

## Why College is Important to Me

by Michelle Wang

For one of the first times in my “career” as a student, I took it upon myself to purchase a book a teacher had suggested to me—not because it was extra-credit, but just because it was a good read. I spent part of a Sunday reading a bit of *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite* by William Deresiewicz and within the first twenty pages, had highlighted more passages than I typically do for a required reading in English class. High school is the tumultuous environment my friends and I sometimes refer to as “hell.” I don’t mean this in a derogatory or ungrateful way, as I recognize my own educational privilege and am extremely grateful to have three meals a day, drive my own car to school, and have money to go out with friends on the weekends—but I aim to point out that even the most affluent students at a particularly well-off high school seem to overlook this fact because they can only see the “resume arms race” ahead of them.

Figuring out *why* college is important to me is a feat in itself. Yes, I want a legitimate degree from my college education; yes, I want to have a brighter job outlook in the future; and yes, it is what you’re “supposed” to do after high school. These are only superficial desires. But after reading *Excellent Sheep*, I realized the desires that fuel parts of your human soul: *how* to think (not what to think), *how* to question things beyond textbooks and calculations, *how* to build a *self*. Deresiewicz says, “To ask what college for is to ask what life is for, what society is for—what people are for.” College is important to me because I aim to get more out of my education than I did during high school. (ACF: This is a student with a Total GPA grades 9 – 12 of 4.3571, all A’s, with 9 A+’s) It’s my second chance to explore.

Towards the end of my junior year I felt immense pressure from my environment that was a combined feeling of: “I still don’t know what I’m going to do with my life” and “everyone else has a passion they’re pursuing” that made me realize something big in my life: you *have* to explore. I was taking a science research class I didn’t even enjoy, because it seemed like the “right thing to do.” I didn’t

know what I liked because I didn't give myself a chance to try new things. I was so scared of failing, that I preferred not attempting it rather than attempting it and failing. My world up until that point was a blur of GPAs and schoolwork, because that was the only thing I had proved I was good at. I can get straight A's. But I prioritized my schoolwork so extremely because I thought it was the only thing I had to offer and the only thing Ivy League schools wanted to see.

This one sentence particularly struck a chord with me: "The system manufactures students who are smart and talented and driven, yes, but also anxious, timid, and lost, with little intellectual curiosity and a stunted sense of purpose: trapped in a bubble of privilege, heading meekly in the same direction, great at what they're doing but with no idea why they are doing it." A higher education should not be a means to an end. A college education should force you to reflect and discover; not to look for definite answers, but to raise questions that lead you to think about who you are as a person at 2am in the morning. This is exactly what I want from my college education.