

U.C. Application Freshman Personal Insight Questions—Samples

Question #1: Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time.

Nick Barnes
17 September 2007

The Dangerous Hitter

This past year as I helped coach my brother's six to seven year old team, there was a player that I developed a special bond with. Tyler is not a particularly gifted athlete. In fact, he was one of the least gifted, athletically, on the field. There was something special about him... a joy of life. Being on the field and playing baseball was vital to Tyler. Other kids who hit the ball further or could run faster were the ones that received the most attention from the coaches and parents. I could see how this affected Tyler as he put his heart into being the best he could be.

As I reflect on it now, I realize one of the reasons I bonded with Tyler as a player and child was that I had a similar experience when I was younger. My coach would make the slower kids run more wind sprints than the fast runners; not because we did not try hard, but because we were not fast. I did not realize how much that bothered me until I matured and could see other kids that were vulnerable to the same treatment. I did not want to see Tyler go through the same experience I did. It became my mission to make sure Tyler had an exciting, enjoyable experience playing a sport rather than being chastised for not being as 'good' as other players. As the season evolved and I continued to work with Tyler I could see his confidence rise.

Tyler kept working hard with me as the season progressed. Eventually, he became one of the better hitters on the team. Before our last game, as I went out to coach first base, I said to Tyler, "Did you notice how all the players are backing up when you come up to bat? You are a dangerous hitter." He smiled back at me, grinning ear to ear. As a coach, the reward I felt was equal to my own accomplishments as a player.

Question #2: Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many and ways: problem solving, original, and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

Kevin Niles

15 November 2009

Spandex and Spirit

Fall marks the beginning of the much anticipated high school football season. As the Puma fans pour out of their cars and into the stadium. They pass by a seemingly normal car but do not know what is going on inside. Within the car I prepare myself for the game, and begin to put on the skin tight yellow lycra leggings; standing 6'0", it's not easy in a small car. After applying a form-fitting yellow lycra t-shirt, a small green speedo over my leggings gives me a superhero look. A magnificent forest green cape tops off my outfit. I look somewhat like a green and yellow superman, like one would find in a classic comic. And, like all superheros, I have my secret weapon—a continent-sized Maria Carrillo flag. Well, judging by the size of it, it's not much of a secret.

Our school wasn't very spirited and there was a chance that people wouldn't care, or just think I was stupid. Regardless, I decided to make my debut at our Homecoming game with the football team, running out in front of them, with my "secret weapon" billowing in the wind. The cheerleaders put me up in stunts and people cheered with me. Once that game was over, the suit stuck with me and people wanted to see it at every game. After the season people recognized me from the schools as the 'spandex guy'. Kids at my school who I had never met before passed me in the hallways saying, "Hey, you were that guy in tights on Friday night! That was awesome!" This year my friend asked if she could accompany me on the track as a superwoman. I was stunned that someone liked what I did enough to put herself out there just like me. I realized it doesn't take superpowers to be a superhero, sometimes one just needs some spandex and spirit.

Question #3: What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

A. Valentine
22 October 2010

Oso Proudly

“Pay Attention! Ready, sit up...wait, wait...One, two, three...” And then we soar for a brief and glorious moment; we are weightless, together, as one. “Good boy!” There is nowhere else I want to be than with my horse, pushing ourselves to the limit to perform our very best. Where I am right now, galloping along the cross-country course of my first International Three-Day Event is the culmination of years of persistence, frustration, and ultimately tremendous reward. This place, this brief moment in time where I forgot my limitations and focus solely on the exhilarating task at hand, is why I compete with my horse. No matter the failure or disappointment that sometimes occurs, I keep returning to competitions, in search of that place where my own limitations are secondary, and the partnership my horse and I share brings out the best in both of us. When such a powerful animal believes in me, and trusts me so much, it is impossible not to believe in myself.

Cross-country, the heart of the equestrian triathlon known as Eventing, is where a horse and rider must jump a course of massive solid objects, where any lapse in focus in either horse or rider can lead to serious consequences. While physically demanding, the challenge really comes through the mental aspect of the course. In this partnership, the rider is the leader, and every moment there are decisions to be made, as the horse will only trust a leader who is decisive and knows her own mind. There is no room for self-doubt on the cross-country course, and through this, I have learned to know myself, and be aware of my own abilities and limitations.

Question #4: Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

Jonah Hodes
20 September 2012

Two Worlds

When the first bell rings, I'm sitting in AP Calculus. The kid on my left is applying to Stanford and the kid on my right hopes to attend Brown. Almost all of my classes are like this. I talk to two girls about the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. I talk with another group about Machiavelli's Rhetoric and the impact he has on today's society. I learn about definite integrals and limits, about Newtonian and fluid mechanics. As soon as the bell rings for break, I walk out and join my friends in the quad. It's Friday—game day. Thirty-eight blue varsity football jerseys stand out among the high school crowd. I'm wearing mine proudly, bottom tucked in and sleeves rolled up. Growls of excitement and adrenaline run through the hearts of the entire team.

But I am different. Not only am I going over plays and schemes of the other team's offense in my head, I am also preparing for the AP Government quiz I have next period. I'm simultaneously thinking about my responsibility in a cover-two defense, and thinking about Howard Zinn's "How Democratic Is America?" as well as Sidney Hook's response. Our middle linebacker turns to me and gives me the nod that we all know means, "Are you ready for tonight?" I nod back and the bell rings again and I'm sitting in Spanish Four Honors, going over reflexive verbs in subjunctive form.

My teammates are my best friends, and I love them. But rare is the time when we talk about our SAT scores or the deadline for college applications. Some of them will go to the junior college and some of them no college at all. I have known my three best friends since kindergarten, and we have stuck together even though there are times when I have to miss social events because I'm finishing homework and I'm often more tired at practice from staying up late studying.

I look forward to college, to blur the lines of these worlds, to have the chance to develop a singular identity that encompasses all of who I am.

Question #5: 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?

Olivia Mora
7 September 2011

For most of my life, I've contained my fear of germs, yet I've never been able to run my hand down an escalator; the thought of bathrooms make me cringe; and I won't leave a building unless I can closely tail someone after they've opened the door. This past July my family adopted Daisy (our dog) and the constant reminder of germs was everywhere, it only magnified my fear. I felt the anxiety taking over me. I felt uncomfortable and disturbed in my own home. I could feel germs crawling all over me. I couldn't bare to touch anything because I pictured germs spreading everywhere and multiplying by the second. Sitting at my desk in the classroom became a nightmare. From the outside I must have looked insane. My obsessions became amplified as the amount of excess dog fur increased and my stamina increased. Every day became an emotional turmoil as I constantly fought a battle within myself. After numerous breakdowns, skin so dry it was rubbed raw, and one too many jokes at my expense, I was at my breaking point. I needed help.

I've talked with people with similar issues, researched techniques and taken advice on how to cope with my problem. I put my obsessions in two categories: things I can control, and things I can't. Everyday, I sort through my thoughts and categorize which ones I should worry about and which ones I should forget. I plan to maintain a clear state of mind to help me finish everyday at school and at home successfully. To face an obstacle one must do it head-on. To face one's deepest fear, one must face it and never look back. That's what I do, I had the resources and will to fight through my internal struggles; I haven't looked back. I no longer let germs run my life. I win a battle everyday within myself with resilience, determination, and pride.

Question #6: Describe your favorite academic subject and explain how it has influenced you?

Ever since I was old enough to hold a pen, I've been drawing and creating art in forms that were unique to me and surprised those around me. When I was three years old, I picked up a magnetic drawing pad and drew a cat. To me, it was just something to do to pass the time, but to my parents, I was an artist in the making. They were shocked at how detailed and precise my drawing was. Ever since then, they have encouraged me to be artistic and explore my talent. For most of my childhood, I would draw or paint everyday, and I loved it. It always came easy to me, and secretly I loved the attention from people when they saw my artwork. Then middle school rolled around, and art was no longer the cool thing for kids to be doing.

I felt different, and I hated that. So I slowly stopped drawing as much, painting and creating unique things. It wasn't until last year, when I decided to apply for Advanced Art, that I gained my love of art back. Being in this environment strengthened my motivation and taught me so much about color, shading, mediums, value, and originality in art. I started sketching every chance I could, in class, at home, or on a long car ride. I had a new sense of excitement for whatever piece I was working on, and I was just overall happy. I can't truly explain how creating art makes me feel, because it's a mixture of a lot of different emotions. I'm relaxed, steady, excited, inventive, and thoughtful all at the same time. This has caused me to view the world with a new sense of intrigue.

Now I am taking AP Art and have decided to pursue fashion concept and design. My love of art has helped me choose what I want to do for a living, and in a way, has come to define who I am.

Question #7: What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

Kevin Niles
15 November 2009

Spandex and Spirit

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Question #8: What is one thing that you think sets you apart from the other candidates applying to the University of California?

Paul Dick
10 September 2009

The Only Moment

It's coming. I watch it as it nears. I turn 180 degrees with balance and precision. Every nerve in my body is blazing with excitement, and I can feel the cold bite of the icy water on my hands. In one swift motion I lower my chest to the sweet spot; I can feel the balance. I take one last glance back and take off. I'm using every last muscle in my body to paddle and still more. Adrenaline has taken over. I feel the wave under me lifting me up and pushing me forward, faster and faster. In that one precise moment, the only moment in my whole world, I can feel that the wave has taken control. I push down hard and lunge forward. For a second that lasts forever I stand there on top of the world, just hanging in space, then I drop. The acceleration is just ridiculous and it seems like there is no way to avoid certain destruction from the monster crashing behind me, then I bank hard right and can hear it crash behind me. I have gotten to where I want to be now. The face of the wave is my whole world and I am free to see it from the top or scream down to the bottom. I am the god of my small world and can do whatever I want, so I do.

Surfing, in a way, helps me define myself as a person in the same way that a religion can for some people. Not in the style or jargon of surfers, but in the way that surfing is a thrill that rejuvenates one's spirit by giving it an escape from everyday life. It has helped me work through some of my major issues in life and resolve some of my major conflicts. When I surf I have the ability to see my situation more clearly and truly forgive and let go of issues. The person that I aspire to be, my role model, my hero, is the person I am when I am surfing.