

Each year, students in grade 9-12 in the Greater Washington area are invited to submit a 1,000-1,500 word essay. "Several great entrepreneurs, including Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, dropped out of college before getting their degrees. How important do you think a college education is to your future success?"

While entrepreneurs who are primarily geared towards building financial wealth or those in the creative fields may be able to forgo a college experience and dive right into active practice, I am looking for a career in preventive medicine. As it is generally not considered advisable for would-be doctors to begin practicing medicine on their friends, I have resigned myself to the requisite years of schooling needed to become licensed.

All jokes aside, college is extremely important to me, and thoroughly necessary for my future success. I want to study biology in order to discover how to improve the health of women worldwide and to create better healthcare platforms that aid families in developing countries. My ultimate long-term goal is to blend my love of science and my love of service into a career in preventive medicine.

I have always known I wanted to pursue a career in science, but was never sure exactly what. Then I went to Bangladesh. While traveling the countryside, I saw families in houses with no electricity and dirt floors. I saw men laboring in the rice fields as women struggled to cook with the same river water that they washed their children in. There was no regular hospital: women gave birth with female midwives, on their homes' dirt floors. Despite this, Bangladesh has been able to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus, a potentially fatal disease that many countries still struggle with. Caused by a toxin of *Clostridium tetani* bacteria, the disease occurs through infection of the unhealed umbilical stump, commonly when the stump is cut with a non-sterile instrument. It is also associated with non-sterile delivery and unsanitary cord-care practices. Mothers who are affected by the disease can pass it on to infants and put them at risk. Newborns with tetanus can stop feeding, their bodies can become stiff, severe muscle contractions may occur, and death can follow. How did Bangladesh manage to eliminate it? And could their methods be used in other poor countries to improve maternal health? I knew I wanted to find out.

These are the kinds of questions I want to explore at the college I attend in the future. The revelations from this trip exemplified what higher education means to me. Not only is it necessary for me personally to go to college for the degree I want to pursue, but educating others about health would be part and parcel of my future career. In my ideal future, I envision myself in a research lab, developing medicines that are cheaper and more effective. I see myself working with the health departments of other countries to bring their medical systems up to date. I want to assist developing nations in putting into place systems that ensure the health of all women. College will allow me to put my passion to work on a broader scale, in projects which will allow me to create the change I want to see in the world.

But college is not merely a necessary step towards medical school for me. The experiences of college are as essential a part of my education as the classes that I know I will take in calculus and chemistry. And just as crucially, I want to meet people as passionate about health and service as I am. College would not only provide high-end laboratories and worldwide research opportunities to explore ways to better fight diseases in developing countries, but the kind of *people* who care as much about this work as I do. I want to learn from professors who have hands-on experience in the fields of biology and health.

A college education would open up the world to me, just as traveling to Bangladesh did. While I know I am going to go for a career in medicine, college gives me a chance to study a wide range of subjects before subjecting myself to the oh-so-enviable strain of med school. While majoring in biology, I also plan to take courses like psychology or social anthropology. I know college will be the path to allow me to participate in a wide range of activities as well, such as studying abroad, taking internships and volunteering in community outreach programs. Not only can I benefit others by bringing my strong opinions and unique experiences to the table, but I know I will benefit from the people that I surround myself with. I want to learn from others, explore new cultures and overall surround myself with a wealth of knowledge.

I can see myself using my degree to help people worldwide. After obtaining a degree in biology and with the skills I obtain at college, I know I would have a strong resume for med school. Studying a STEM subject like biology would open doors for me to be successful in my quest to improve maternal health around the globe. Working in a STEM related field would allow me to seek new opportunities as a young woman and break societal norms. I want to examine how poor living conditions in differing environments affect pregnant women's outcomes. I hope to uncover a template that can be used in other developing countries to better maternal health.

A college education will help me immerse myself in this path which will ultimately help me help others. I know that it will allow me to gain expertise in the subject of medicine and have opportunities like working with *Doctors without Borders*, an impactful international humanitarian organization. Being able to be a part of organizations like *Doctors without Borders* will allow me to participate in projects delivering emergency medical aid to people in developing countries. I would have hands-on experience working with countries like Bangladesh.

Receiving a college education will allow me to develop my skill set through real world application. Around the world, women and girls just like me suffer needlessly because the world does not put a premium on their health. After graduating from college, I will use my advantages and education to fight for a world that does.