

**Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.**

When I first began the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program I was terrified. I worried about the rigor and extra workload of such a competitive program. As I worked through my self-doubt, however, I discovered that while it was indeed challenging, it also provided me a unique platform for success.

AVID taught me to take control of my own learning. Instead of note-taking and binder checks being a weekly annoyance, they became critical in helping me excel in my classes. I learned the importance of being organized and taking pride in advanced preparation. In addition, two days each week we collaborated in a study group to present a problem encountered in class; the group was responsible for independently applying resources and finding solutions. At first I was hesitant to fully involve myself in the process. When I began struggling in my academics, I realized that tutorials were there for my benefit and started taking advantage of the built-in collaborative structure provided by AVID. I began asking questions and taking the time to work through points of confusion, both individually and collaboratively. Soon I became comfortable taking the lead in study groups and helping others learn along the way. Finally, AVID taught me how to set goals and prioritize. I realize I can't do it all, but what I do, I want to do well. Through creative lessons and assignments, AVID taught me to set goals and priorities in my academics, extracurricular activities and college preparation. The AVID approach to learning helped me achieve my goals and boosted my self-confidence. As someone with multiple interests who likes to be involved in a lot of different activities, honing these skills over the past four years in AVID has been invaluable to my academic success.

While I will wear my AVID hood with pride during commencement this year, I am most proud of the skills AVID has taught me in preparation for my next chapter at the University of California.

**Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?**

Growing up and living with my disabled father has been a significant challenge my whole life. My dad was in a diving accident in college and is a C4-C5 quadriplegic. He is in an electric wheelchair and is highly dependent on caregivers. While caregivers come in and out daily for his major care, my sister and I need to help throughout the

day. Whether I am feeding him, adjusting him in bed so he is comfortable, giving him his daily pills, and other minor things, it has been difficult not seeing them as inconveniences. While we are lucky he has lived this long (for over twenty years) it has not been easy being involved in school and sports, and having a social life, especially as a teenager, while caring for my dad. I've had to develop empathy and selflessness sooner than most of my peers, taking care of my father and finding ways to do my part in fostering a father-daughter bond when his physical limitations are so severe.

While I accept my dad's disability as part of who he is, and love him in spite of it, I have had to find creative ways to play the roles of both daughter and caretaker. I consciously structure my time with my dad as caregiver when needed, but also carve out special time to just be with him as his daughter. We watch movies together and he comes to watch me play softball -- two areas where we can really connect. I have also had to work through my resentment and move to acceptance through deliberate discussions with him about my feelings and ways we can navigate through the challenges to allow both of us to get our needs met.

My experiences with my dad have shown me how strong and adaptive I can be. I have no doubt that I will be able to meet many future challenges head-on. Whether I have social difficulties, challenges in my academics, or even at home, I know I will be able to handle them with grace and strength.

**Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.**

I am in love with math. While I always enjoyed solving easy problems, high school has left me craving the hard ones. My high school teachers have helped me solve problems through inquiry and guidance, in classrooms that are safe havens and where mistakes are part of the process. Math became a whole different world for me when I found the beauty in making mistakes -- the kind that always bring me closer to the solution.

My interest in math began in the classroom. I arrive at school an hour early each day just so I can be in the classroom and challenge myself with the next day's homework. I remember when we were beginning to learn about the trigonometric functions sine and cosine -- I wanted to know about tangent. When I cannot grasp a concept, I bring questions to class the next morning and my teachers guide me toward understanding by asking questions and pushing me to

use prior knowledge. I spend my lunch in the classroom reviewing and working through worksheets and SAT problems with my classmates in a group setting. Discussing math through bites of a turkey sandwich I learned to explain the solution to a math problem by showing how I arrived at it. As my math assignments have become more challenging, I have grown excited about solving complex problems.

While studying math in the classroom has been fun, it is at home where I learned how to independently solve math problems. It has not always been easy to focus on the complexity of math at home, especially with all my other commitments, but I find myself motivated to keep challenging myself. I think it is because I am fascinated with solving “the puzzles” of math. Math is one of the few subjects that never feels like “busy work.” When I am in my room looking between my notes and the problems on the screen, it feels like I am solving the world’s biggest problems.

I am excited to continue to foster my passion for mathematics at the University of California.

**Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admission to the University of California?**

We moved from Sacramento to Merced when I was a junior in high school, the same time I realized I was gay. Transitioning away from my friends was hard, but moving to a rural city 16% the size of my home town with conservative values and a small LGBTQ+ community has been even harder.

Being openly gay at school is not easy. I have struggled with being my true self among peers who I have feared would shun me if I was ‘too gay’. Few of my gay peers are ‘out’ and many who are, are not supported by their families. My high school is comprised of predominantly Hispanic students with deeply conservative and religious values. It is difficult to be isolated in such a small community where most of my peers are just now being taught about the LGBTQ+ community. Because I do not fit the stereotypical ‘lesbian’ image, my peers are consistently shocked that I am gay, which makes me feel even more isolated.

I am grateful for the support I have from my family and friends and want to help others feel safe enough to come out in this community. I joined the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club at my high school and have helped plan Pride Prom events to introduce teens to the LGBTQ+ community, participated in the Merced LGBTQ+ events

led by the LGBTQ+ Alliance and UC Merced, and try to learn as much as I can about how to stay involved and informed in the community.

While being gay in a rural, conservative town has been challenging, it has also served as a catalyst for me to get more involved in the small LGBTQ+ community that does exist. No matter what kind of social adversity I may face in the future, I am looking forward to spending the next chapter in my educational experience in a University of California community. I believe here is where my identity will be better understood and I can be myself, all of the time, in addition to being a supporting member of the University of California community.