

## Why College Is Important to Me

by Audrey Gruszczynski

A map. A simple yet profound entity. In my mind, I sometimes envision one decorated with minute strings connecting place to place. Every string adding an experience and a memory that threads my world together. My experiences and memories, like strings on this map, build who I am and connect me to the world.

String one. Though childhood memories have developed me into the person I am today, I find that here at string one is where I really started to grasp who I was and wanted to become. This string starts on the day I adopted a scared, abused shelter dog in middle school. The total responsibility for caring for “Maggie” made me realize how determined, strong, and independent I was. I found profound empathy within myself as well as a drive to make a difference in a life. This power to be able to make a difference set the foundation of who I wanted to become.

String two. High school. Daunting as it was, I was ready to leave my 47-student graduating class in middle school and delve into a school with over 2,000 students. High school challenged me in many ways. It challenged me to expand my mind, branch out, and become more versatile. My participation in clubs, athletics, and classes allowed me to practice how to effectively balance my life. This participation also highlighted the importance of physical as well as mental exercise and how to work effectively on a team. In addition, I realized that hard work is talent. Furthermore, participation in clubs paved a way for me to branch out into my school community and become a part of something more than myself.

String three. Compassion. I have done extensive volunteering throughout my life. However, one of the most life-changing volunteer experiences was through my participation in a team leadership program at a local hospital. Here I was given the opportunity to interact with nurses, doctors, patients, and their family members. It helped me further seal my passion to study biomedical science. During this experience, I also observed many people who were combating serious illnesses. Despite these

maladies, the majority of these people remained positive and optimistic. These patients demonstrated to me what being resilient and strong truly means.

String four. Diversity. The stringed map that I have created in my mind through my experiences is my own type of wanderlust. Wanderlust is a strong desire to travel. I crave the expansive knowledge that interacting and experiencing different world cultures brings. Indeed, my map doesn't just show how to get from one place to another or the location of countries, cities, and continents. My map brings to life how similar we all are to one another despite living in different cultures and parts of the world. In this way, my map strings connect us all to one another.

I continually seek to add new strings to my map that I have created and look forward to the many strings that will certainly be added within my college experience and beyond. College means to me receiving an expansion of knowledge and culmination of experiences to add onto my ever-filling mental map.