

WRITE TO EDUCATE

Scholarship Contest Winner

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Essay Topic: How has the place you have grown up molded you into the person you are today and impacted your life?

Did you know that rural students are now officially recognized as an under-represented group in colleges? For decades, rural students have faced unique barriers in getting into the best colleges, but in recent years, people have started to realize that the lack of rural representation in academia is a problem. From my own experiences growing up in a small, rural town, I have gained skills vital to my future career as a plasma physicist, allowing me to collaborate with my peers in the scientific community to better the world.

One of the key things that Napoleon has offered me is a close-knit community, which has given me social skills that I would not otherwise have, allowing me to effectively collaborate with others when the time comes to work as a group. These skills will serve me well in my future career, where I will be collaborating with scientists both in my own field and related disciplines. As a smaller, rural school district, Napoleon had not always had the resources of larger schools. Despite this, my teachers have helped me to develop creative ways to solve problems when not all the tools are available, allowing me to effectively function in situations where I do not have the same opportunities as other students.

For instance, though my school doesn't offer advanced physics education, I was able to seek out opportunities like the Academically Talented Youth Program at Western Michigan University or Physicists Inspiring the Next Generation (PING) at Michigan State University, which allowed me to gain knowledge I would not otherwise have, and I was supported in this endeavor by my school. As a student in ATYP, I had to leave school early once a week in order to gain an accelerated honors education in English - not only was my school able to accommodate my periodic absences, they were also willing to accept my ATYP credits in lieu of the school's English classes. This flexibility let me have more time at school to pursue other modes of education such as dual enrollment.

Similarly, my upbringing in a more rural area has given me a perspective on the world and how it works that is beyond what my more urban peers are familiar with. Growing up in a forest, I have always been surrounded by nature, and I have a deep love for the woods around my home. This has spurred my intention to enter the field of plasma physics, where I can make a difference by working towards the end goal of nuclear fusion energy, a clean and safe source of electricity that will keep the woodlands I have loved safe for centuries to come. Already, I am able to apply this perspective to the community around me - in my role for the Jackson Community Foundation's Youth Advisory Committee, I have had an incredible opportunity to serve as a mediator, helping to resolve issues that occur in my group of students working towards a better future for the youth of Jackson County.

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