

Featured here are the CommonApp and/or supplemental essays of:

1. James Pease
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James Pease: Columbia University

Please tell us what you value most about Columbia and why.

Columbia's superlative course of study is a perfect balance between my major and interdisciplinary courses. Through their Core Curriculum, Columbia will prepare me for a lifetime of learning by analyzing the extensive thought processes required, rather than spitting facts to study later. As a science major, I look forward to taking the *Frontiers of Science* lecture, and refining my writing ability through *University Writing*.

Columbia offers the intimacy of a small liberal arts college while providing frequent opportunities for exploration through original research. As an aspiring NASA Astrophysicist, I am particularly attracted to Professor Elena Aprile's current research with the XENON Dark Matter Project, in Columbia's Astrophysics Laboratory.

I look forward to learning with Columbia's Professor Aprile, in the small and engaging classroom environment; a setting I thrive in. On Columbia's diverse and international campus, I am certain that every classroom promotes spirited debate that will help me cultivate a global mindset; something imperative to a career in science. Through this assertive discourse, my viewpoints will be challenged.

In addition to the unparalleled education on campus, being in the greatest city in the world offers more opportunities to pacify my intellectual curiosity. The opportunity to learn off-campus about the latest scientific breakthroughs at the annual Isaac Asimov Memorial Panel Debate, or to study at the Center for Computational Astrophysics, is incomparable to learning about such topics in an average college lecture. Beyond academics, Columbia's optimal setting allows for study breaks amid Central Park, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, or at a Broadway show; none of which I have ever indulged in. With these opportunities, I am certain Columbia and NYC will foster a love for trying new things and cultivate the more outgoing personality I desire as I mature.

Jordan Ordoñez: Columbia University and Dartmouth College

I have always been fascinated with numbers. They are an abstraction of our physical reality, yet in a sense can become reality itself, our reality. They have a universal language of their own, one which boundaries cannot hold back. There is such a tremendous power which can be harnessed from them to ensure the progress of our species. In my life, numbers provide me with hope, comfort, and a sense of order. They allow me to maintain the tempo as I play guitar, find a solution to a complex math problem, understand the intricacies of coding, and retrace the history of humankind. Numbers are my language, helping me express my ideas in a concise way which the people around me can understand.

My language, however, fails to tell the whole story. On this particular night, I was with my father collecting plastic bottles and metal soda cans, hoping to make enough money to pay off our overdue rent. I saw my dad climb into the garbage bin, frantically searching through it without any gloves, slowly bringing up every bottle he found. "Get out, you don't pay taxes in this country!" As the man spoke, my hands were shaking and a cold feeling suddenly went across my body. I tried to speak, but a thick ball of cowardice formed in my throat and not a word escaped my lips. My father stood up in a defiant pose, stared at the man, and with the limited English he knew, told the man to leave us alone because we were not doing anything wrong. My dad turned around and said "Nunca dejes que nadie te haga sentir como si eres menos que ellos, Dios nos ha dado a todos la misma oportunidad."

These words, 'Don't ever let anyone make you feel inferior, God gave all of us an equal opportunity,' transformed me. That day, I learned to dream big, and a desire to become a better version of myself was born. My perspective on numbers changed. I no longer related them to an economic barrier which my parents tried time and time again to cross. I saw the concept of numbers as the great equalizer. Regardless of one's background, a person can compete with those around him using the knowledge which he has gained. I have grown up in such a materialistic world, which places such an emphasis on quantity over quality, that I had, at one point, forgotten what I could achieve with effort. Consequently, with years of hard work, diligence, and restless nights, I have risen to the top of my class and I have been recognized as one of Stamford's top scholars.

I plan on further pursuing success in the field of Electrical/Computer Engineering. My dream is to ensure a better source of energy for future generations and provide a less expensive way of communicating with people around the world to use. In this way, I will give back to the world which allowed me to surpass the financial circumstances in my life. There is a constant among all of the uncertainty: the language of numbers will keep on reshaping our lives. The exponential growth of transistors, artificial intelligence, and data all point to a world deeply influenced by my language. Those, like me, who are willing to learn this language and use it will make revolutionary change.

Brianna Jean: Yale University, Dartmouth College, and Brown University

It was on the stage of my elementary school auditorium, surrounded by dozens of roaring children, where I first learned how to speak.

Let me clarify, it is not as if I had never uttered a single word before. Growing up, I was familiar with direct one-on-one communication. Public speaking, however, was uncharted territory. In my household, life was as hectic as a bustling New York City street; my parents and older sisters charged from school, to work, to church, flying through constant appointments and to-do lists. If I had something to say, it would have to transcend the voices of my bigger, louder sisters to be noticed. I was using up so much energy just to have little things acknowledged, things that I did not feel were worth the trouble. From an early age, my sisters taught me that I had to work to be heard, and if lucky enough to be heard, I then had to work twice as hard to be accepted. In hindsight, I have come to realize the rule that prompted their advice; that oftentimes in society, the smaller person has to take extraordinary measures to be acknowledged.

At my very first audition for Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, I discovered an exception to that rule. I found myself in a place where speaking did not feel all-consuming, where I felt like everyone wanted to listen to me. I was a bundle of nerves at first, trembling as I climbed up the steps of the stage. Each step exposed me to every single other person in the room, people quietly waiting to hear what I had to say. The choreographer asked me to say my name and grade loudly as if it could reach the back of the auditorium. “This skill in acting is called projection,” she explained. “We do it to make sure that everyone in the audience can hear you.”

Cautiously I began, “Hello, my name is Brianna.” In that moment, every syllable that escaped my lips seemed to expand into the surrounding air, filling the void between the stage and the back of the auditorium until the space felt no bigger than my small bedroom. I was amazed by the atmosphere of this auditorium, a room where whispers and exclamations were held to the same value. It was completely different from anything I had experienced before. I realized that making myself heard did not have to be an exhaustive process and factors that limited the power of my voice at home did not exist here. It did not matter that I was the youngest of five sisters, my voice was welcomed and treated as though it always belonged there.

A few days after my audition, I learned that I had landed the role of Willy Wonka, a part I did not even think was possible for an eight-year-old, Haitian-American girl to play. With each rehearsal, I watched my voice develop into something more than background noise and grew confident in my ability to play the lead. By opening night, I had discovered the power of my voice, a voice that was not then, and is not now, limited by age, race, or gender—a voice that is important on its own and, most significantly, is mine.

On stage, I discovered the power of my voice. Whether I am singing in the ensemble, presenting an argument on the debate team, or writing an article for my school’s newspaper, I learned that my contributions are unique, valuable and deserve to be heard. In the next stage of my education, I hope to be exposed to new, diverse and meaningful ideas that will challenge and

inspire me to act upon the power of my voice through advocacy and empowerment until it is the standard rather than the exception for the even the smallest voices to be heard.

Stephanie Walsh: University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University

How will you explore your intellectual and academic interests at the University of Pennsylvania? Please answer this question given the specific undergraduate school to which you are applying.

I have to admit that considering all of the options and opportunities that Penn offers me as I begin my college career is a bit overwhelming. I am fortunate to have attended a large inner-city high school that offers a large variety of courses and employs many talented teachers who come to Stamford High from around the world. But that pales in comparison to what awaits me at Penn.

What I am certain about is that I want to study computer science and attend the School of Engineering and Applied Science. Participating in the summer immersion computer science program sponsored by major technology companies, Girls Who Code, sealed the deal. Different computer science topics from programming to robotics were taught weekly. I learned with a class of junior and senior girls from around the NY metropolitan area. It was extremely challenging but so rewarding when what seemed so difficult on Monday was achievable by Friday.

Similarly, I am taking BC Calculus my senior year. This class has the distinction of being the most difficult class my high school offers and also is the class that I love the most. The instructor is the reason, he had a career in engineering before he took up teaching. He treats the students with great respect but also demands their full effort and commitment to mastering the subject material. It is not just a simple mistake, it could be a miscalculation that causes a bridge to fall.

I envision my academic life at Penn to be similar but so much better. I envision being surrounded by fellow classmates who come from vastly different backgrounds and economic circumstances but are united in wanting to learn as much as they can and use that knowledge to forge our mutual future. I envision being challenged and inspired by my professors to work harder than I ever thought possible and when leaving the classroom feeling the time spent could not have been used more meaningfully and productively.

The required core curriculum with its concentration in programming, math, and problem solving will ensure I graduate with the requisite skills to design and implement new technological solutions to problems that may not even exist today. I plan to take full advantage of courses outside my major in topics such as ethics and history to ensure I graduate not only competent in computer science but also aware of the huge responsibility that comes from having the skills to perhaps direct the shape of the future.

Outside of the classroom, I want to join the Women in Computer Science club at UPenn. When I was in Hollywood for the Marvel STEM Challenge I passed registration for a software development convention being held in my hotel. Except for the woman registering the participants, everyone was male. I believe it is up to my generation of female engineers who will reverse this sad statistic. I believe I will find support and like minded friends in this club.

And I will take full advantage of the knowledge and insight that my fellow students bring to both the classroom and student life. I envision sitting in the dining hall with new friends from around the country and world discussing our concerns and hopes and dreams. I expect my fellow classmates to challenge my preconceived notions and look forward, with a bit of trepidation, to have my perspectives change.

My academic career at Penn will be a marriage of formal class studies and informal education achieved through participation in the Penn community. I can't imagine a better recipe to shape me into the adult I aspire to be, competent, thoughtful and compassionate in all I achieve.