

Why College Is Important to Me

by Jack Benedict

My view of education has been greatly influenced by my grandparents' journeys to be educated. My grandmother grew up in poverty and little education in Puerto Rico. After completing 6th grade, she stopped school to work in her father's tobacco fields. At eighteen, she traveled to the United States and started a new life. Her husband, my grandfather, also came from humble beginnings as one of nine growing up on a small farm in Pennsylvania. Survival meant long hours working on the farm before and after school. When their barn burned down, my grandfather had to skip every third day of school to help his father rebuild it. A gifted athlete, he gave up sports in high school because it took too much time from his chores at home. But he persisted and became the first of his family to go to college, supporting himself while pursuing a degree in engineering.

I am inspired by them both and realize how fortunate I am to have access to early education opportunities denied to them. I have benefitted from growing up in a family involved in a wide array of fields such as space, medicine, theater, law, and engineering. My experiences with them have shaped my love for the STEM fields and the arts and a curiosity to try new areas of study where, even though I may not linger long, I find myself happy to have explored.

I have discovered that I have a passion for music – both as a performer and composer, but that I'm not a great dancer. Through my internship experiences at the Smithsonian and Anne Arundel Medical Center, I've learned that I can work collaboratively with my peers and engage well with the public. Being a team captain in basketball has offered tough, but necessary, lessons in sportsmanship, teamwork and proving that it's not just talent that carries the day, but consistency and practice – lots of it. I have also found that tutoring a young eighth grader can provide a stronger sense of achievement than winning a championship game.

Both my parents are college graduates. They have also encouraged me and my two younger brothers to take on new challenges, read daily, take part in community activities, and explore the world on many levels learning about different subjects and how they overlap and intertwine. I want to continue that exploration in college and often think about the possibilities of combining music and my newfound interest in physics at college.

To me, college is a natural progression forward, the next step in my education where I will be surrounded and inspired by like-minded peers and educators with whom I can engage and learn from. I'm thankful that I am supported in my desire to better myself and pursue my interests when so many others cannot. College is the pathway to opening up career options, acquiring important skill sets and relationships, and giving me the freedom to choose my course in life. For that, I am very grateful.