

**SAMPLE; Jessica**

Obstacles can represent remarkable opportunities, something I have learned personally through a vision impairment resulting from albinism. While my poor vision has presented challenges, fighting to surmount them has given me a degree of self-confidence and tenacity that I would not otherwise have possessed. Based on my experiences overcoming poor vision, I firmly believed that with hard work, anything could be accomplished. I would subsequently discover that tenacity is not always enough to allow some individuals -on their own - to overcome injustices in society. This realization has led me to strive to help those impeded by societal injustices to achieve their aspirations.

Beginning in elementary school, my poor vision distinguished me from other children, as I lugged around large-print books that were bigger than I was and attended gym classes for children with disabilities. Athletics were particularly difficult, but I wanted to excel nevertheless. At the beginning of high school, I finally decided that sports involving balls were not for me. I took up competitive running instead, founding my school's first cross-country team. At first, my failing eyes caused me to trip frequently, and my one-woman team always finished last. However, by my senior year of high school, I had recruited a team that won the state title, and I placed fifth at the U.S. Track and Field Youth Nationals.

My success through running gave me the confidence to enroll at ██████████, although few people in my family had attended college. It also motivated me to become involved in activities such as College Matters. Through College Matters, I have helped students from my hometown prepare for college, encouraged other university students to do the same through my role as National Director, and spearheaded a book project on college admissions, published by McGraw-Hill, whose proceeds benefit a scholarship fund for underserved students.

Despite working with underserved populations through College Matters, I did not fully comprehend the difficulties that social barriers can present to realizing capabilities until the summer after sophomore year, which I spent working at a microfinance organization in Peru called Pro Mujer (Pro Woman). While many of our clients displayed remarkable tenacity, discriminatory norms prevented them from expanding their businesses and escaping poverty. I realized then that entrenched social structures often make certain obstacles extremely difficult for less-empowered individuals to surmount by themselves. However, with initial assistance, such individuals can realize basic capabilities that subsequently allow them to have control over their own lives and inspire change in their communities.

My experiences at Pro Mujer significantly influenced my subsequent pursuits. Many microfinance institutions, including Pro Mujer, do not serve the very poor. The faces of the women Pro Mujer turned away haunted me, inspiring me to co-found a non-profit that assists microfinance institutions, serving very poor women, through technical support and fundraising. I have led committees on sex trafficking and domestic violence in Central America. Closer to home, I have promoted awareness about women's issues through chairing the ██████████ Women's Leadership Network. My academic work compliments these experiences. I recently spent a semester in Santiago, Chile, studying Economics at the graduate level and researching variations in gender wage differentials for the UN Economic Commission for Latin America. I have published articles relating to international development and am writing my thesis on how trade liberalization has affected regional convergence of female labor force participation in Mexico.

Through my pursuits, I have been able to use my skills to help those who lack access to resources - especially women and minorities - take opportunities they might not know about or otherwise have and run with them. I firmly believe the best way I can use my life is to continue doing this on a more macro level through a career in international development policy formation and research (at a development bank or organ of the United Nations), focusing on gender.

I hope to pursue an MPhil in Development Studies through Queen Elizabeth House (QEH), in order to study gender and development from a theoretical and interdisciplinary perspective. The theoretical approach of the MPhil - central in discerning root causes of systemic problems - contrasts markedly from the pre-professional focus of MPP programs, and the interdisciplinary perspective differs from narrowly focused PhD programs. QEH houses the International Gender Studies Centre and works closely with regional centers, including the Centre for Latin American Studies. These centers support extensive projects and contact networks in gender and development. ██████████ - director of the project

Gender and Development Institutions – has agreed to supervise my dissertation. I hope to examine how incorporation of the informal sector has affected female labor force participation.

After completing the MPhil, I intend to pursue a PhD in Economics, which will allow me to combine interdisciplinary understanding gained through the MPhil with specialized economic approaches. For example, an anthropological understanding of group solidarity could enrich microfinance regressions. In this manner, I could better integrate non-economic factors into economic analyses, yielding models that closer approximate reality and policies that can be more successfully implemented within national and international cultural and economic frameworks.

Overcoming my disability through running installed in me the confidence and optimism to choose this path. Running continues to be an important part of my life, as I now run Division I Varsity track and cross-country, and my vision will always remain an obstacle to overcome. I do not think I would have felt such a deep connection with those who through structural injustices have few opportunities for advancement, if I had not known the exultation that can come through overcoming a handicap. I desire that all people, many in a far worse situation than I ever was, be able to experience this personal triumph as well. While this is a far-reaching goal - whose realization on even a small scale requires many change agents working to reform complex structures and processes - I look forward to dedicating the rest of my life to fighting for its achievement.

I certify that this essay is my own work.