

# CSE Admissions Essay 2019

Thursday, June 27, 2019 12:10 AM

It's midnight at the beginning of the summer before what's meant to be my senior year and I'm listening to ABBA. Admittedly it's not the most conducive to writing because I just wanna jam out to those groovy 70's tunes but it puts me in a good mood. Now it's here by the third sentence of this essay where I believe I had already reached the topic of genocide in last year's admission attempt. I don't think I'll be returning to that subject, but I only plan these things out in the roughest sense before writing and do few revisions after, so no guarantees. But I've been told that whoever read my paper last year really enjoyed it - so if you are a returning reader, then welcome back, and if you're a new one, then I hope I can elicit a similar response to that of your predecessor.

My career at UW continues to be an interesting one. You know, somewhat early on in my consideration of studying computer engineering, my AP CS teacher said that he switched to this major because he noticed all his friends in the program were out partying while he was studying. This combined with my streak of successes in grade school made me think this path was to be an easy one. It turns out I've had a much different go at it than my teacher's friends did. I've had to claw my way up the ladder to stretch towards the mere ledge of Adequacy. This quarter I finally surpassed the 3.0 GPA milestone by .02 points. Yay. You can't see it but I'm blowing one of those party blower things, trust me. Aha, maybe *this* is one of those "parties" my teacher talked about!

You know, just for fun, let's look at a few interesting failures and fumbles that have got me to where I am today.

- I slept through the alarm for my very first college math exam and missed the entire thing completely. That day I learned the meaning of "redundancies" and have never found myself in that situation again.
- I was repairing a rover for my club, the Society for Advanced Rocket Propulsion (SARP) the night before it was due to be launched 30,000 feet into the air. A very late night, I might add, coming off of a very long day in the heat. After managing to get it barely functioning in one of those magic "I don't know if I even changed anything but I won't question it" computer science moments, it still had to be shut off at the last minute due to safety concerns with someone else's portion of the project. That was the last time I saw posthumously named Lycha alive, before her flight of a mere 5000 feet followed by an untimely pancaking against the New Mexican desert. I learned no number of late nights can guarantee success. And also there's no such thing as too much water when you're in the desert for 12 hours, unless you really like IV bags.
- I accidentally bought plaid for my costume design class despite being told specifically not to, because I didn't fully understand what plaid was. I always got the pattern plaid confused with the material flannel since they often go together. The disappointed look in my instructor's face has forever cleared things up for me.

I could give some excuses for some of some of the less fun failures (the math test one definitely was not fun but it somehow wasn't the worst math grade I've gotten here), there are maybe even a few small issues should I talk to a therapist about sometime. Regardless, despite the improvements I've made and whatever I've learned from the long list of missteps, I know I still don't quite stack up yet. And that hurts. After a lifetime of - for lack of a less boastful but still interesting word - excellence, it hurts a lot to be knocked down a peg. It hurts to fail and it hurts to be rejected so many times.

But I've been hurt before. Few pages of the history books are dedicated to the times when everything was just going dandy, it's during the undandy times that change rolls on in. Similarly it's through my darkest moments that I learn the most about myself. I learned about my undying sense of optimism, although sometimes hidden, it always manages to pull me through. I was also allowed to learn about and

grow my interest in the urban sphere and humanities after being rejected from CSE and HCDE - writing and drawing and thinking about new dreams - but I never quite gave up on the old ones. I even discovered my own sexuality, bi the bi (a little pun for you there). The results on paper aren't as sexy as I had hoped for by now, no. Math and physics grades have merely approached that aforementioned ledge of Adequacy, but they did so from the precipice of failure. The fight has been difficult, and while I have to keep reminding myself not to be defined by the numbers, and even with the amount of progress that still has yet to be made, I have to take pride in the strides in time management and work ethic and the *things* I've done and created that prove to myself my own self worth and capabilities.

So where does that leave me? Leave us? There is an us, right? Well I guess that's up to you, but I already feel a special connection, dear admissions agent, and I must add that you're looking quite lovely today, and that can go double with a certain decision towards my application. Well here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to tell you what I like, and what I want from myself. What I want to do with the summer, the next few years, and the ones proceeding. I also have to finish coming to terms with the possibility of bad news after this submission, and the fact that you, dear admissions agent, would only be living up to half of your attractiveness potential if that happens to be the case. I'm not being defeatist or anything, after four major rejections a guy has to be a little realistic, but - well, here's me trying to not be defined by the numbers - I am frankly too stubborn to care about the tally of rejections. My own guidance councilor tried to prepare me for an alternative path after looking at my transcript, but I didn't care, I went to the CS councilor right after to ask how I could prove the first one wrong (no hard feelings though, she's great and just looking out for me). Much of my life has been pushing against boundaries set for me by others, and while I'll try everything short of getting on the ground and begging to be given the home I want in the Computer Engineering department, I'm not letting anyone tell me what I can and can't do. What I'm going to do is create!

Regardless of your decision, I need to do what I frankly should have started years ago, by taking my technical education into my own hands. I've been waiting for someone else to come in and hand me something to do, but the one decent piece of advice any cartoon villain will tell their henchman: if you want something done, you have to do it yourself. The amount of books, YouTube videos, online tutorials, and side projects must increase ten fold. First, I really gotta finish my portfolio website ([students.washington.edu/sidmil](http://students.washington.edu/sidmil) if you wanna see a showcase of all my skills, when it's done). Then I'm going to greatly increase my participation in SARP, because rockets are cool and there is a wealth of knowledge to be learned from the people there, so long as I'm willing to meet them halfway. I've suddenly inherited a ton of Arduino and Arduino accessories from a certain dead rover and am gonna have to find a worthy place to put them to honor her memory. I want to keep working with AI and perhaps social media in the future, the latter being done not with the expectation of becoming the next Zuckerberg (although wouldn't that be nice?), but because these projects allow me to tackle both incredibly challenging and satisfying technical problems as well as ethical ones related to technology, communication, and media. While there is much I can do myself with enough dedication, a home in the Computer Engineering department is still a priceless one to me, and given the skyrocketing home prices in Seattle that says a lot. The knowledge contained within its walls, in its instructors and councilors and students beats anything I can figure out alone.

I also want to note that those ethical concerns I mentioned just now are just as if not more important than the technical ones. There are plenty of people who think that, with enough plucky young engineers, we can accomplish anything we want. These people are 87.6% correct, give or take a few percentage points for made-up-statistical error. The remaining 12.4% relates to the fact that there are thousands of examples of poorly designed, mismanaged, and - most dangerously - unethical projects and products being pushed through every day, sometimes by careless engineers and often by immoral businesses and leadership. This is a problem that will not be fixed by people whose only goal is to create the biggest, baddest invention, as cool as they may be, and especially won't be fixed by those only interested in making the most money. Right now I've only got the mere makings of and desire to be that plucky young engineer, but I already have an understanding and appreciation of the following: only through the careful

combined efforts of science, technology, art, and the humanities can we achieve both the technical and political reality of an awesome sci-fi utopia the likes of which we've seen in Star Trek, a series of which I'm a big fan. Raw technological power alone will bring us closer to, say, Blade Runner, a film of which I'm a regular fan. Hopefully we can also skip Star Trek's WWIII, an event of which I'm definitely not a fan.

To further these other important skills, I want to keep drawing and designing characters, posters, logos, interfaces, buildings, spaces. I want to keep thinking about politics, and how we could restructure our systems, our messaging, to be more inclusive and more fair. I want to keep thinking about how we could tackle climate change to avoid sending our planet to an early fiery grave so that hopefully I can make it to a very late and much more peaceful grave - this is a problem where both politics and technology can help a great deal on their own and even more together, and I'd like to play a role on both sides of this union. Much of this I very much hope will culminate in a web series I'm planning where I get to use my writing, research, and video production skills to take an in-depth and unique look at certain political topics, many related to my newfound urban geography/planning knowledge and environmentalism. All of this is to say that through programming, writing, designing, filming, one way or another, I'm getting through this whole college thing as someone who *creates*.

Through all of my loves and skills and ideas, this single vision guides me. I keep returning to something I wrote in 2016 to get into UW, and I think I also mentioned it in my previous CSE Admissions essay. "The world is beginning to be handed off to the next generation of dreamers, and I want to be one of the few brave enough and quick enough to be one of them - to make the world, in part, mine: to build its societies and the ideas they run on, to populate it with beauty and art, to promote equality so that everyone has the same chance that I've had." My desire to build and design and create defines me even at my most unproductive moments. I want to build the device you're reading this on. I want to design the website you're using to process these applications - if it's anything like some of the UW services I've used then it has room for improvement. I want to better your neighborhood and city and maybe someday your whole country. I want to connect all of these things and everyone experiencing them in a seamless and just way. I promise that whatever I'm making, I'll try my best to make you glad I did it at all.

Whatever I do, I'd like to keep doing it in a public institution for a while. My time here is invaluable and unique so I have no intention of wasting any of it and am in no hurry to end it prematurely. This is why I don't mind staying a little longer than the usual 4 years just to prove to someone that the stubbornness can pay off. After that, I'm also very heavily leaning towards grad school - pending your decision, either for Human Computer Interaction or Geography/Urban Planning. Maybe even both. Because I'm a madman. And also, for all my will and forcefulness, I'm really not sure where I'm going when I leave the watchful protection of Dubs. I only wish to pursue what I think will make me a better man and help me make the Earth a better world. After that, it's anyone's guess as to how it materializes.

Here's another quote for you, not by myself this time: "One look and you're hypnotized. He'll take your heart and you must pay the price." -Angel Eyes, ABBA. Wait, sorry, I'm on the wrong song, let me skip ahead. "Honey, I'm still free, take a chance on me! Gonna do my very best - and it ain't no lie - if you put me to the test, if you let me try." -Take a Chance on Me, ABBA. What I won't promise you, if you take a chance in admitting me into the Computer Engineering program, is becoming valedictorian or Bill Gates (again, wouldn't it be nice?). But what I can guarantee you is spirit and heart and thoughtfulness. We have many talented engineers out there, and we're gonna need a lot more. But beyond that, throughout the world and in all walks of life, we need people with vision, compassion, empathy, foresight, and a unique way of putting it all together. I'm pretty sure I'm going to be one of those people. Your decision can help me end up as a damn good engineer, too.

It's in this frame, of hope, of creativity, and of a little arrogance, that I hand this application to you, dear admissions agent. Thank you.