

BWS Education Consulting Highly Selective Colleges Sample Application Essays

Brown University

Prompt: Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.

There are a lot of details to the story, but I only recently learned most of them because for a long time, the situation was too difficult for my family to talk about. Even now, it brings a “pit of doom” feeling to my stomach whenever we discuss it.

Most people hear the word kidnapped and think of a young child being abducted or disappearing. I think of July 27, 2000 and of my grandmother in Colombia, scared and alone, wondering what’s going to happen to her. That day, my grandma was working on her farm, when one of her employees helped a group known as FARC abduct her. We never saw her again.

The news scared me a lot. I was only seven years old, and like most people, I thought, “Oh, that’s the kind of thing you see in the news and feel sorry about. But nothing like that will probably ever happen to me or my family.” That notion was brutally shattered, however, and for a time, so was my belief that all people have some good in them.

Nine years later, I am envious of my older cousins because they are able to recall many of the good times they shared with my grandma. Although I understand how unrealistic it may be, a small part of me sometimes naively holds on to the hope that my grandmother might still be alive. I may never know for sure; her body was never found. I struggle to remember much about her, but I know that she remembers me, most likely from Heaven. I have a feeling she watches over me and helps me out when I’m in trouble. I think she’s still here with my family in spirit.

Thinking about my grandmother breaks my heart. I think of my dad crying on Mother’s Day, how losing her was the worst tragedy to ever happen to my family. But the situation opened my eyes and allowed me to see that every second spent with family is important. The people that shape our lives cannot be taken for granted. I try to keep that thought with me every day, and I hope my grandma would be proud of me.

My grandma’s abduction was an unusual tragedy that most of the people in my family, including I, have not made peace with. But I think it sparked some realizations within me about life. I try to live appreciating every moment, smiling as often as I can. And I strive to be like my grandma- a good, warm-hearted person who people remember only positive things about. Every day I try to honor her through my actions, and if I ever need to be reminded to do this, I just go to my room, where a picture of my grandma carrying me as a baby is taped to my wall.

Columbia

Prompt: Describe how your four years has had an impact on you?

Looking Higher

In the past I considered myself destined for failure and hidden from success. I struggled with

getting good grades my first two years of high school because I felt that grades did not matter. During this period I doubted myself and I was discouraged. I started hanging out with the wrong crowd. I decided to change this at the end of sophomore year because my path seemed to lead nowhere. The following summer, I explored Northeastern Illinois University with my sister. It was an amazing wakeup call. I remember only one thing: her new dean handed me a book. I still remember him telling me to read it. It seemed like he saw the future me and wanted to make a different breed of black men. The book was titled Letters to a Young Brother by Hill Harper and it told a story of an African American teen boy who becomes clear of his hidden success by learning from his defaults.

This book gave me the type of slap a disobedient child gets when he does something wrong. It was just what I needed to turn my life around. I hated reading, but something made me read that book over and over and over, energizing me and making me want more. Throughout my junior year, I didn't stop reading this book and in fact I loved it. I volunteered and participated more in my classes too. My grades were As and Bs; I officially had proof of my hard work. I even joined my high school poetry club. I was driven to constantly write rhymes, dream big, and do more. My junior year I won the Editor's Award from the World Poetry Movement and I was chosen to have my poem published in a book.

I am committed to college and plan to major in cinema photography, with acting and art as minors. I have worked with the After School Matters Video Program for two semesters and I took an International Baccalaureate film class my junior year where I made short films with scripts of my own. I am willing to put in the hard work it takes for me to expand the film industry and introduce more people to motion picture entertainment while encouraging the public to crave new genres. I am currently working on improving my speaking voice and performance in front of people and may consider acting in the future. Having a talent for art, I am taking art classes to expand my art capabilities and working on becoming a noticed sketch artist with my work one day on display at an art institute. I know that my interests in college will take me further with both a broader visual education and hands on. With this in mind, I believe putting forward effort and making sacrifices is the key to help my future take off into success.

Cornell

Prompt: Common Application – Topic of Choice

The sickening smell of decay permeated the biology class crowded with students silently observing the ongoing procedure before them. The pure excitement that I felt sent shivers down my spine and made my hair stand up on end. Everyone watched in both horror and awe as I cautiously laid the pregnant cat, now dead and covered in preservative chemicals, on the cold dissecting tray. Pure excitement for this long-awaited moment sent violent quivers down my spine. I carefully made a longitudinal incision through the abdominal muscles followed by a horizontal incision at the base of the neck, almost robotically, exactly as I had been taught. The movement felt familiar from the numerous readings of the lab packet.

No, I did not allow any doubts to enter my mind; I was sure, I had to be.

With renewed confidence, I gently opened the flaps made by the incisions and used a scalpel to bend the inner walls of the rib cage outward. Holding the flaps of the thoracic wall open, I saw a

fairly well-developed kitten buried inside the womb. Fascinated, I examined its facial features and moved on to inspecting the interior of its mouth. This was my first hands-on experience with my long time passion, the Human Anatomy.

My interest in Human Anatomy developed, oddly enough, through gory films. The movie, “Saw,” which many would testify is unfit for females with feeble minds, intrigued me and made me curious about the analysis of crime scenes. I often found myself in Barnes and Noble, sitting on the carpet and eagerly going through the books held in the “Crime” section. I absorbed the information and grew a sincere interest in exploring the daunting world of forensic pathology. I even cultivated a habit of hypothesizing the cause of death of frequent roadkill I passed by.

As time passed by, I have come to realize that my passion has steadily developed, making me serious in pursuing forensic pathology. While others may view forensic pathology as a horrendous and frightening subject, I have come to genuinely appreciate the field. Instead of having to mimic the similar work of the field on roadkill, I plan to unwaveringly commit my passion on sharpening my skills to work on actual human bodies. It is certainly rewarding to help society by uncovering the truth using common sense, forensics, and medical knowledge. I hope that someday, I can serve an important role in society by unraveling the stories held within the last moments of death. After all, a crime scene holds the key to the confession of the crime.

Dartmouth

Prompt: Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud, and how does it relate to the person you are?

Someone once told me it takes strength to be a teacher. As I stand in an all-too familiar room I realize just how true this statement is. Four years ago I began a martial arts program for underprivileged and at-risk youth in downtown San Diego. I thought I could do some good, but I never dreamt that my experiences here could change who I am.

A small window hides in the corner of my studio. As I see the sunrays filter through it I can't help but smile, recalling my timid 13-year-old self standing nervously, facing my class for the first time. My mother, professing this would be a 'valuable experience', had thrust a perpetual wallflower, into the spotlight. I was afraid and didn't even notice a little girl silently stand up and walk towards me. I DID notice (I jumped two feet in the air) when she unexpectedly stuck her hand out and said, “Hi, I'm Ana...why are you scared?” Since that day, I have yet to see Ana afraid. She has continually inspired me, as she did that day, to stand up, smile, swallow my fear and begin life.

In another corner is a gaping hole, a testament to the frail but defiant Paula. Paula suffered from a mild learning disability. Despite my best efforts, she was teased. But Paula had more determination than anyone I had ever met. One day we were practicing kicking when I heard a tremendous crash from behind me. I whirled around, expecting to see one of the boys looking around sheepishly but, lo and behold, there was Paula, looking triumphantly at a gaping hole in our studio wall. She grinned at the boys and exclaimed, “See...I *told* you guys I could do it!” She

had demolished a wall, and with it all the stereotypes surrounding her. She inspires me to define myself on my own terms.

And between the hole and the window, hanging on a peg is Angel's hat. Angel was a quiet, diligent boy, unremarkable except in his industry and his story. His mother worked three jobs; his brother took care of him. Angel never allowed his situation to influence his performance, he never felt sorry for himself. He never complained. His persistence and dedication helped him excel at everything he undertook, martial arts included. In a tumultuous world he simply did what he could to make things better and this is all I can hope to do. He has taught me to give my best despite the problems I may face.

These are just a few examples. Teaching children can be frustrating at times and these kids have taught me persistence and all of my students have changed me in some way. This experience has helped me participate in speech contests and raise funds for clubs unabashedly. I don't know if I have impacted my students the way they have impacted me, but I will always be proud of them and I will always remember the lessons they have taught me.

Harvard

Prompt: Submit an essay that addresses your background as it relates to your academic and professional interests, and why you wish to pursue the GSD degree program to which you are applying. Limit to responses to approximately 1,000 words.

I have no compelling life story to tell: it was simply my love for drawing that led me to this point. It is one of three general meta-narratives that inform my design approach and guide my academic and career interests. For me, drawing is something beyond a mere tool of representation; it is an ever-mysterious process of discovery. Studio art and advanced drawing courses, taken alongside undergraduate design studios, reinforced this perspective and it is the process that continues to fascinate me: the hands as a means of transmitting ideas and engaging one's body with the design. There seems something so inherently honest in this process. The personable, human characteristic within a built environment is maintained through this means of making, of materializing one's ideas through hand drawing, painting, and physical form finding.

The second meta-narrative I shall term "healthy design", which I feel is not to be confused with only feel-good "green" strategies. At any project scale, two realms of issues in my mind come into play: the tangible, which includes environmental protection and human health, and the intangible, which would include the *finer* points of functionality. For instance, being within an academic environment of constant design study and dialogue made shortcomings in my own environment more apparent. I rent a room in a house where "functional" was defined by a mere checklist of amenities, rather than carefully considered spaces: the bathroom door remains in perpetual conflict with the medicine cabinet, the dishwasher is located five steps from the sink, and there is no open counter space adjacent to the oven. A battle to get ready in the morning, followed by rush-hour traffic is, for me, a needlessly irritating beginning to the day. Thoughtless design decisions can become a daily source of stress and frustration, and although they may seem minor, it is the cumulative effect that negatively affects the lives of users. In my view, healthy

design goes beyond “green design” criteria; I am interested in developing strategies, from the scale of the individual to that of the city, which aim toward a comprehensive approach to healthy design.

This concern for healthy design leads to the third meta-narrative of mine. Experience in a professional office has demonstrated to me that thoughtful design can often make a positive difference in people’s lives, be it at home or the workplace. This point in turn directs me toward those whom I would like to serve through design: disadvantaged individuals who are often a lower priority to our design profession. I am interested especially in the role of design within developing or devastated communities; this might include eventually pursuing a degree in Urban Design or Urban Planning. To work for those who have very little will be a sharp departure from the clients I have encountered in my professional experience, wherein the option to hire a designer often resulted from fortunate financial circumstances. This is not to criticize such practice, but to state that in spite of whatever challenges my alternative path might present, I am determined to work with those less fortunate. It is in working with these individuals that I feel my skills as a designer would be best utilized, while also potentially providing personal rewards that transcend the material. For instance, a five-hour exchange with a homeless man in Fort Worth one afternoon, while I was on a class drawing assignment, was deeply satisfying to me. What seemed hardly exceptional to me – just listening to someone – evidently was immensely meaningful to him. It is one of several events that continue to define my personal, central task of architecture.

Identifying specific career goals at this point in time would, in my mind, negatively narrow my vision and limit opportunities. I can only determine general personal expectations for future work based on the three principles described above. Advanced research in architecture at the graduate level will focus this trio of concerns and convictions into a design theory that I hope will be used in real practice. In particular, I look forward opportunities for cross-discipline projects that were not available at the undergraduate level. Working as part of a professional design in all phases of the design process, from schematic design through construction, and direct interaction with clients and consultants/contractors has demonstrated what combined effort is necessary for the realization of architecture. The Harvard Graduate School of Design seems to be an environment that applies this same approach to design research. By maintaining a diverse community of students and faculty from various trades and origins, the school remains intensively and globally connected to architecture and design practice. The GSD’s composition of multiple departments, along with ample resources, seem to encourage a wide range of issues and design problems be investigated, and at a level which far exceeds the basic requirements for “accreditation”. Recent student work from the GSD demonstrates the variety of methodologies and techniques explored in the school. It is this multidisciplinary environment and uninhibited manner of design exploration that I seek in my graduate education.

Princeton

Prompt: Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.

The cool Santa Barbara night air wisped in through opening doors. A rickety grandfather clock in the corner struck midnight. On cue, clusters of students herded into the lounge from the adjacent

computer lab, bowls of ramen in hand, plopping onto the couches and floor surrounding a miniature table. Suddenly, the once dreary room came alive. Music blasted from iPod speakers, harmonizing with the Grieg concerto I had been playing on the piano. Buzzing chit-chat and laughter surrounded me. I got up from the wooden piano stool to fill my ramen bowl with boiling water. The nightly heart-to-heart ritual at the Summer Science Program was beginning.

“What do you all plan to do next summer?” I queried the others crowded around the table.

“Well, next summer a group of friends and I are going to hop onto the midnight train at Istanbul and backpack across Europe,” replied Alpkaan in his thick Turkish accent.

“That’s sweet! So jealous.” I was a small-town girl, living in a lonely world, who had always dreamt of going everywhere.

Once the ramen finished cooking, out came the disposable chopsticks swindled from the cafeteria— and the feast began.

“I’m not sure yet, but maybe an internship in the Senator’s office? Politics has always been pretty interesting. How about y’all? Jobs? Majors?” Jenni asked, in between mouthfuls of noodles with the soup dribbling down her chin.

What did I want to do with the rest of my life? I’ve always had so many interests— to pick only one, what would it be? My thoughts were interrupted by a redheaded Romanian’s quick answer.

“I definitely want to do something with astrophysics, but I’m not sure what yet. I like the orbit determination stuff we’re learning though,” Tudor said as he ran his fingers through his ginger hair. Tudor had many quirks, one of them being a fondness for ramen soup. I, along with everyone else, found this salt fancy quite odd; but without question, we pushed our empty ramen bowls over to him. Soon, mini pools of ramen soup cluttered around Tudor.

“Yeah, that would be perfect for you. I could totally see that.” I responded enthusiastically. Sadly, I still was not quite sure what I planned on doing.

As we talked, I discovered that despite our shared affinity for science, we each had different hopes for the future. There were the aspiring mechanical engineers and computer programmers, the wannabe financial analysts and political scientists, even the artists and fashion designers. Once again my train of thought was cut off with an abrupt “—Guys! It’s already 2AM! We probably should be getting back to our homework,” that brought me back down to earth. I was reluctant to end our jaunt from an endless night of challenging astrophysics and computer programming problems; however, the imminent deadline of tomorrow’s 10AM lecture was rapidly approaching and I wouldn’t have minded getting a little sleep, too. The nightly gathering dispersed and we all went back to work.

I breathed in the dewy scent of dawn as I walked down the faintly illuminated pathway to the dorms. I chuckled to myself, thinking about that night’s happenings. These thirty-three people were surely the most diverse group I had ever encountered. I thought back to the first day, when

the feelings of uncertainty were almost tangible and marveled at how much things have changed since then. Underneath the surface of different ethnicities and cultures were the characteristics that actually defined each of us: the different ways of communicating feelings, the different ways of relaxing, the different ways of expressing humor, the different ways of giving and asking for help, the different ways of solving problems. Some of my quirks were probably as strange to them as Tudor's penchant for salt was to me. But I didn't need to be embarrassed of my oddities; each person's idiosyncrasies kept life exciting. I came to know everybody past their initial barriers, and likewise I slowly exposed my true self— my obsession with Yogurtland froyo and hot sauce, my love for Garcia Marquez novels and extreme Sudoku, and even my hopes of traveling the world and living a life full of excitement. Despite our differences, we spent the summer living with and learning from each other. That summer switched the lens through which I saw the world, my newfound family, and myself. I opened myself to their peculiarities and judgments and dreams, and when the summer ended, I knew their refreshing views had struck a chord deep within me.

Summer flies by. Leaves litter the ground on a lonely October night. My house is empty. I gaze outside and see the crescent moon lingering on the edges of the great oaks and start to reminisce— that misty Santa Barbara sky, the people rushing together. My digital clock beeps midnight. This is my cue. I pour hot water into my Hot & Spicy ramen bowl and breathe in. The spiced aroma floods me with a torrent of laughter, memories, and dreams.

University of Pennsylvania

Prompt: Common Application – Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.

It's Sunday morning and I can feel my heart pounding. After riding in the car for what seems like hours, I arrive at the University of Montevallo's theater. Hands shaking, I swing open the door and look head on at the semicircle of chairs at the front of the room. Facing the chairs are about three rows of benches filled with theater students. I take a seat in the audience and look around, picking out several possibilities for who could be my characters.

The director stands at the front of the room and calls up the actors, handing them each a copy of my play *The Tutor System*. They take their seats in the chairs up front. I can feel my stomach flip and my palms break into a sweat. These are my characters in front of me, alive and active. As the main character, Blaine Edwards, reads her plan to establish a student tutor system, I suddenly feel the overwhelming sense that this play is *mine*, that I have created this world, that because I have transmitted my characters' desires and fears onto paper this audience is taking their time to listen. But at the same time I realize that this play is not mine at all—that although I have written the dialogue on paper, it is up to the actors to bring the story to life, to make it their own according to their interpretation.

The audience watches intently as Blaine fights to establish her system. She is just as spirited and ambitious as I had imagined. As the play delves into Blaine's idea to make student-teacher relationships a more crucial part of education, I feel a moment of panic: what if the audience laughs at her idea to challenge the education system? What if they think it's crazy or

stupid? But after Blaine finishes describing her ideas, the audience still watches intently, some even nodding. They laugh when one of Blaine's friends, David, makes a joke, and I find myself laughing as well. Again I feel the conflicting emotions of both power and helplessness—yes, I wrote the line, but it was David's actor who delivered it in the funniest way possible.

The audience claps as the play ends, and I feel myself relax with relief. The director calls for responses from the audience. The first comment is from a directing student, who says that he enjoyed the comic relief from David. The next student comments that she connected with the small school environment, and another comments that she wishes she could've heard more from one of the more minor characters. It is amazing to hear their feedback, to know that a group of people that I have never met before has listened to my play, connected with parts, and even given their suggestions.

But the most rewarding part is by far the last comment. One of the actresses says she agrees with Blaine's ideas about education. Like me, she attended a small school, and teacher-student relationships contributed greatly to her learning. To hear that someone identifies with your character is, in my opinion, the best and most important feedback a writer will ever receive. Throughout my life, I have always looked to characters in books and movies to relate to, sympathize with, and look up to. From the American Girl Kit to Hermione in *Harry Potter* to Skeeter in *The Help* and sometimes even the Phantom of the Opera, characters have taught me to work hard, be myself, and stand up for what I believe. To perhaps have contributed another one of these characters to someone's life is my proudest moment as a playwright.

Today, my audience might be small, but I have accomplished my purpose as a writer by affecting a few people's lives with words. I hope to continue affecting lives with my writing, be it by inspiring new ideas or giving someone a character to relate to. The University of Pennsylvania's Kelly Writers House will give me the opportunity to further connect with the community with writing, be it through author readings, getting involved in literary magazines, workshops, or just hanging out at the house. I look forward to a great experience.

Yale University

Prompt: If you selected one of the engineering majors, please write a brief third essay telling us what has led you to an interest in this field of study, what experiences (if any) you have had in engineering, and what it is about Yale's engineering program that appeals to you.

Engineering has always seemed to be a natural fit for me, but then again, everyone says that. Everyone who is gifted in math and science, everyone who wants to build something, everyone who wants to design something. Far too many of these students blindly follow the advice of their teachers, family, and friends and enter an engineering field only to discover that they are actually passionate about economics or biology or chemistry. But how are students to know that the choice they are making is the right choice?

Well, that is where my experience comes to bear. I have been fortunate enough to attend a high school that offers specific engineering classes. Under the banner Project Lead The Way

(PLTW), I have taken three years of engineering: Introduction to Engineering Design, Principles of Engineering, and most recently, Aerospace Engineering.

Introduction to Engineering Design (IED) focuses on the different steps of the design process, how to apply it to real projects, and how to document it in an engineer's notebook. A large portion of the year was spent learning Autodesk Inventor, an industry-standard CAD (Computer Aided Design) program. With this program, I designed a futuristic coffee cup that had a thin LED touch screen that wrapped around the cup and acted as a remote control for the liquid inside: adjusting temperature, sugar content, and flavor at the touch of a button. At the end of the year, I also reverse-engineered a standard stapler, working backwards to discover how a stapler works in order to accurately model it in Inventor.

In contrast to my first year, Principles of Engineering was very hands on (and subsequently my favorite). Using only PVC-pipe, wood, and any non-flammable or compressed means of propulsion, I designed a launcher that would shoot a ping-pong ball accurately thirty feet into a small trash can (no bigger than the size of a typical textbook). Using only Fischertechnik pieces, small building pieces similar to K'NEX or LEGOs designed to work with small electric motors and circuits, I designed a system that would sort marbles based on color, implementing a light sensor that read an integer value for the light that passed through the marble and then sorted it accordingly. Lastly, I designed a Rule Goldberg machine that used the potential energy of a marble to successfully raise a flag; however, I had to use each simple machine (earning the project the name SMET [Simple Machine Energy Transformation]).

My last year of engineering, Aerospace Engineering, was the most concept based course, although I still did a fair amount of hands on work. I learned about the evolution of flight, navigation and control, flight fundamentals, aerospace materials, propulsion, and orbital mechanics. I designed my own airfoil using a NASA simulator called FoilSim III, made it out of Styrofoam, and collected data on it in a small wind tunnel. I also designed and built a glider using another computer program.

Yale offers me the perfect opportunity to continue my love of engineering and problem solving. Engineering at Yale strives to not only teach its students the fundamental knowledge they will need in their careers but also problem solving, which is arguably more important than the knowledge itself. In a rapidly advancing world, Yale teaches its students to adapt their knowledge to changes in technology and to be able to communicate their ideas successfully. Yale engineering provides its students with what they need to succeed: "quantitative reasoning, teamwork, and the habit of breaking complex problems into manageable pieces."