

College applications force seniors to define them-

By Becky Bartindale
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(KRT)

SAN JOSE, Calif. — With her college application deadline sneaking up, Wilcox High School senior Monica Padron had finished everything but the essay. Now, all she had to do was define herself in 500 words or less.

Her grades and test scores were recorded on the application form. But what meaningful family, cultural or personal tradition could she write about with enough force to guarantee admission to Dominican University?

"The hardest part was coming up with an idea and just getting started," said Padron, a varsity tennis player and discus thrower who will be the first in her family to attend a four-year college. "You only have one chance to make a good first impression."

Writing the college essay is an anxiety-ridden ritual for seniors, especially as November and December deadlines near. Many 17- and 18-year-olds have never reflected on themselves. Yet, the essays ask them to extract meaning from their lives, distinguish themselves from their peers and explain what they have to contribute, often in a page or less.

The task would be daunting for anyone, but carries extra weight for students who have grown up being told getting into college is a competition, and where they get in will make or break their future. Luckily, many teachers, counselors and parents are ready to offer support, suggestions and

reality checks.

The day of reckoning for Padron was a Saturday. She retreated to her bedroom and turned everything off — the computer, the television, the radio. She closed the window, stuffed a towel under the door and spent two hours thinking.

Padron and her classmates have spent the fall researching colleges, preparing applications and applying for scholarships in Teddy Duffy's AVID class, for Advancement Via Individual Determination. The elective helps students who are not performing to their full potential get and stay on the college track.

Duffy, a Spanish teacher at Wilcox High in Santa Clara, Calif., presses her students to think deeply about their own experiences so their essays will be original. She steers them away from what she calls "cry me a river" stories of hardship.

"You have to stand out" to the admissions officers, she tells them. "Let's face it. They've read the same essay a million times."

Many students think the essay must be about a significant accomplishment, like finding a cure for cancer, Duffy jokes. So they conclude they have nothing to write about. Duffy encourages them to be themselves. What colleges want to learn from the essay, she says, is "Are you a thinker?"

What is mostly on students' minds, though, is whether they will be admitted to their top-choice colleges. For this is an acceptance/rejection proposition.

That is one reason the essay produces so much performance anxiety, said Scott Peterson, an English teacher at Willow Glen High School

in San Jose. To help students get going, Peterson requires seniors in his AP literature class to write a personal statement and devotes several class sessions to it.

After working on hers for two months, senior Mallory Stein had many first paragraphs, but had not gotten farther because "none of them felt right." Stein knew what she wanted to say, but struggled to cram a life-changing experience into 600 words.

For Angela Nguyen, the issue was tone — "how to write in a way that you don't sound pompous but make yourself sound like an eligible candidate."

In some high schools, writing college essays is part of the curriculum. In addition, many counseling departments offer essay-writing workshops, and counselors and teachers spend hours advising students individually.

Surviving the application process is a milestone. To celebrate, Padron and her classmates in Teddi Duffy's class dug into quiches and other goodies the day before they broke for Thanksgiving.

Although Padron initially planned to write about a cultural experience, she ended up choosing something very personal — 10-minute car trips with her father, doing errands.

Both she and her dad are "strong-headed," Padron said, and sometimes communication is strained. That changes when they ride together. "When we are in the car, he talks to me about things that are meaningful to him. It makes me feel special."

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Shining stars of CHS

Will Harris
Charger Staff

Name: Olen "Jasper" Allison
Age: 14
Grade: 9th



Sign: Aquarius
Siblings: One brother, one sister
School activities: Academic Team, History Club, FCA, and Young Life.

Waffles or pancakes? Waffles.
What CD is in your CD player right now? Chingy, D-12 and a mixed CD.
College? Yes, Florida State.

Boxers or briefs: Boxers.
Favorite Christmas song: Jingle Bells.
Favorite Christmas movie: A Christmas Story.
What is one thing on your Christmas list? X-Box.

Do you believe in Santa Claus? Heck NO!
If you could spend Christmas with a celebrity who would it be and why? Jessica Simpson; that girl is fine.

Name: Megan Rae West



Age: 15
Grade: 10th
Sign: Libra
Siblings: One sister (11th-grader Heather West)
School Activities: Marching Band.

Waffles or pancakes? Waffles.
What CD is in your CD player right now? A mixed CD.
College? Yes, University of Florida.

Do you make snow angels or snowmen? Snow angels.
Favorite Christmas song: "Silent Night."
Favorite Christmas movie: Mickey 's Once Upon a Christmas.

What is one thing on your Christmas list? Cell phone.
Do you believe in Santa Claus? NO!

If you could spend Christmas with a celebrity who would it be and why? Orlando Bloom because he is really, really cute!



Name: Vanessa Celia Rodriguez
Age: 16
Grade: 11th
Sign: Gemini
Siblings: Two brothers, one sister
School Activities: Color guard, Peer Buddy, FTA, FCA, Renaissance Club.
Waffles or pancakes: Neither - I don't like them.
What CD is in your CD player right now? Spice Girls.
College? Not sure.

Do you make snow angels or snowmen? Both!

Favorite Christmas song: "Let It Snow"
Favorite Christmas movie: How the Grinch Stole Christmas.
What is one thing on your Christmas list? New CD's.

Do you believe in Santa Claus? Yes, just joking.
If you could spend Christmas with a celebrity who would it be and why?



Oprah Winfrey because she would give me alot of gifts.

Name: James William Scott
Age: 18
Grade: 12th
Sign: Virgo
Siblings: One sister (11th grader Jill Scott)
School Activities: Swim Team, Girls Track manager, Drama.

Waffles or pancakes? Pancakes.
What CD is in your CD player right now? A mixed CD.
College? Yep, not sure, but planning on East Tennessee.

Boxers or Briefs: Briefs.
Favorite Christmas song: "Carol of The Bells".
Favorite Christmas movie: How the Grinch Stole Christmas.
What is one thing on your Christmas list? A couch.
Do you believe in Santa Claus? Yes... NO!
If you could spend Christmas with a celebrity who would it be and why? Photos by Katie Coe.

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Not just donuts anymore

Katie Coe
Charger Staff

Mmm...pizza and doughnuts. Who would have thought the two go hand in hand? Big "O" Donuts, formerly only a doughnut shop, has renovated itself in more ways than one.

Savory supplements have been added to Big "O"'s already succulent menu. Joining the bear claw, twist and muffin are other delicious treats including pizza, chicken wings, soup and salad.

The shop is not just a breakfast hot spot anymore, it is now a café and diner.

Along with new chow comes new digs. Big "O" has doubled in size. The shop is decorated in a rustic café setting that is reminiscent of an old coffee house.

Customers can expect to receive the



same quick and courteous service for which Big "O" Donuts is known.

They can also expect an inviting environment. Comfortable seating and light music provide a luxurious atmosphere in which anyone can relax and talk for hours on end.

Big "O" Donuts is open twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week.

It is also located off Jefferson Avenue, making it convenient for any person with an undeniable craving

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