

**“Why College Is Important to Me”
-Shriya Suryakumar**

Our cherished family tradition is watching reruns of the original Star Trek series on Friday nights. While I was too young to remember my first episode, my love for this classic series has grown over the years. In one of my favorite episodes “The Devil in the Dark”, Captain Kirk orders Dr. McCoy to treat a silicone-based creature. To that Dr. McCoy replies, “I’m a doctor, not a bricklayer!” and Kirk replies “You’re a healer”. Dr. McCoy with his ingenuity finds a way to cure the creature. The subtle yet profound lesson, that a healer always finds a way to help regardless of the patient or situation, is deeply etched in my mind.

As I have progressed in my academic journey, I have gravitated towards advanced STEM classes at school, and have been captivated by the mysteries of the human body. In my pursuit of understanding caregivers, I eagerly seized the opportunity to volunteer at a local hospital. Over the past year, I have repeatedly observed the selfless dedication of tirelessly overworked caregivers who go to great lengths to treat patients, comfort them, and instill a sense of hope. The cheerful smile on patients' faces as they are discharged, the most uplifting moment of my shift, reaffirms my deep appreciation for the transformative power of knowledge and service.

A remarkable encounter at a school for the visually impaired "opened my eyes" and drew me towards visual impairment. Discovering that many eye conditions are preventable and often linked to socio-economic factors was a shocking revelation to me. This motivated me to learn about vision impairments and gain practical exposure by shadowing eye specialists. Recognizing a pressing need among unhoused clients for vision services, through my [“Vision100”](#) initiative, I hold awareness camps, collection drives, and eye clinics by collaborating with vision service providers and community centers. Upon hearing phrases from clients like, "Your presence here is truly a blessing; I've been eager to have my eyes examined for quite some

time", my determination to dedicate my life to the convergence of vision sciences and community service grows stronger.

College is the critical catalyst that can mold my raw curiosity and potential and prepare me for the real world. This is the place where I will undergo a metamorphosis, emerging from the safety of my family's cocoon and making my own in the independent world of adulthood. While this is a scary thought it is also oddly alluring. I am looking forward to acquiring knowledge under the guidance of experts, developing skills, and specializing in vision sciences. I want to engage in innovative research that academia offers, for early diagnosis and treatment of ocular ailments that are affecting millions around the globe. Forging strong connections with the professional network, I aspire to join "Right to Sight" global efforts to prevent avoidable impairments and establish healthcare equity. I am excited to embark on this intellectually stimulating, deeply challenging, and emotionally rewarding journey to be a healer. I want to be another Dr. McCoy!