

## Opportunities and Challenges Faced

F. Scott Fitzgerald opens his quintessential novel, *The Great Gatsby*, with sound advice: “Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone [...] just remember that all the people in the world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had” (1). This is very applicable to my life. As I reflect on nearly 15 years of Davis education, I see that I have been blessed with an excellent, albeit unconventional, education, which has opened many opportunities to me. However, all these advantages have also come with significant challenges which have taught me to persevere, work hard, and give back to the community which has given me such a solid foundation.

Growing up and going to school in Davis has brought special academic and extracurricular opportunities. Perhaps the most obvious is my kindergarten through high school education at the Grace Valley Christian Academy, nine-time winner of the “Best Private School in Yolo County” award. At GVCA, I received an unconventional yet rigorous education from highly qualified and very supportive instructors, such as professor emeritus Dr. Richard Spencer, and physician Dr. Kathy Perez. I benefitted from the early foundation in lower grades, as well as GVCA scholars program, which allowed me to finish high school in three years while taking college courses at the nearby Sacramento City College Davis Center. Not many kids have a community college interested in high school students and located close enough to bike to and from classes. In these classes, I was able to learn key subject areas, as well as important life skills such as independently managing a difficult workload. I gained valuable experience through taking courses with older students, and not only learning the material, but also discovering how much I enjoy certain classes, such as college-level chemistry. I was able to use the knowledge and experience I gained in these classes to tutor other GVCA students as they

took chemistry. Tutoring enabled me to pass on to others some of the benefits I received from my Davis education, and forced me to master the material more thoroughly.

Not all opportunities came in the classroom, however. The fact that Davis is home to a world-class university and world-class companies like Schilling means that I can begin gaining real-world experience in my own backyard. Last summer, I biked to my internship with the U.C. Davis Facilities Management Energy team, where I gained hands-on engineering experience. This internship sparked my interest in renewable energy, which I have since been able to cultivate by attending the “Energy Bites” seminars hosted by the University’s Energy Graduate Group, conveniently located in West Village. I also got a chance to job shadow Schilling Robotics employees to learn more about the engineering field. Not many students in the world, or even California, have so many opportunities so close by.

These valuable opportunities have not come without challenges, however. While my education provided many advantages, it was very challenging, as were events surrounding my high school years. First, my unconventional education meant forfeiting a “normal” high school experience, a difficulty I was keenly aware of each day. Instead of going to cross-country practice or prom, I took most of my classes online or with older students. Yet, I faced this challenge with a small group of close friends and the help of my teachers, who have known me since pre-school. This taught me in a unique way the value of good friendships and of caring, supportive teachers who are interested in my overall well-being, not just my homework. Second, an accelerated education including college courses was just plain difficult. This challenge made me persevere and grow in maturity, and not just look for the easiest path. By God’s grace, I was just named the Salutatorian for the North Bay Region of the online portion of my schooling at Connections Academy. Third, it seems that every year of high school was met by a major, local

natural disaster. Yet, these events have taught me to look outside myself and give back to my community. In my ninth grade year, the Sonoma area was devastated by wildfire, I joined a relief effort to deliver essential supplies to the Redwood Empire Food Bank and ran a grueling 10K in that year's Turkey Trot as part of Grace Valley's team to raise funds for disaster victims. These experiences taught me the vital importance of volunteering and giving back to my community. In my second year of high school, the Paradise Fire erupted and poor air quality plagued Davis for weeks. This was particularly difficult for me due to my asthma and because my community college class, Introductory Chemistry, was suspended for some time. This class was a prerequisite for a class I took later, General Chemistry 1, so I was forced to learn the missed material on my own. Little did I know that these disasters were just a preview! This year, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting school shutdowns have been a struggle. My two Sacramento City College classes shifted to an online format within the span of a week, so I had to pivot and learn college-level chemistry and trigonometry online. Yet, I was better prepared for the challenge distance learning due to my familiarity with it through the online high school I've attended for these past three years. I am very thankful for my professors, and my school administration, all of whom worked very hard to teach the material in an online format that allowed me to finish the classes successfully.

I certainly have been very blessed with many unique opportunities due to my education in Davis. From high-level academics taught by excellent instructors to hands-on internship opportunities, I have enjoyed many things that could only happen here. Many of these opportunities have also been challenges, which have in turn given me the opportunity to persevere, mature, and give back. I am very thankful for my Davis education which has provided me a solid foundation and prepared me to serve my community in the future.

**Word count (excluding Title and Works Cited): 997 words**

Works Cited

Fitzgerald, Francis Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. New York, Simon and Schuster, 2018.