College Admission Essays- Brigham Young University

**Describe a topic, idea, or experience that you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. What have you done to learn more or engage further in the topic, idea or experience? What resources do you use to learn more? 2000 characters**

On a random Friday a couple months into my junior year,  I discovered a new part of myself when a friend of mine invited me to an Ethics Bowl club he was starting. The club presented ethical dilemmas to students whose job it was to solve them using philosophical reasoning. At first I knew nothing and I needed to be taught the moral frameworks that define the study of ethics. Some might consider such an activity boring but to me it was like gaining a new language that I had been searching for my entire life. It gave me a power and agency I’d never had before. I’ve always loved to argue and make my opinions heard, but now I had the ability to think critically about my thoughts; it was a game changer. My friends and I dove into the cases and discussed them for hours. Every tangent, every interesting thought, every wacky idea--we talked about them all. When competition season was over, we kept on going, analyzing movies like *Inception* and episodes of *Black Mirror*.

That summer I found a book called *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?* by Michael Sandel, which explores all of the frameworks and ideas my friends and I had talked about in preparation for the Ethics Bowl competition such as utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and non-consequentialist theories, but this book went deeper. It looked at John Rawls’ *Theory of Justice* as well as Aristotle and the idea of Telos, or purpose. Most importantly, it showed where each of these moral theories breaks down. *Justice* doesn’t advocate for any particular system; it gives the tools to think about each system on its own merits.

This year I’m taking the philosophy course taught by the Ethics Bowl advisor, Marc Stafford. So far I can’t get enough. Day after day, I stay after class to discuss that day’s topic. And at home I read on my own; right now I’m struggling through an essay by John Locke on human knowledge. While it’s difficult work and the ideas aren’t easy to grasp, through Ethics Bowl I’ve found a new way of looking and thinking about the world.

**We strive to create a rich and varied educational environment by admitting students with a wide range of: Goals Interests Skills and talents Life Experiences Perspectives Cultures. Tell us your story. What will you contribute to our university community? Be specific. 2,000 characters.**

The story of my life is best told through libraries: the ones I’ve lived in, devoured, curated, and called home. I found my first library when I was seven. Whether it was my inability to play handball or my lack of friends, somehow I found my way to the library almost every recess period. Rather than being turned away, I was welcomed by Diana Curtice, the assistant librarian. Though I couldn’t read too well at the time, I loved a good story and was determined to try. I started by  checking out *Eyewitness* books, thin non-fiction tomes filled with pictures. In fact, I checked *all* of them out. By third grade I was begging to help out in the library. Although hesitant at first, Mrs. Curtice taught me the Dewey decimal system and I began shelving books. I started reading fiction--*Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings, Redwall*, *Fablehaven*. I was obsessed.

When my time with Mrs. Curtice came to an end, it was time to go to middle school, which is exactly what I wanted. I had been checking out books from the middle school library and shipping them down to the elementary school for years. I traveled to that middle school library like a devout Muslim making his way to Mecca. I continued reading and led a team to back-to-back victories in the annual Battle of the Books trivia contest.

When it was time to move on to high school and find myself a new library, this time it was in the classroom of English and Newspaper teacher, Mike Palshaw, an avid reader himself. In him I found a kindred spirit. Although he taught mostly juniors and seniors, I found myself in his classroom multiple times a week. Now a senior, Mr. Palshaw teaches two classes of mine. I  couldn’t be happier.

 Soon the wheel will turn once more, and I will find myself in search of another library to call home. I wonder, will it be at BYU?

**Briefly describe a time that your efforts have fallen short, a goal was not accomplished, or an aspiration was not achieved. 500 characters. -What steps did you take to recover from this defeat? What resources did you use? How and why are you different today? 2,000 characters.**

My senior year I was determined to do it all: Pit orchestra, cross country, three newspaper articles in an issue, AP courses, and early morning seminary all on top of that. In previous years I’d been able to get by with mediocre work, but this being my senior year I wanted to do all of my obligations in a method I could truly be proud of myself in. The combined weight overloaded me and I eventually quit cross country, a 7-year investment for me, in order to do justice to my other obligations.

In this struggle of my own creation I was like a little kid at a fancy restaurant, ordering a dish far larger than I could possibly eat. In other word: I bit off more than I could chew. In trying to do everything, I only achieved failure. But to me it wasn’t just about doing all these things, it was about doing them *right*. This desire came to me most clearly in my pit orchestra involvement. At my high school the pit orchestra is a select group of musicians that provide live music for the school musicals. The music we work with is professional level and we put the show together in about 40 hours over two weeks. In previous years I had tolerated mistakes with accidentals and key signatures, but going into my final shot to get it right I wasn’t going to allow that. But as we started work on the latest and my final musical it soon became clear to me that it simply wouldn’t be possible with my lack of time to practice. Simultaneously I was in the middle of cross country season, a team I’d been a part of for four years and where I was a currently a varsity athlete. I was quickly being worn apart. I tried keeping all my plates in the air, missing deadlines and assignments here and there all while trying to keep everything else afloat.

Needless to say, that didn’t last long and I started falling apart on all fronts. Two of my newspaper stories were thrown out for being shoddy work, I grew frustrated at myself for making simple mistakes in pit orchestra, I missed deadlines on a huge essay. I knew that I had failed and I knew that something had to change.

I decided to give up cross country. I had invested years of effort, I’d run my way from JV to Varsity. I love the cross country team and all the memories I’ve made there, but I needed to give something up in order to be proud of my other achievements. I’ve learned that in order to uphold my standards, be that the quality of my work or how I live my life, I need to sacrifice good things for better things. Moving forward I’ll know to only take on what I can accomplish and be proud of. Because of my choice I was able to devote the time I needed to pit orchestra and I can finally say I’ve done it justice and made myself proud.

**Have you become aware of significant needs in your family, school, and/or community? Please explain how you have worked toward meeting those needs. 2,000 characters.**

 I’ve always been a voracious reader, engulfing book after book often to the chagrin of my parents who wish I’d be doing something more productive. But as long as I’ve loved reading, I’ve also longed to write, my head swirling with ideas for novels and stories. While I still have some handwritten and laughably bad story prologues from 4th grade, it wasn’t until my freshman year when I got more serious about this writing my own novels. One evening I was talking to a friend with similar authorial aspirations and we both expressed our difficulty staying on track and working through ideas. One idea led to another and a few weeks later the creative writing club was born. In the beginning it was just five of us, but that number grew to maybe ten by the end of freshman year. I found that there were many students just like myself at my high school, bursting with ideas and desires, but struggling to execute. Together our goal was simple, help support each other and get our stories written. During our meetings we would discuss our ideas and make suggestions and critiques, while outside of school we would read each other’s work and leave comments on it. I led lessons about story structure, pacing, realistic characters, just to name a few. Over the past four years the club has changed every year as new members have joined and old ones have faded out, but the some challenges and joys have stayed the same. I’ve discovered that I really love helping people with their ideas, in one good conversation I can help a person turn idea fragments into a full concept. The main struggle facing the club hasn’t changed, the difficulty of actually sitting down and writing, but as a club we’ve developed ways of fighting that. We’ve had weekly competitions based on word-count, set public goals, and even rewarded baked goods to top weekly writers. While the club has had varying degrees of success, being a purely solo enterprise after all, I’ve helped build an environment for fledgling writers, myself included, to begin spreading their wings and taking flight. This year as we prepare short stories for competitions, I look ahead for opportunities for more opportunities to grow as I turn my next to my next chapter.