

Why College is Important to Me

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For much of my childhood, I was content being a passive observer of life: sitting out on the sidelines during kickball and only sparingly sharing juicy gossip during sleepovers. In student reports from parent-teacher conferences, teachers would often remark on my “potential”, if only I would speak up in class...

Reflecting now, I hold the sinking feeling that those early years were ruled by inaction rather than action. Yet, today, I no longer fear such action, whether it's starting initiatives or building new connections. And it all started with raising my voice.

As a student, I'm intimately familiar with paper usage, which is pervasive in the academic setting from homework to note-taking. However, it was only following COVID-19 that I became acutely aware of academia's continuing irresponsible paper consumption and its environmental implications. Painfully singular in my revelation, I felt compelled to advocate for environmental accountability, starting with educating others in my community through videos, presentations, and a website. Over time, my discomfort with the spotlight turned into solace as I realized the focus was on my mission and had never been on myself.

Moreover, that little website I designed on Wix quickly evolved beyond my imagination. Today, A Sustainable Future (ASF) is an international student-run, environmental initiative that has reduced irresponsible paper consumption in 50+ member schools nationwide. ASF provides resources for students to educate themselves and others on sustainable paper consumption, as well as guidelines to conduct paper consumption research in their own schools. Through doing so, I am proud to meaningfully impact 150+ student ambassadors across 7 countries *worldwide* and speak up at conferences and symposiums on what matters most to me.

However, I am proudest of my growth to begin sharing these passions with the world; it is my greatest privilege today to unabashedly and confidently advocate for what I love. In class, my voice no longer quivers when I speak, and I approach each new occasion as an opportunity for growth rather than sheer survival.

I am pursuing college with intentions to further that growth, as college will doubtlessly challenge me to take risks, engage in creative problem-solving, and delve into my passions like never before. Specifically, the intersection between data and environmental science has always fascinated me: from modeling nationwide school printer data to tracking vegetal disruptions caused by devastating Californian wildfires. A college education would enhance my experiences to pursue a prospective career in environmental science, whether it's gauging voter engagement on climate policy, evaluating carbon-capture technology, or predicting trends in nonrenewable resource consumption. In essence, college is the bridge that will take me from my aspirations to their realization. Daunting as it may be, college is yet another opportunity to raise my voice--to find solace in a future dedicated to others.

My teachers were never far off when they proclaimed every young person has extraordinary "potential"; through my continuing role with A Sustainable Future and my college education, I hope to help as many of them raise their voices to ignite change.