his direction.
- What are your career aspirations?
- Have you ever struggled mightily and succeeded? Describe what you have felt at the glorious moment of victory? What does a winner feel?
- What is the major contribution you've made in any field of your life?
- Discuss your academic background and achievements.
- Choose a prominent person (living, deceased, or fictional) that you would like to interview and explain why.
- Identify a person who had a significant influence on you and explain the influence.

- Describe a successful student.
- What a college education means to me?
- What author, musician, actor influenced on shaping your ideology? Why especially this person is so significant to you. Did he/she help you to see another side of the world?
- Write a speech for delivery before some group or write an article or editorial for a publication.
- What is a major achievement in your life? Who and what assisted you in reaching your aim?
- Hiking to Understanding.
- Reveal your personality by naming all the positive and negative features you possess. Which of them you'd like to get rid of and which you'd like to promote and enhance.
- What is your strongest and most determined trait of character? Do you maintain strong beliefs and adhere to philosophy?
- Tell about the most unforgettable experience you've ever had.
- Discuss your research experience. What would you like to research?
- Write about a book that has special significance for you.
- What are the most important extracurricular or community activities? What made you join these activities?
- Explain why especially you must be accepted to a particular college, university.
- What would you like to study? Describe your academic interests.

SAMPLE ESSAY 1:

Carnegie-Mellon, current affairs: Middle East debate

A Greek philosopher once said, "In argument, truth is born." Even though sometimes feelings and emotions come into play that confuse the issue at hand, usually an argument results in a new insight on the subject. Even if a person holds strong views that are unshaken by anything his adversary may say, he may nevertheless gain from the debate. It forces him to organize and analyze his views, leaving him with a clearer understanding of the subject than before. Further, his opponent's arguments help him better appreciate his views and their differences. Finally, the argument forces both to look inwards, at their character and value system.

For these reasons, I enjoy debating issues that are important to me and about which I hold strong views. One such issue receiving great national attention is the Middle East peace process. While the peace process has always been important to the American community as a whole, and more specifically to the Jewish American community, the assassination of Israel Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has focused the spotlight upon it, as well as intensified the debate around it. Since I attend a private Jewish school, I often discuss this topic with my peers, often finding myself in the minority. Most of them support the peace process, while I adhere to the views of the Likud (opposition) party, which opposes the peace process.

Complicating the issue are several emotional stigmas that are often attached to it, transforming the discussion from an objective one to one driven by passion. The foremost of these stigmas is the accusation, which is often hurled at the opponents of the peace process, of promoting war and violence. Often made by people who know little about the issue, this view fails to realize that opposition to the peace process does not imply opposition of peace. Rather, it implies disapproval of certain tactics and specifics of the peace process as it was carried out by Rabin.

Another commonly advanced accusation against American Jews who disagree with the peace process centers around the question of whether they have the right to influence Israeli policy. "You don't have to send your children to the Army," it is said, "your children don't die in wars. What right have you to oppose peace?!" The fallacy of this argument is that it doesn't differentiate between belief and action. While it is true, for precisely the reasons above, that American Jews have no right to try to influence Israeli policy, that does not preclude them from having ideas of what that policy should be.

Finally, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin has introduced yet another dimension into this debate. In its aftermath, opposing the peace process sometimes is identified with condoning the assassination itself. Such an identification of the man and his beliefs involves grave dangers, such as rashly implementing his ideas in a flurry of compassion and commiseration.

What all of these stigmas have in common is that they forsake logical and objective debate, opting rather for emotions, generalizations and accusations. And the dangers of that happening are the main lesson I learned from my debates. While those debates have shed new light on the issue and have forced me to reconsider what I think is moral and just, most importantly they have demonstrated the necessity of objectiveness and removal of emotions from the discussion,

especially when, as in the case of the peace process, thousands of lives are at stake. When passions and hatred take over, we must stop and think of what it all is really about.

COMMENTS:

The social concerns or ethics essay is notoriously difficult to write. This essayist tackles it well with solid arguments, clear thinking, and good structure. The main suggestion for improvement came from one officer who felt that the statements made in the first paragraph were too broad and lofty for a college essay.

Very clear headed.

This student put time and energy into this essay and it shows in the writing style, the flow of discourse and the conclusions that the writer comes to in the end. It is a well thought out essay with depth and focus.

This essay is well written, and brings out an interesting point of view, one of which I had not been aware until now. This author grasps the subtleties of a difficult political position. I think he would be an interesting person to know, and would certainly make people think, both in class and in discussions outside of academics.

The argument in the essay is logical and substantiated with solid examples, making it an effective representation of the student's thought and writing style while revealing the student's personal opinions on the Middle East peace process.

Compare & Contrast Example:

SAMPLE ESSAY 1:

Columbia, Athlete and Musician (sailing and bass guitar)

Prompt: Write a chapter from your autobiography.

Chapter 34: One Memorable Sailing Practice

The sun's glare off the water forces my watery eyes to close even more. Spray leaps over the bow and blocks my vision as it slams into me like hundreds of little pebbles. The salt water has irritated my eyes enough already, but I am only beginning my practice for today. The Buzzards Bay Regatta is only three days away, and I must get comfortable with the boat.

Skimming over the waves on a screaming plane, the boat senses every movement. The boat is like a leaf being blown across a pond. With only the rear end of the hull in the water, I am half flying and concentrate on positioning my weight aft for the most speed. I shuffle my butt half a foot aft and the boat rounds up towards the wind, but I fight the motion off with the helm and regain my original course.

With one hand on the tiller and the other holding the mainsheet, I see that my hands are in the same position when I play my bass guitar. Comparisons between the two mesh together in my mind as I realize the similarities between bass guitar and sailing. I recall the practicing involved in bass and see how sailing requires the same diligence. My thoughts no longer focus on fine tuning my sailing, but they vividly connect bass guitar playing and sailing.

I probe to find out what the essences of sailing and music are. While on the water in a sailboat, I accept the elements as they present themselves to me. Given certain wind and wave conditions, I manipulate the sailboat to attain the best harmony between by boat and its immediate environment. I imagine the sailboat is an extension of my body and plunge, accelerate, and rock with the sea and the wind, as the boat does. Sailing stresses technique because I need proper form to adjust to all of the different combinations to have twelve different notes in the musical alphabet with which to work, and with my technique I manipulate those notes and arrange them to adjust to varied moods I want to express. Again, painstaking technique is emphasized because by body must encompass the bass to attain the pure harmony between my expression and the notes on the instrument. Meticulously, I pluck, pull, and slide my fingers on the strings as I adjust to the countless combinations. Musicians and sailors alike practice their technique to reach perfection, whether it be in the form of the fastest sailboat or the most sonorous melody. Rooted in the same essence, I discover that I draw from the same method to sail and play music.

Seemingly unrelated experiences converge. Bass guitar and sailing do not seem to relate to one another, but I discover the similarities. Linking bass guitar and sailing consummates the understanding of two of my hobbies. I seek the mastery of my sailing, but I realize that I simultaneously increase my understanding of bass playing as well.

My focus shifts from new realizations back to my sailboat, but the waves are turning into ripples as the sun sets. There will not be any more sailing today, but I can now continue practicing with my bass.

COMMENTS:

This writer maintains focus by making the similarities between his two activities the topic of the essay. The detail with which he describes both activities and the depth with which he analyzes their similarities clearly demonstrate the passion that he brings to both.

SAMPLE ESSAY 2:

Harvard, Favorite Characters

Of all the characters that I've "met" through books and movies, two stand out as people that I most want to emulate. They are Attacus Finch from *To Kill A Mockingbird* and Dr. Archibald "Moonlight" Graham from *Field of Dreams*. They appeal to me because they embody what I strive to be. They are influential people in small towns who have a direct positive effect on those around them. I, too, plan to live in a small town after graduating from college, and that positive effect is something I must give in order to be satisfied with my life.

Both Mr. Finch and Dr. Graham are strong supporting characters in wonderful stories. They symbolize good, honesty, and wisdom. When the story of my town is written I want to symbolize those things. The base has been formed for me to live a productive, helpful life. As an Eagle Scout I represent those things that Mr. Finch and Dr. Graham represent. In the child/adolescent world I am Mr. Finch and Dr. Graham, but soon I'll be entering the adult world, a world in which I'm not yet prepared to lead.

I'm quite sure that as teenagers Attacus Finch and Moonlight Graham often wondered what they could do to help others. They probably emulated someone who they had seen live a successful life. They saw someone like my grandfather, 40-year president of our hometown bank, enjoy a lifetime of leading, sharing, and giving. I have seen him spend his Christmas Eves taking gifts of food and joy to indigent families. Often when his bank could not justify a loan to someone in need, my grandfather made the loan from his own pocket. He is a real-life Moonlight Graham, a man who has shown me that characters like Dr. Graham and Mr. Finch do much much more than elicit tears and smiles from readers and movie watchers. Through him and others in my family I feel I have acquired the values and the burning desire to benefit others that will form the foundation for a great life. I also feel that that foundation is not enough. I do not yet have the sophistication, knowledge, and wisdom necessary to succeed as I want to in the adult world. I feel that Harvard, above all others, can guide me toward the life of greatness that will make me the Attacus Finch of my town.

COMMENTS:

This essay is a great example of how to answer this question well. This applicant chose characters who demonstrated specific traits that reflect on his own personality. We believe that he is sincere about his choices because his reasons are personal (being from a small town, and so

forth). He managed to tell us a good deal about himself, his values, and his goals while maintaining a strong focus throughout.

Narrative Example:

SAMPLE ESSAY 1:

Brown, achievement: Martial arts competition

A faint twinge of excitement floated through my body that night. A hint of anticipation of the coming day could not be suppressed; yet to be overcome with anxiety would not do at all. I arduously forced those pernicious thoughts from seeping in and overcoming my body and mind. I still wonder that I slept at all that night.

But I did. I slept soundly and comfortably as those nervous deliberations crept into my defenseless, unsuspecting mind, pilfering my calm composure. When I awoke refreshed, I found my mind swarming with jumbled exhilaration. The adrenaline was flowing already.

After a quick breakfast, I pulled some of my gear together and headed out. The car ride of two hours seemed only a few moments as I struggled to reinstate order in my chaotic consciousness and focus my mind on the day before me. My thoughts drifted to the indistinct shadows of my memory.

My opponent's name was John Doe. There were other competitors at the tournament, but they had never posed any threat to my title. For as long as I had competed in this tournament, I had easily taken the black belt championship in my division. John, however, was the most phenomenal martial artist I had ever had the honor of witnessing at my young age of thirteen. And he was in my division. Although he was the same rank, age, size, and weight as I, he surpassed me in almost every aspect of our training. His feet were lightning, and his hands were virtually invisible in their agile swiftness. He wielded the power of a bear while appearing no larger than I. His form and techniques were executed with near perfection. Although I had never defeated his flawlessness before, victory did not seem unattainable. For even though he was extraordinary, he was not much more talented than I. I am not saying that he was not skilled or even that he was not more skilled than I, for he most certainly was, but just not much more than I. I still had one hope, however little, of vanquishing this incredible adversary, for John had one weakness: he was lazy. He didn't enjoy practicing long hours or working hard. He didn't have to. Nevertheless, I had found my passage to triumph.

My mind raced even farther back to all my other failures. I must admit that my record was not very impressive. Never before had I completed anything. I played soccer. I quit. I was a Cub Scout. I quit. I played trumpet. I quit. Karate was all I had left. The championship meant so much because I had never persevered with anything else.

In the last months, I had trained with unearthly stamina and determination. I had focused all my energies into practicing for this sole aspiration. Every day of the week I trained. Every evening, I could be found kicking, blocking, and punching at an imaginary opponent in my room. Hours of constant drilling had improved my techniques and speed. All my techniques were ingrained to the point where they were instinctive. Days and weeks passed too swiftly. . . .

I was abruptly jolted back into the present. The car was pulling into the parking lot. The tournament had too quickly arrived, and I still did not feel prepared for the trial which I was to confront. I stepped out of the car into the bright morning sun, and with my equipment bag in hand, walked into the towering building.

The day was a blur. After warming up and stretching, I sat down on the cold wooden floor, closed my eyes, and focused. I cleared my mind of every thought, every worry, and every insecurity. When I opened my eyes, every sense and nerve had become sharp and attentive, every motion finely tuned and deliberate.

The preliminary rounds were quiet and painless, and the championship fight was suddenly before me. I could see that John looked as calm and as confident as ever. Adrenaline raced through my body as I stepped into the ring. We bowed to each other and to the instructor, and the match began.

I apologize, but I do not recall most of the fight. I do faintly remember that when time ran out the score was tied, and we were forced to go into Sudden Death: whoever scored the next point would win. That, however, I do recall.

I was tired. The grueling two points that I had won already had not been enough. I needed one more before I could taste triumph. I was determined to win, though I had little energy remaining. John appeared unfazed, but I couldn't allow him to discourage me. I focused my entire being, my entire consciousness, on overcoming this invincible nemesis. I charged. All my strenuous training, every molecule in my body, every last drop of desire was directed, concentrated on that single purpose as I exploded through his defenses and drove a solitary fist to its mark.

I was not aware that I would never fight John again, but I would not have cared. Never before had I held this prize in my hands, but through pure, salty sweat and vicious determination, the achievement that I had desired so dearly and which meant so much to me was mine at last. This was the first time that I had ever really made a notable accomplishment in anything. This one experience, this one instant, changed me forever. That day I found self-confidence and discovered that perseverance yields its own sweet fruit. That day a sense of invincibility permeated the air. Mountains were nothing. The sun wasn't so bright and brilliant anymore. For a moment, I was the best.

COMMENTS:

The admissions officers admired this essay for its passion and sincerity. In fact, most of the noted drawbacks were based on the writer being too passionate. "Kind of a tempest in a teapot, don't you think?" wrote one. Other suggestions for improvement were "purely editorial" such as the overuse of adjectives and adverbs, using a passive voice, and making contradictory statements. "For example, he says, 'I slept soundly and comfortably as those nervous deliberations crept into my defenseless, unsuspecting mind, pilfering my calm composure.' How could he sleep soundly and comfortably if the nervous deliberations were pilfering his calm composure? There are a few other examples like that that I won't go into here. I would just suggest that the author look carefully to be sure his ideas stay consistent and support one another."

What I like about this essay from the point of view of an admission officer is that I am convinced that the change in attitude described by the author is real. I do believe that he will carry with him forever the hard-won knowledge that he can attain his goals, that perseverance and hard work will eventually allow him to succeed in any endeavor. This is an important quality to bring to the college experience. Especially when considering applications to prestigious institutions, the admission committee will want to feel sure that the applicants understand the need for hard work and perseverance. Many times the strongest-looking applicants are students for whom academic success has come so easily that the challenges of college come as a shock. I always like hearing stories like this, of students who know what it means to struggle and finally succeed.

Descriptive Essay Example:

SAMPLE ESSAY 1:

Harvard, personal identity: Bedroom tour

If someone were to look through your bedroom, what do you hope your possessions would convey about you?

A typical teen's room? In some respects, yes, but in many ways, my room has become an extension of my personality, interests and values. Upon entering, one would probably notice the lack of any music group, scantily clad female model, or indeed, any adornment at all on my walls. I prefer the unsoiled look of clean walls, which provide a sense of calm. However, my room is far from military precision and order; my bed lies unmade and yesterday's wardrobe gathers dust on the floor. The visitor may consider my room tidy, but not inflexible.

While touring my room, one would surely stop to look through the room's workspace, my desk and computer. The desktop is fairly organized, consisting of a pencil holder, desk calendar, and assorted textbooks. The calendar is full of important dates-tests, deadlines, and of course, the rare days off from school. Academics are one of my highest priorities, but would be useless without occasional relaxation. Above my desk hangs a bulletin board. Similar to the calendar, it holds important pieces of information, as well as a few personal items. A postcard, a present from my grandfather, would likely catch one's eye. The postcard is from my homeland, and includes a famous quote by Mahatma Gandhi. It reminds me of the country I was born in, and the ties I have to my original culture. Directly below the postcard hang a few baby pictures of myself, mementos of a simpler time. Alongside my desk is a computer, without which I could not survive. The slightly outdated, yet fully competent Apple Macintosh aids with school, and, nearly any other activity I participate in. The Mac also has a modem, connecting me to the global community linked through the Internet. I am very interested in the Internet, and have found it a very useful source of information for everything ranging from tomorrow's weather to buying a new car. Upon leaving my workspace, I hope my possessions would convey that I am serious about my work, but I approach it with practicality and a grain of salt.

On the other side of my room lies my relaxation area, commonly referred to as a bed. Strewn about the bed are two magazines which represent my interests, MacWorld and Time. I read these magazines daily, to keep up with current events as well as advancements in the information age. Atop my bureau lays the latest work by Stephen King. The content may not be as deep and insightful as Jane Austen's or Keats, but his stories serve their purpose in providing light entertainment. The bed is unmade, a fact for which I feel no remorse. Although my mother disapproves, I consider an unmade bed a symbol of rest and quietude. My bed may be considered utilitarian, for its uses are not limited to sleeping upon. Some of my best moments of focus and concentration have occurred while lying on the bed and staring at the ceiling, producing thoughts ranging from T.V. shows to pondering college life. Few teen rooms can be considered complete without a loud stereo and an assorted collection of tapes and C.D.'s. My room is no different-my music collection occupies two shelves. Past the techno-rubble of the Eighties lie my current favorites, alternative rock. If a visitor were to turn on the stereo, he would find a couple presets devoted to "homework" music, classical and light jazz. I find that these sounds provide a sense of

tranquility while trying to do homework, write reports, or complete college essays. My bed and surrounding areas represent my non-academic, more human interests. They personify the activities and hobbies which I truly enjoy, and provide a breather from some of the more rigorous aspects of life.

After exiting my room, I would hope my visitor learned a few important things about me. I consider my academics seriously, and devote much of my time (and room) to them. However, they do not necessarily dominate my existence; loud music and Stephen King novels also play a role.

COMMENTS:

While no one felt that this essay was strongly flawed, they made a number of suggestions about how the author could have rewritten the essay to create more of an impact.

The writing style is a little too rigid. The writer should let go of the fear that he won't be taken seriously unless he uses a formal style. The writer should replace stodgy sounding phrases like "while touring my room," with the more straightforward, "as you look around my room." If this were one of my students asking advice, I'd pat him on the back and say, "Lighten up, it's your bedroom. Don't use words like quietude and utilitarian. Relax and have fun with this."

The last paragraph needs to be dropped altogether. If the essay has done it's job, recaps like this are obvious and unnecessary.

This essay does not, unfortunately, convey an impression of a very active person. Whether or not he meant to, I picture the author as someone who spends a lot of time alone in his room playing with his computer and reading lightweight novels. I don't see what he would contribute to campus life. This is something that applicants to technical institutions in particular should be wary of. Admission officers at such places tend to be especially unreceptive to applicants who seem to believe that being a "computer jock" is all the credentials they need for admission.

Cause & Effect Essay Example:

SAMPLE ESSAY 1:

Columbia, Musician (cello)

For some reason, my parents felt the necessity to inundate me at a young age with extracurricular activities. After school, I was always being driven from tennis to violin to swimming to cello to baseball to piano to karate to near craziness! I could have been called the world's busiest kid at the time. From two of the activities, I have reaped the most benefits. Although my cello has been used less frequently than my tennis racquet, the musical instrument creates the most meaningful ideas in my life.

However, my appreciation for playing the cello did not come immediately. From the time I was nine years old until I left for prep school, I detested Sunday. The first day of the week was torturous "cello day": I practiced all morning, had a lesson during the afternoon, and came home in the evening exhausted. But today, I thank austere old Professor [teacher's name] for forcing me to learn the art in music.

With the hectic schedule I have year round, being overwhelmed is not a difficult task. Therefore, I consider playing the cello one of the most rewarding aspects of my life. Very few people have the luxury of being able to absolutely enjoying themselves in the middle of a workday. I can bomb a physics test, and then five minutes later be in heaven. Totally relaxed, I sway back and forth to the rhythm created by my bow and my fingers; both of my arms work in harmony. Eyes closed, I reach the final note and my left hand creates a slow, soothing vibrato-mediocre cello playing at its perfection.

The cello reigns as the supreme instrument in my mind. Whether blusteringly chaotic or lovingly sweet, good cello playing, with its deep, rich tones and fantastically broad range is the epitome of expression. I also have ample opportunity for the other half of art-interpretation. I feel a delight beyond description when listening to Pablo Casals or Yo-Yo Ma. I am able to just sit there and think about my life, and their masterful music can make me feel ebullience or rage. Most importantly, whether I listen to music or play it, I can reflect upon and enjoy life as one special being.

I wish the venerable Professor [teacher's name] could be alive today to hear me play the cello. "With feeling," he would always say. Whenever I played a note out of tune, Mr. [teacher's name] would yell at me until I cried. But now, with my newfound love for the cello, even if he screamed in my ear, I would continue to relish my playing and let him go until he became hoarse.

COMMENTS:

This essayist does a clever job of combining his focus on the cello with gentle reminders that he is involved in much more as well. He does this by beginning with brief mention of "tennis . . . violin . . . swimming . . . cello . . . baseball . . . piano . . . karate . . ." in the second sentence. Then he quickly hones in on the cello alone, making only one additional indirect mention of the "hectic schedule I have year round." He wisely does not go into more detail about the other

activities. This single reference is enough, since the admissions officers can easily refer to the rest of the application for more detail on his other involvements. This writer also does a good job of showing his love for the cello by painting a picture of himself playing: "totally relaxed, I sway back and forth to the rhythm created by my bow and my fingers; both of my arms work in harmony. Eyes closed, I reach the final note and my left hand creates a slow, soothing vibrato--" This image is likely to be the one that sticks in admissions officers' minds, making him more memorable.

College Admission Essay

By Rachel Tornheim

I tighten my fists and narrow my eyes at the invisible enemy in front of me. The sweat drips from my face and soaks through my crisp white *gi*. I struggle to breathe as I have been taught - in through the nose and out through the mouth - and bounce to the music, anticipating the instructor's shout.

“*Move!*”

My body springs into action. Backfist, reverse punch, front ball kick, hook, uppercut, double palm heel to the ribs. On the last strike I *kiai* with the rest of the students. Our yells fill the room, louder than the traffic outside and louder than the din from the stereo. The sound pounds inside my head. Drawing back, I assume the on-guard position. I am ready.

Karate has been a part of my life since 1994. My mom had been encouraging me to take up martial arts ever since she realized that my tiny size would make me an easy target, but it wasn't until seventh grade that I felt physically threatened and decided to sign up for karate classes. Although I no longer feel in danger at this school, karate has not gone the way of figure skating, horseback riding, and piano. It has stayed with me and become a part of my identity. I have paid for my brown belt with sweat and occasionally blood, with anxiety before tests, and with hours of exertion and exhaustion. My training has given me the ability to defend myself, a necessity for a four-foot-ten, slightly built woman entering the twenty-first century.

But karate has left me with more than aerobic and defensive abilities. Because of my physical limitations and my , defending against an attacker does not come easily to me. I cannot count the number of times I have been unable to evade the plastic knife wielded by my opponent or the number of bruises I have received from fists, feet, and knees. My aversion to failure and reluctance to trying unfamiliar things are obstacles I face in other aspects of my life, obstacles that my experience with karate has helped me to overcome. It has taught me that when you get knocked down, you get up again and keep fighting in . Karate has boosted my confidence too. I have sparred with a professional body-builder, and there's nothing like the rush I get from bringing a 200-pound man to the floor!

As we kneel and meditate before each class, the teacher instructs us to clear our minds and leave our problems of work, school, and family outside the *dojo*. At first I don't think it's possible to, for an hour, avoid worrying about the freshmen adn their I need to tutor, the science project that isn't finished, or the 6:45 AM flight I need to catch for this weekend's debate tournament. But somehow, every time, I forget these concerns. For one hour, I am only a *karateka*, a warrior.

College Admission Essay

By Sanju Poudel

In summer 2003, my aunt suggested I deliver babies. That was what volunteering at her small town hospital in Bharatpur, Nepal meant to me anyway. The more she insisted, the more frustrated and I became, fearing what I felt would be another one of my parents' ways for me to build character. My aunt, on the other hand, was determined to show me otherwise and literally dragged me to her work on a rickshaw. Throughout the ride, I did not hold back my aggravation. After all, what did I know about small time hospitals?

Nevertheless, I had certain expectations of the well-known hospital before entering. I pictured succeeding red-bricked buildings with tidy carpeted rooms and people arriving in cars for minor checkups. I imagined how in each room a doctor with a white lab coat, a , and a stethoscope around his/her neck would be consulting individual patients.

However, the very moment the rickshaw slid through the gate, my naïve conceptions dissolved into disease, disorder, and destitution, the truth of what was in front of me. Hesitating to get out of the rickshaw and stepping into a foreign world that was threatening to suppress my innocence, I closed my eyes. I closed my eyes to the make-shift wooden stretchers carrying frail men and women stomaching their inevitable deaths; I closed my eyes to a young girl with a tattered school uniform and undone ribbons leading a blind woman by the hand; I closed my eyes to the sorry, languishing environment that I did not want to be a part of.

My astonishment peaked when entering the maternity ward. In what I considered a room fit for two patients, there were *fifteen* women sprawled in rusting metal-framed beds and sheets on the floor. In the little gaps about the room were green plastic pans where the women would uncomfortably station themselves to urinate and vomit in. I immediately imagined all of these women in nice comfortable beds in their own separate rooms which was the way *my* mom had given birth to my younger brother in New York.

The longer I stayed in the hospital, the more I wanted to reach out to these people playing . Although the hospital had initially been a place I was reluctant to even see, I ended up visiting everyday that week even if merely to speak to the patients. It was because of this day that I finally understood why my aunt refuses better paying jobs abroad. Her strong conviction of returning to her native land and using her education to help her *own* people has filtered into me. Before this event, I had always planned on living in New York and indulging in its luxuries and getting a . Now, however, the prospect of going back to my country and living among a community I can lend a hand to is much more appealing. At the end of the day, I was very thankful that my aunt had pushed me into an experience I now consider a crossroad in my life.

College Admission Essay

By Beth McNamee

I wake up every morning to its rich scent. My parents cannot start the day without it. I often wait in line and pay \$3.85 to buy it. The senior lodge at my school is littered with empty Starbucks cups containing only the remnants of skim lattes, , and mocha frappuccinos. Coffee is a staple of American life that many take for granted, but few take the time to think about how they get it.

In the rural village of Cadillo in the Dominican Republic, the people's livelihood depends on coffee. Rows of green coffee plants line steep hills and scatter the countryside. The people there pick and sell the coffee beans but receive little profit for their hard work.

During the week I spent in Cadillo playing , I witnessed the poverty these coffee farmers endure. Their homes are small and dark, furnished with only a few wooden chairs, a table and a few beds. There is no lawyers and electricity in Cadillo and I especially remember the emptiness of the village at night, when I could only vaguely see the faces I illuminated with my flashlight. I can still see the shiny metal bowl in which they used to bathe, and Jose, a neighbor who was missing several teeth because like most people in Cadillo, he lacks a toothbrush and could not afford a .

These images still burn in my mind, but it was the people of Cadillo more than anything who opened my eyes to the importance of social justice. Before I met them it was just a concept I heard about a few times a year at church when a missionary would come to speak about the poor people in Africa or South America and explain why it was our duty to help them. These people were far removed. A small fraction of my weekly allowance, once a year, and I could remove them from my mind. After living for a week with a family in Cadillo, however, I understood for the first time that it was real people leading these lives.

The family I stayed with there took me in as part of their family and gave me a taste of their life. I remember my Dominican father, Barilla's face as he played guitar and how he laughed kindly when I struggled to play the chords he had taught me. I could feel the warmth and sincerity of my Dominican mother, Marsela, when she sat and talked with me about my home and family after a long day of work. And I will always remember how much fun I had playing catch or blowing bubbles with their two children, Jendi and Andisco.

I will not forget the images I saw or the people I encountered. They made me realize that my work does not end with the school I helped build, the holes I helped dig, or the roads I helped widen. They showed me that there are real, wonderful people being treated unjustly and that I cannot sit back and let that happen. I cannot be silent when I know that people are getting rich off the coffee Barilla receives so little for. It is my responsibility to be active, to teach what I have learned, to fight injustices in my community and the world.

I am not sure if I will ever visit Cadillo again but I do know that I can continue what I started there. I can tell people what I saw and spread awareness about injustice in the world. I can volunteer in my own community to help make changes at home and fundraise to aid third world countries. And tomorrow, after I wake up to the smell of fresh coffee, I can make a difference.

