Jesuit Journal

Spring 2014

College Essays

Take this edition with you! We have plenty.
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Thank you to all the seniors who were kind enough to allow us to publish their essays in our annual college essay edition, especially given the personal and reflective nature of some of the topics.

We wish well the seniors of the class of 2014 as the year draws to a close and as they prepare to leave Jesuit and go off to college and beyond.

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Mason Amelotte

Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

I’ve just finished my first session with Dr. Seacrest. My eyelids hold back tears, and my heart hangs heavy in my chest. As I pull my car into its usual parking spot, memories of my late father flood my mind, but I remind myself that these thoughts are only temporary. After a moment spent pulling myself together, I head towards the door of the coffee shop.

I pass through the threshold. In this moment, I am Dante ascending into the Paradiso with Beatrice at my side, though, in this case, Beatrice just so happens to be a green twin-tailed mermaid.

The usual faces behind the counter greet me as the noxious aroma of fresh espresso, a familiar scent that recalls late nights and long days, clogs my nostrils and churns my stomach. It perplexes my mother that I choose to frequent an environment that fills me with nausea. Like most bad experiences in life, however, the nausea eventually subsides, leaving me with only a fleeting memory of its presence. It has been a year this October since my father’s motorcycle accident, yet I’m still reminded of his order every time I pass by those simple white coffee cups: Grande, nonfat, no foam, 140º caramel Macchiato. The words resonate within me. Here, everything resonates within me.

Waves of hurried doctors, secretaries, and parents overflow the shop. Despite the 8 A.M. early morning pandemonium, a relieving sense of calm washes over me. Here, I am allowed to descend into the masses and merely observe. In this moment, the world isn’t focused on me. No. Here, the world is focused on efficiency and productivity: two characteristics I am able to admire from afar. Others would call this people-watching. I call it observing, analyzing, learning. In this moment, I exist within a greater network of human beings, strangers united under both circumstance and time. To my psychologist, I’m a unique individual with a fairly typical case of acute stress response. Here, though, in the middle of this hustling and bustling coffee house, I am just another customer, another order, another Grande caramel Macchiato.
Aaron Stonecipher

Describe a circumstance, obstacle or conflict in your life, and the skills and resources you used to resolve it. Did it change you? If so, how?

As I sat down on the bench in the locker room, I knew something was wrong. I never cried because of pain, but this was different. It hurt to walk, it hurt to stand up, and I couldn’t even bend down to grab my shoes. It felt like someone had smashed my back with a hammer over and over again, and they ruthlessly refused to stop. What I thought was a pulled muscle turned out to be something that would change my life forever.

Two weeks later, after an x-ray, a bone scan, and a CT scan, I discovered I had bilateral stress fractures in my lower back. In addition, I also had degenerative discs above and below the vertebrae, which meant that the discs were about 1/3 the size they were supposed to be. My fractures would heal, but my discs never would. Furthermore, I discovered I have a fairly-common spinal condition. My bones had not fused together at the bottom of my spine, therefore making me extremely susceptible to stress fractures. After hearing the news, my stomach dropped, dragging my heart down with it. “You can’t play football again,” the doctor said, “You can get hurt even worse if you play. It’s time to hang up the pads.”

A huge door closed for me that day. For about 6 months, I couldn’t carry things over 10 pounds, I couldn’t carry a backpack at school, I couldn’t run, I couldn’t jump, and I had to take endless amounts of Aleve to soothe the pain. My life turned upside-down. I had quit baseball and basketball to focus on football. The one sport I loved had been taken from me, and because of the large time commitment, I wasn’t involved in many clubs. I had nothing going for me; my grades had suffered as well. I was filled with depression, confusion, and even anger. Why me? Why did the thing I love most have to be taken away? I had so many mixed feelings, all of which hurt me.

One day, my Theater Arts teacher emailed me asking me to audition for the spring comedy. He said that my stellar performances really caught his attention and that he really saw potential in me. Instead of staying at home and sulking about my injury, I decided that I should try something new. The next evening after the auditions, he emailed me again congratulating me on the lead role in Lend Me a Tenor. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I had zero experience in acting, yet I was cast as the lead. My life turned around that day. I saw happiness and potential in myself to do more, and it motivated me to start getting more involved.

I started going to school happy again. I was asked to join iPanel, a team that made crucial decisions regarding our school’s transition to an iPad-environment. My skills with technology helped me thrive on the board. I then joined the Freshman Retreat team as a small group leader. Finally, I was asked by my English teacher to write for the school newspaper. After two articles, I was asked to be an associate editor. After only a year and a half of writing, I am the Editor-in-Chief.
After seriously injuring my back, my life changed forever. I could’ve chosen to stay home, sulk all day, and not try new things. I think that my Theater Arts teacher helped me see that one door closing only opens another door. Because I cleared my eyes and understood what he said, I opened another door, and then another, and then another. My life became amazing because of the new organizations I joined, and I learned I have so much potential in other things, too. My eagerness to try new things helped me see exactly what my teacher wanted me to see: when one door closes, another opens.
Brian Lee

Describe two or three of your current intellectual interests and why they are exciting to you. Why will Cornell’s College of Arts and Sciences be the right environment in which to pursue your interests?

Infinite possibilities can be achieved through science. It is the foundation for everything magnificent in the world, especially the human body and experience. I first discovered the practice of genetic engineering through a paper I wrote examining a current social justice issue. This extremely controversial subject was riddled with a long list of ethical and moral considerations that I found to be fascinating. To genetically modify a species defies God’s vision for the individual, oppresses the poor who cannot afford the expensive procedure, and can attribute unfair advantages to people who benefit from enhancements. I however, in terms of science, believe successful utilization could lead to the eradication of genetically determined diseases that plague our society. The question then becomes: Would it be ethical to defy God’s creation to cure a heart disease? Would enhancing the genes of the rich create a more disparaging social gap and deteriorate the unity of our society? Or would such advances lead to decreased costs of healthcare and increased life expectancies that allow mankind to fully reach their potential?

Paralleling to my interests in genetics, I have recently discovered Sherlock Holmes and his examination of neurological sciences. His innate ability to perceive the environment around and deduce conclusions captivates me. “A Study in Pink” clearly illustrates Holmes’ deductive skills as he dissects his enemy’s thoughts. When given a choice between two pills, one lethal and the other safe, he realizes the foolish gamble and resigns from the game despite the gun pointed at his head. Now for the truly ingenious part: Holmes taunts his captivator with this a daring statement, “Go ahead pull the trigger.” Initially I was initially baffled by his seemingly suicidal decision. Does he wish to die without a fight? Then it was revealed that the barrel of the gun was simply a containment for a lighter. This dramatic scene made Goosebumps appear over my skin. Holmes’ superhuman ability to absorb all the details in his surroundings saved his life. He knew the killer would never give him an easy death because the killer is driven by the process of his victim’s death. His modus operandi includes reveling in the “game” and emotional thrill when his victim chooses the wrong pill.
Lastly, fencing is the main force behind my competitive drive. Although technically a form of athletics, I believe success depends on the control of the mind over the body. It leaves no room for error. Patterns in the movements of your opponent must be recognized, analyzed and manipulated for victory. Even when facing a familiar opponent, a sparring partner you fence on a weekly basis, someone whose habits and patterns are as familiar as your own, the challenge never fades. In fact, this is where the battle truly picks up. Using reverse psychology to bait out an opponent’s moves and trapping them in the position where you want them is the most rewarding feeling. Every touch requires careful thought and is a direct consequence of your mind as it translates to extraordinary actions. Fencing has cultivated my drive for success and experiencing such success through careful planning translates well to other aspects of my life.

I feel Cornell, with its diverse student body, renowned faculty and unparalleled facilities would be the ideal university to mediate a balance between moral ethics and the brilliance of science. It would also provide for a competitive atmosphere that would challenge me to achieve my goals.
William Melsheimer

In his 2005 inaugural address, Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., president of the University of Notre Dame, challenged our community: “we at Notre Dame must have the courage to be who we are. If we are afraid to be different from the world, how can we make a difference in the world?” When you leave Notre Dame, what is one way you will bravely face the world, stay true to your values, and make a difference large or small?

When I leave Notre Dame, I will bravely face the world, stay true to my values, and make a difference by living out the notion that family is not defined by blood. That idea has been central to my identity for all of my life. I am a brother of two adopted children. Not a legal brother, just a brother. Because they were adopted at a young age, they have felt like what most people call “biological” siblings. I have never thought twice about whether or not they are my “normal” brother and sister, they are just my family. Most people would say that I deviate from the norm in what I consider to be a family. I consider family to be not people who share the same blood, but people who I love and cherish.

I will emulate the model that my parents set of adopting total strangers. I will make a determined effort to adopt individuals who may not have any family otherwise. I have the opportunity to make a difference by broadening my circle, by bringing in familiar or fresh faces with open arms. If I stick to the narrow-minded notion of family, I will never be able to meet new people, to forge new relationships, and truly make a change in someone’s life. And these changes can be big or small. They can be something as simple as chatting with a lonely colleague for five minutes; or something complex like adopting a child from another country. While these gestures differ greatly, they are both profound attempts at accepting someone with open arms and helping someone in need. So when I leave Notre Dame, I will stick true to my values and always seek to change someone’s life by making them part of my family.
Mauricio Narvaez

Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?

Sitting Friday afternoon at our junior convocation, the event at the end of the school year where awards for academic excellence are presented and many scholarships are granted, the Latin phrase nomen non fuit mihi – the name was not mine – floated in my head. Hearing my name called six times already, the seventh was missing. Seven, the perfect number, perfection I missed. Although I did not receive the Henrion Scholarship, the most valuable scholarship awarded, the scholarship of highest prestige, the scholarship I worked so hard for, I gained something much greater.

The first day of my freshman year, I entered Jesuit College Prep with a single thought: to surpass all of my classmates in something. Anything. To be someone whose name would be spoken and remembered. Coming from a public, “underprivileged,” predominantly Hispanic and African American middle school, I wanted to prove myself better than these “rich, white private school kids.” With my determination and many preconceptions, I entered this unchartered territory. Throughout that year, most people did not know me and my teachers stumbled trying to pronounce “Mauricio Narvaez” (Mao-ree-sio Nar-vá-es) every time they called roll. By the end of the year, I had finished near the top of my class, but not quite where I wanted. I had heard of the achievements of Grant Uy, the valedictorian, but had little to boast about myself. Even my friends couldn’t spell my name.

That year, I taught myself to program because the valedictorian was a programmer and I needed to beat him at something he was good at. Two years later, I did not have a website with simple Javascript games on it, but at least I had written an encryption algorithm, published Blue Shadow and Minefield Swim to the Android Market, and created a clone of Minecraft from scratch. With my high grades, many extracurriculars, recognitions, and skills, I was confident I would win the scholarship. I sat at the convocation that Friday, continually getting up to receive my awards, three of which for my participation in Latin, and my confidence only kept growing. Soon, I had received six awards, and the valedictorian, by now a close friend, had seven. When the winner of the Henrion Scholarship was about to be announced, the auditorium grew silent. Everyone leaned forward in expectation. The name was called. Nomen non fuit meum.

Before entering high school, I bragged a lot about my many talents, from playing the piano, to drawing, to solving a rubiks cube in under 2 minutes, to fixing computers. Entering a school so different from what I was used to, despite my desire to become famous, I did not want to come across as arrogant, so I tended to keep my abilities to myself, so much so that it became a habit to hold back my knowledge when not speaking with my close friends. This hurt me when applying for scholarships – the donors wanted to hear about everything I could do. Convinced that saying good things about myself was bad, I wanted to avoid bragging, so my misconception kept me from expressing my abilities, therefore hurting my applications.
Although I did not earn the scholarship I wanted, I learned to stop holding back, to stop hiding what I could do, and to instead use it to contribute to the community by helping teach other students to use technology to its fullest. Beginning this senior year, I created an App Development Club at my school, which focuses on creating utilities and games for different devices. In this club, we teach other students who are interested in technology how to work as a team, contributing as programmers, artists, designers, testers, in order to create and publish a final product. Through this club, I express my abilities and serve as a leader, and in my head floats the Latin phrase nomen erit mihi, the name will be mine.

Drawing by Michael Lanham ’15
Patrick Arraj
Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

Many people wouldn’t consider a war-torn Middle Eastern country as a place of content; but I’m not many people. As a Canadian citizen born to Lebanese parents in France, I receive the privilege of traveling around the world, being able to visit the most volatile region in the world: the Middle East. Sure, militias clash and car bombs threaten the lives of innocents more often than in my North Dallas neighborhood, but I just can’t get enough of my roots.

Once inside the country and among family and friends, all the news headlines of casualties and protests in the streets seem to disappear. I wake up in the morning, looking out to the Mediterranean, with fresh orange juice in one hand and ka’ak, an improvised bagel, in the other. A ring at the door reveals my aunt and young cousins, equipped for a day at the beach. The nicer beaches tend to place themselves north of the nation’s capital, a region containing much more peace and relaxation, with country clubs and spas. These beaches allow me to forget the instability of the region, making Northern Lebanon seem more like beaches of Florida or California.

After the beach usually comes a reunion with old friends, ones that unsuccessfully try to keep contact through Facebook. These reunions transport me back to my childhood and allow me to feel like a naive youngster, one who doesn’t know the difference between harmony and conflict. Usually, these experiences bring old relatives and family friends, ones that I don’t even remember meeting but seem to know more about me than some of my friends back in Dallas. During these afternoon meetings, the hospitality of the Lebanese people begins to kick in, and I leave thinking I will never be able to eat again. I return to my family’s house, about thirty minutes north of Beirut, and sleep off the food and daily events, only to wake up around 9:00 for activities downtown.

Traveling downtown, the epitome of my day brings excitement as the city centre offers hundreds of different possibilities to explore. Concerts of international artists, Western blockbusters, and American chain-restaurants all remind me of home. Even the more strange customs and forms of entertainment are offered, including soap soccer, a recently popular discovery. Downtown Beirut presents me the opportunities provided in Dallas, but also adds a little cultural flare to them.

This trip is meaningful because it allows me to appreciate the simple pleasures of life, mainly personal communication. Modern technology such as texting, Facebook, and Skype can only go so far in connecting people, and Lebanon helps me remember that personal interaction is important. Texting is less popular, forcing people to talk to each other, and there are no self-serve gas stations or grocery store checkout lines. Among the biggest blessing is the absence of Wi-Fi at my house. No I am not crazy. No Wi-Fi for a few weeks allows me to relax and escape the world of liking statuses and retweeting and forces me to talk to people. I can ignore the less important things in life and focus more on spending the little time I have with my family and forming memories.

Lebanon is my little taste of paradise, a small oasis in the midst of chaos.
Trevor Johnson

Considering your lifetime goals, discuss how your current and future academic and extra-curricular activities might help you achieve your goals.

I trace my greatest ambition back to a single bodily organ, the pancreas. I plan to be a doctor. Although the pancreas brought much pain to my family, it ultimately shaped my identity, evoking fervent dedication. In 2004, doctors diagnosed my mother with pancreatitis. I hardly recognized the gravity of her condition, but after days of intensive care, I awakened to reality. The thought of death suddenly came over me, and I fell into a pit of hopeless despair. Fortunately, such fear faded as my mother improved, recovering after three agonizing weeks. This experience left me with a new perspective on medicine, for doctors had saved my mother and thus became heroes.

The most attractive feature of medicine stems from patient interaction, an intimate connection that transcends all boundaries. In search of this bond, I enrolled in clinical rotations at Dallas Presbyterian Hospital this past year. Initially, contact with patients felt somewhat uncomfortable, for the topic of illness evoked grief and sadness. But, this mindset disappeared as the patients themselves became beacons of hope. Such inspiration arose in the oncology department, where a woman with brain cancer cracked jokes to lighten the mood, displaying incredible optimism despite her grave condition. Moreover, as the patients improved from one visit to the next, my volunteer service developed into a deep and meaningful reward. I nurtured a caring bond with patients of different languages, proving the universal nature of medicine. Ultimately, clinical rotations allowed me to assume a doctor’s perspective, prompting further participation this upcoming year.

I similarly value scientific research as the foundation of medical progress. In order to better understand this field, I applied to the STARS Program at UT Southwestern, which occupied eight hours per day for eight weeks of the summer. I felt slightly overwhelmed by the task at hand, for each participant works in a different lab, organizes his own project, and presents his findings on a research poster. These initial worries vanished when I received my project overview: examine the link between autism and vaccines. Immediately, the assignment aroused deep fascination, for this topic remains a point of heated controversy. My cousin Dylan copes with high functioning autism, evoking personal sentiment. As I dove into the project, I quickly realized that science hardly proceeds according to plan, but instead presents troublesome obstacles. I discovered how our findings might ultimately influence medicine, for the results could determine vaccine composition. Overall, this experience contributed to my lifetime goal as it revealed the foundation of medicine.
My activities within school likewise reflect a pursuit of medicine. I participate in Medical Society, which offers monthly lectures and occasional dissections. By attending such events, I maintain an ongoing familiarity with medical advances, along with their applications. I challenge myself through enrollment in honors and AP courses. Presently, I have completed honors biology and honors chemistry, and I plan to take AP biology this upcoming year. I strive to maintain this academic momentum as I enter college, attending difficult classes that pertain to medicine. Perhaps, if my interest in research continues to grow, I might pursue an MD-PhD. As I reflect upon this arduous journey, both past and future, it astounds me to consider its origin, the ailment of a failed pancreas.

Drawing by Bryce Bonner '16
Drawing by Emilio Chavez '14
Charlie Wensinger: The Selfish Gene

*Tell us about the most significant person, experience, or circumstance which has shaped your life thus far. How has he, she, or it influenced your character? How might you use what you have learned to achieve your goals?*

A family name and legacy can be helpful at times. In my case, it happens to be an obstacle. I am continuously judged by my brothers’ actions, instead of my own. At first I thought it was cool, people talked to me and my name got me into social groups, but then I started to see the downside. I realized that I did not want that reputation, I wanted to be my own person and make a name for myself, so I settled down and started to put more focus into my school work. My oldest brother, Max, is a drifter, full of charm, but was never able to focus and dropped out of college after a year. My other brother, Sam, is a “party animal.” His life is all about social and college for him is the party, not the academics. Unlike my siblings I want to learn, I value academics.

I never let anyone know how much I resented the comparisons until my junior retreat, where I wrote a very direct letter to my counselors asking them to judge me by my actions, not my brothers’. My family has a history at my high school, Jesuit College Prep. My dad, my uncle, and my two brothers all attended. My dad is very involved and was the head of the board of foundation. Sam was asked to leave due to his actions, and Max rarely showed up to class. So, everyone assumed I would be trouble. I had tried to prove that I was different to my teachers by doing the little things like; paying attention in class, doing my homework, studying, and respecting them, as well as my classmates. I worked hard to get them to realize I was not like my brothers, but I could see some teachers thinking “oh, here comes another Wensinger.” I wanted my teachers to see me the way my parents, friends and other people who know me do. In my family, I am “The Good Boy.” I have the best grades, the highest test scores, and the steady focus on school and trying to do the right thing that my brothers did not have. I love my family and I learned to find a positive from my brothers. I learn from their mistakes, I see what they do wrong and make sure to not do the same thing. I try to make my family proud and rebuild the family name. It is not always easy and is often a challenge, but I am glad to be able to overcome this obstacle. Although I will never fully outgrow the reputation of my brothers, it is sometimes fun to watch my teachers’ attitudes toward me change as they realize that I am not just “another Wensinger.”
Matthew Bedard: The Peace in the Pieces

Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

It is a bittersweet day, the day that I finish a puzzle. When a puzzle finally lays complete on the table, there is a celebration of achievement, but this joy comes with the loneliness of losing a companion, a comforter. The adventure of every puzzle begins in the same way, the opening of a box with a multitude of pieces haphazardly piled in the painted container, but each puzzle takes me on a unique journey. My first memories of puzzles come from my youth. Growing up, my family would biannually visit my grandparents’ cottage in Maine, along with my cousins. I distinctly remember the unspoken family tradition that the first night upon our arrival in the rented house near the miniscule cottage a sizable table would be silently cleared, a musty cardboard box drawn from the depths of someone’s suitcase, and a puzzle strewn out across table. It was not argued about or even deliberated, once someone began clearing a table everyone recognized that the tradition had begun and came to their aide. I was still too young to truly appreciate the subtle joy of successfully placing a piece in its predestined home, but I remember spending late nights with my cousin Ryan at the table, together putting pieces in their places, bonding in the sacred silence of the puzzle table. I brought this sacred sense home with me, and ever since have been rejoicing in the game of puzzle building. I often recline at my puzzle table, late in the night, and continue the family tradition of solving puzzles. The lights of my house long ago extinguished, I sit in solitude underneath the single lit lamp left in my entire house. Before me lays my latest passion, my newest project. Still just a spattering of pieces, seemingly random to the casual observer, my puzzle lays before my hands like the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo; only I can foresee what it will transform into. The seemingly random spattering of lights in the 2000 piece monstrosity will one day perfectly depict the night time bustles of Time Square, but for now they lay in meaningless piles. Slowly but surely my hands relay the instructions from my brain and pieces begin to fall into their places. Piece by piece I formulate the bright white LG advertisement which spans the top corner of the puzzle; and as every piece finds its place, I begin to feel peace. The subtle click each miniature picture makes as it joins its brothers is a victory for me, as slowly but surely the puzzle grows across the table. This is my Nirvana. It seems unlikely to those who first meet me; on the outside I am extroverted and social, often garnering remarks about my talkative nature. But this friendly extrovert slides away when I reach my puzzle. Suddenly my world is consumed by the expansive problem before me, and I devote my attentions to its solution. I begin relentlessly committing myself to task of sorting through the pieces in search of the sacrosanct corner, the slightly musty smell of cardboard tickling my nostrils as I contemplate where each piece will end up. In my solitude I find peace, no longer bothered by the troubles of my day or worried about the early morning swim practice that awaits me the following morning, I am able to relax and focus on the task at hand. Nothing else in this world brings such serenity to my mind, the peaceful determination that is only found in a puzzle maker’s quiet and relentless hand. This serenity and contention bring me back to the late nights with my cousin, building puzzles full of grasses, mountains, and skies, building relationships, and forming character.
WE WANT YOUR SUBMISSIONS!

We strive to highlight the creative talents of Jesuit students, whether in the form of drawings, paintings, short stories, poems, essays, photography, recipes, or any other type of artistic expression.

To do that, though, we need your submissions. We accept all school-appropriate creative works, regardless of topic, from all current Jesuit students. These do not have to be from a Jesuit art class, nor do they have to be new. Anything you have made or will make would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your consideration.
We hope to see one of your creations published in a future edition.

Please email all submissions to jcpjesuitjournal@gmail.com.
If you have any questions, contact Grant Uy ’14, Byron Song ’15, or Dr. Degen.