

The New York Times

Business Day

Search All NYTimes.com

Go

WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE AUTOS

Search

Global

DealBook

Markets

Economy

Energy

Media

Technology

Personal Tech

Small Business

Your Money

Published: May 17, 2013

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

GOOGLE+

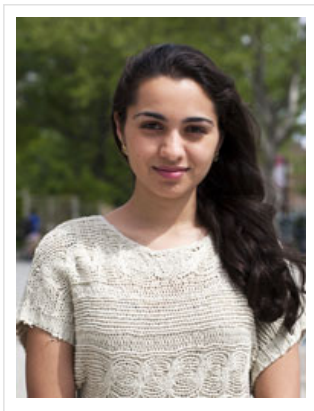
EMAIL

SHARE

Visions of College, Colored by Money

Themes of money, working, class, affluence and the economy increasingly figure in college application essays. Four are being featured in a Your Money column. Here are the essays in full.

[Related Article »](#)



Shanti Kumar

Bronx

Essay Written for Princeton University

I wonder if Princeton should be poorer.

A New York Times article geared towards helping Americans slice their end-of-year charitable pie quoted Peter Singer, a Princeton Professor of Bioethics, saying that, “The marginal difference my dollar can make to an organization that already has a large endowment is not as great as one given to an organization that helps people who have almost nothing.” The article went on to explain how Singer donates absolutely nothing to Princeton and has talked other alumni into giving less. In fact, he questioned the morality of donating to any institution, church, or cultural activity that did not directly serve the desperately poor, particularly those in “faraway places.” Singer is calling for the newly added words of “Princeton in the service of all nations” to be put into action -- and I would like to help.

I sat at the breakfast table in my pajamas wondering how many of Princeton’s donors read that article. If these alumni take this professor’s words to heart, Princeton may see a decline in their annual donations’ yield -- unless Princeton decides to channel its money towards the causes that the school’s leadership implied when they expanded Princeton’s service to all nations. Prof. Singer condones and even promotes this shift in assets, making him a unique and different voice in a multibillion-dollar institution.

‘Different’ is what I have searched for my whole life. In particular, a different way of thinking. I never understood why I was the only one whose hand shot up in history class when the teacher asked a broad question about Africa, but when she asked us to name the 15th century Queen of Spain, hands waved around me like tree branches twisting furiously in the wind. This blindness to everything non-Western continued outside of the classroom. No one ever talked about the things outside of their occidental bubble – the bubble of the comfortable, warm, well-fed Occident. It wasn’t even a bubble; it was an opaque, porcelain snow globe. On the bus ride to school my friends lamented that the city might take away our free student Metrocards, blind to the fact that other kids didn’t have schools to walk to. Were we selfish to demand our Metrocards? No. Were we unaware of our relative global status? Incomprehensibly yes.

It is my belief that a different way of thinking is budding at Princeton. I want to breathe it, taste it, engulf it, make it my own, and use it for the purpose of spreading

it. How can we privileged people hope to aid the formation of global solutions if our thinking is limited to the 1136-by-640-pixel screens of our smart phones? If our thinking is not global in scope, our dreams and solutions will remain capped.

I have a cousin and a dream.

In this dream, my cousin and I are sisters across the sea, she in the waves of heat over northern India and I on the banks of the Hudson River. She is sharp, cheeky, and much better at cooking than I am. When we were young, she found great joy in getting her slender brown fingers caught in the knots of my chestnut curls, never knowing how much I envied the glossy black shawl that cascaded from her scalp to her shoulders.

In this dream, she has a life and a name.

In reality, she died when she was six months old, a half a world away, about a year before I was born.

To this day, no one has told me her name.

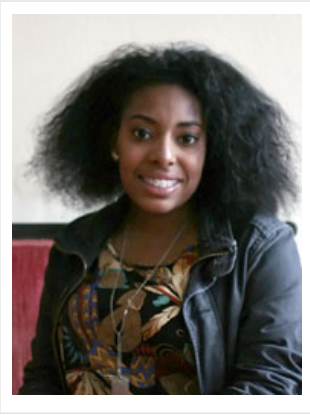
My cousin died of a digestive tract abnormality, a birth defect that would have been easily diagnosed and treated with surgery had she been born in midtown Manhattan like I was. In the throes of dusty hospitals equipped with obsolete instruments, however, her defect was overlooked and she died a slow death of starvation. If I had known her, I would have promised her one thing: to do everything in my power to bring health, justice, and empowerment to the marginalized people of the developing world.

I believe that global inequality is rooted in the ideas that are taught in schools and portrayed by the media in everything from talk shows to textbooks. Most people are afraid to peek through the cracks in their snow globe and see what exists beyond their merry blizzard. I will not be the doctor who saves the next dying child, nor will I be the engineer who maximizes solar energy harvesting with cheap materials, but I can be the writer who makes the voices of the underrepresented heard. I want to unfurl the idea that change emerges from empowered people who can demand their rights, and that it is augmented by people who believe that accidents of geography should not impede these rights. I dream that my life's work and writing may stimulate and chronicle the development of a more just and equal world.

In terms of this cause, one of the best uses of Princeton's money is the international Bridge Year Program. According to Singer, "The only way to justify giving something to educational institutions that are relatively well off is if they produce people and knowledge that will help solve the world's problems." This is one manifestation of Princeton's role in the service of all nations that is worth every cent. These cents won't be going towards towering turrets and terrific tennis players, but rather towards increments of global consciousness.

Value lies in how money is used, not the power that it fosters while lying in accounts. Could more of this money be used to expand the global consciousness of Princeton's student body, which in effect will change the mindset of some of the world's most powerful future leaders? If you agree that the use of Princeton's endowment could change to unlock the potential of its service to the world, please take a fiscal chance and accept me to Princeton University.

(Ms. Kumar will be attending Cornell.)



Ana M. Castro

Albany, N.Y.

Essay Written for Hamilton College

I hate clowns. I hate vines. I hate fuzzy caterpillars.

But I most vehemently abhor leeches. They are full harbors of evil on Earth. Their zombie-like way of crawling, as if their life is turned on for one second to create that signature hump of a worm, and then quickly turned off, instantly flattening out, dead, brings me to tears. Before long they are up again, repeating this pattern; their black covering sparkling, creating the most shocking juxtaposition of attempted beauty on a creature so wicked. They are shown falling from leaves, free as children on monkey bars, their intentions seemingly unknown to the deranged cameraman filming them. When they find that next prey they are spellbound, burrowing their fang-rimmed faces into the leg of an unsuspecting hiker... Despite my aversion to the leech, I am still planning on joining the Peace Corps.

Growing up, my family and I did not have much. We moved all the time, to apartments of family members, a mattress on the floor of a store, and public housing. Although my mother struggled, every year she still put money aside to take a trip back to the Dominican Republic. Back home, we would visit my father, who still had not received his "papers" to come the U.S. with us. One year, my mother

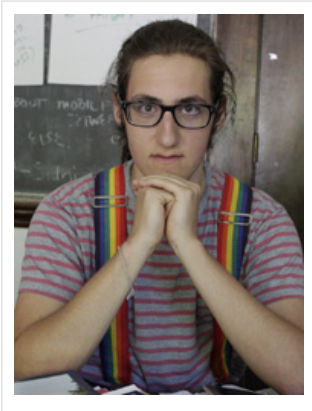
Shanti Kumar Ana M. Castro Julian Cranberg Lyle Li

father in a small shack. He was my age, 9, but looked nothing like me. We were poor, but his family was worse. His eyes reminded me of what I imagined my mother and her siblings were like as children; starving and dirty, but lively. One day this boy asked me to play with him. I happily agreed, overjoyed to find someone my age. Suddenly, my father called me over with his booming voice. He whispered in my ear, "I don't want to see you playing with that boy. His family does not have water so they can't shower. You could get sick." My heart broke, not because I was now stuck eating plantains by myself in the stinging sun, but because that boy experienced a level of poor I never knew.

Even when squeezing three people on a dirty mattress on the floor of a corner store, my brother and I had our basic needs fulfilled. This boy did not.

People often ask why I want to join the Peace Corps. Why help out another set of people without helping your own in America? I was at first confused by this question. I have never seen the United States as my country. I was born here, and I grew here. However, my country was always the Dominican Republic. Even so, I do not know the Dominican Republic as my family does. I am still the first individual in my family born in America, and some of my relatives are convinced I only speak English. I have never felt total patriotism to any country. I do not instantly think of staying here to help "my home," because I do not consider the United States my home. The Earth is "my home." Every country, state, city and province on this Earth is a potential home to me. I want to grow, explore, learn and make an impact. For me, the Peace Corps will provide that opportunity. I just have to get over my fear of leeches.

(Ms. Castro will be attending Hamilton.)



Julian Cranberg

Brookline, Mass.

Essay Written for Antioch College

Ever since I took my first PSAT as a first-semester junior, I have received a constant flow of magazines, brochures, booklets, postcards, etc. touting the virtues of various colleges. Simultaneously, my email account has been force-fed a five-per-week diet of newsletters, college “quizzes,” virtual campus tour links, application calendars, and invitations to “exclusive” over-the-phone question-and-answer sessions. I am a one-year veteran of college advertising.

They started out by sending me friendly yet impersonal compliments, such as “We’re impressed by your academic record,” or “You’ve impressed us, Julian.” One of the funniest yet most disturbing letters I received was printed on a single sheet of paper inside a priority DHL envelope, telling me I received it in this fashion because I was a “priority” to that college. Now, as application time is rolling around, they’ve become a bit more aggressive, hence “REMINDER – University of X Application Due” or “Important Deadline Notice”..

How is it that while I can only send one application to any school to which I am applying, it is okay for any school to send unbridled truckloads of mail my way, applying for my attention? If I have not already made it clear, it’s an annoyance, and, in fact, turns me and undoubtedly others off to applying to these certain schools. However, this annoyance is easy to ignore, and, if I wanted to, I could easily forget all about these mailings after recycling them or deleting them from my email. But beneath the simple annoyance of these mailings lies a pressing and unchallenged issue..

What do these colleges want to get out of these advertisements? For one reason or another, they want my application. This doesn’t mean that their only objective is to craft a better and more diverse incoming class. The more applications a college receives, the more selective they are considered, and the higher they are ranked. This outcome is no doubt figured into their calculations, if it is not, in some cases, the primary driving force behind their mailings..

And these mailings are expensive. Imagine what it would cost to mail a school magazine, with \$2.39 postage, to thousands of students across the country every week. The combined postage charge of everything I have received from various colleges must be above \$200. Small postcards and envelopes add up fast, especially considering the colossal pool of potential applicants to which they are being sent. Although vastly aiding the United States Postal Service in its time of need, it is nauseating to imagine the volume of money spent on this endeavor. Why, in an era of record-high student loan debt and unemployment, are colleges not reallocating these ludicrous funds to aid their own students instead of extending their arms far and wide to students they have never met? I understand where the colleges are coming from. The precedent that schools should send mailings to students to “inform” them of what they have to offer has been set, and in this competitive world of colleges vying for the most applications, I only see more mailings to come in the future. It’s strange that the college process is always presented as a competition between students to get into the same colleges. It seems that another battle is also happening, where colleges are competing for the applications of the students..

High school seniors aren’t stupid. Neither are admissions offices. Don’t seniors want to go to school somewhere where they will fit and thrive and not just somewhere that is selective and will look good? Don’t applications offices want a pool of people who truly believe they would thrive in that college’s environment, and not have to deal with the many who thought those guys tossing the frisbee in the picture on the postcard they sent them looked pretty cool? I think it’s time to rethink what applying to college really means, for the folks on both sides, before we

hit the impending boom in competition that I see coming. And let's start by eliminating these silly mailings. Maybe we as seniors would then follow suit and choose intelligently where to apply.

(Mr. Cranberg will be attending Oberlin.)



Lyle Li

Brooklyn

Essay Written for New York University

While resting comfortably in my air-conditioned bedroom one hot summer night, I received a phone call from my mom. She asked me softly, "Lyle, can you come down and clean up the restaurant?"

Slightly annoyed, I put on my sandals and proceeded downstairs. Mixing the hot water with cleaning detergents, I was ready to clean up the restaurant floor. Usually the process was painstakingly slow: I had to first empty a bucket full of dirty water, only to fill it up again with boiling water. But that night I made quick work and finished in five minutes. My mom, unsatisfied, snatched the mop from me and began to demonstrate the "proper way" to clean the floor. She demanded a redo. I complied, but she showed no signs of approval. As much as I wanted to erupt that night, I had good reasons to stay calm.

Growing up in rural China, my mom concerned herself not with what she would wear to school every day, but rather how she could provide for her family. While many of her classmates immediately joined the work force upon completing high school, my mom had other aspirations. She wanted to be a doctor. But when her college rejections arrived, my mother, despite being one of the strongest individuals I know, broke down. My grandparents urged her to pursue another year of education. She refused. Instead, she took up a modestly paying job as a teacher in order to lessen the financial burden on the family. Today, more than twenty years have passed, yet the walls of my parents' bedroom still do not bear a framed college degree with the name "Tang Xiao Geng" on it.

In contrast, when I visit my friends, I see the names of elite institutions adorning the living room walls. I am conscious that these framed diplomas are testaments to the hard work and accomplishments of my friends' parents and siblings. Nevertheless, the sight of them was an irritating reminder of the disparity between our households. I was not the upper middle class kid on Park Avenue. Truth be told, I am just some kid from Brooklyn.

Instead of diplomas and accolades, my parents' room emits a smell from the restaurant uniforms they wear seven days a week, all year round. It's funny how I never see my mom in makeup, expensive jeans, lavish dresses, or even just casual, everyday clothing that I often see other moms wearing. Yet, one must possess something extraordinary to be able to stand in front of a cash register for 19 years and do so with pride and determination.

On certain nights, I would come home sweaty, dressed in a gold button blazer and colored pants, unmistakable evidence of socializing. In contrast, my mom appears physically and emotionally worn-out from work. But, she still asks me about my day. Consumed by guilt, I find it hard to answer her.

Moments such as those challenge my criteria of what constitutes true success. My mother, despite never going to college, still managed to make a difference in my life.

Tomorrow, she will put on her uniform with just as much dignity as a businesswoman would her power suit. What is her secret? She wholeheartedly believes that her son's future is worth the investment. The outcome of my education will be vindication of that belief.

In hindsight, I'm astounded at the ease with which I can compose all my views of this amazing woman on a piece of paper, but lack the nerve to express my gratitude in conversations. Perhaps, actions will indeed speak louder than words. When I graduate on June 1st, I know she will buy a dress to honor the special occasion. When I toil through my college thesis, I know she will still be mopping the restaurant floor at 11:00 PM. When I finally hang up my diploma in my bedroom, I know she will be smiling.

(Mr. Li will be attending N.Y.U.)