

Example 1

Describe an activity or experience that has been important in clarifying or strengthening your motivation for your major or career.

The statement that experiences can be life-changing is not just cliché; it is true. While I am a composite of all my experiences, I believe that a few isolated experiences have greatly influenced my motivation for my career, with one being especially significant: tutoring through my high school Math Honor Society. That experience has shaped my desire to have a career that benefits humankind.

When I started high school, I was unsure of what type of career I wanted. Then, I was accepted into the Math Honor Society. At first, I did not know if I would enjoy the required peer tutoring. I made the incorrect judgment that the students coming to tutoring would not be interested in my help, and would potentially be impatient with me. It turned out to be the complete opposite.

Today, nearly 3 years later, I still vividly remember my first experience tutoring. I tutored algebra II to a female student. She had dark, shoulder-length hair and had brought an art project with her. More importantly, though, she was kind, hard-working, and had a clear desire to learn. It was a pleasure to work with her, and that experience only made me want to tutor more. It meant a lot to me to see her understand the concepts I was teaching her, and to know that I made that difference in her life, that I took the stress of not understanding the concept off her.

After tutoring on many more occasions, both in my school and community, as well as assisting in a physics classroom, I began to develop an interest in becoming a high school mathematics teacher. That said, I realized that there had to be a lot of other career options in math. I was just unfamiliar with them. Not knowing if teaching would be a career I would enjoy in the long-term, I reflected on what about teaching appealed to me. Now, thinking about it, I realize that teaching helps others in a very concrete way. Helping others, whether through tutoring or volunteering, provides me with a sense of fulfillment like nothing else does. It helps me see that what I do has purpose. I will not live forever, and so it is important that I leave a positive legacy that benefits the infinite number of generations to come.

Since that realization, I have opened my mind to other potential careers. While I am still considering a career in teaching, I would like to spend my years in college exploring a wide variety of careers in mathematics that benefit humankind, directly or indirectly. Despite that I am uncertain of what career I want to have, my experience tutoring through the Math Honor Society played a fundamental role in my desire to have a career that helps others. I feel very grateful to have had that experience, and I look forward to having other such experiences during my time at NIU. I hope participating in undergraduate research will be one of them.

How will participation in undergraduate research help you to achieve your goals while contemplating your education at NIU?

We have all heard the adage "knowledge is power." Not only do I believe that, but I believe that research is one of the keys to knowledge. It is a place to make discoveries, to learn new things, and to explore topics beyond their surface. That type of exploration is the key to change and progress in our world, whether in medicine, the arts, technology, or any other area.

Of everything about college, one of the things I have looked forward to most is participating in undergraduate research. It is a key opportunity to prepare for a successful career, and, most importantly, to learn and grow. Engaging in undergraduate research will allow me to build on the skills I learn in my classes, providing me with an even more solid foundation for a fulfilling career and adulthood.

I have a definite passion for mathematics, and I want to use it in my career. However, I am not quite familiar with what careers exist in it, particularly those that help better our world. Taking part in research will allow me to explore the possible applications of math, which could relate to potential careers. Likewise, it would expose me to some of the various sub-fields within mathematics, giving me greater insight into my own interests, even within my major. This all fits in with my goal of exploring myself while at NIU.

Research will help me build essential skills for the workforce, both academically and organizationally. With the opportunity to learn everything from how to write a research proposal to how to write formally, I will gain invaluable writing skills for the working world. In addition, I will learn how to find in-depth information about a topic, and how to explore beyond the most obvious resources on it.

Undergraduate research will also give me firsthand experience structuring a large project, another crucial skill that I may not encounter as frequently in my classes. In careers aimed at bettering the world in some way, research and other long-term projects will be essential, as we need research for growth. So, it is important that I learn that skill before beginning my career.

Finally, participating in undergraduate research will give me the opportunity to develop closer connections with other students and faculty. It will put me in a community of intellectuals, both students and faculty alike. As a member of that community, I will have the unique opportunity of both learning from others and teaching others, in a more tight-knit way than in a classroom setting. The relationships I will develop will provide me with opportunities to gain more knowledge and experience, both within and outside my major field.

I know that my time at NIU will be a meaningful experience, because I will make it meaningful through my dedication and pursuit of opportunities, including undergraduate research. Participating in Research Rookies would complete my freshman experience at NIU, opening all doors to the resources the university has to offer.

Example 2

Describe an activity or experience that has been important in clarifying or strengthening your motivation for your major or career.

Working at McDonald's has been one of the most influential parts of my life and allowed me to better understand the importance of business accounting. When you think of McDonald's, you might not expect the job to help an accountant find his true passion, but this was the case for me. I have learned many aspects of business operations and the components that are necessary for successes. I have seen that customer satisfaction is a fundamental requirement for the success of any business. That may sound funny from someone that wants to be an accountant, but I realized by working at McDonald's that everyone has customers, no matter what they do. As an accountant, my customers may be other departments, other companies, or even just my boss. If my work does not reflect the values of the company to my customers, then I may impact the overall success of the business. Also, I am one of the few employees that volunteers to do inventory. Inventory consists of simply counting the supplies that are in the store; which includes existing supplies as well as those that are just received, and I love doing it. By doing inventory, I have concluded that accurate supply management is a must to keep the business solvent. If I counted twenty boxes of tomatoes and one box of French fries, then I knew we were in trouble! Finally, working at McDonald's has shown me that quality of work is everything. As an accountant, if my work is sloppy or inaccurate, it will have a debilitating impact on the business. This happens at McDonald's if a customer receives a wrong order, a sandwich is thrown together in a messy way, or someone receives the wrong amount of change. I have known that I wanted to be an accountant since I was in middle school, but it wasn't until I started working at McDonald's, that I saw the operational impact of the work that I will be doing in the future.

How will participation in undergraduate research help you to achieve your goals while contemplating your education at NIU?

The undergraduate research program will help me in many ways. For one, this opportunity may allow me to get a kick start on my own research project that I will be executing for my senior year as an honors student. At minimum, it could seed some ideas for my project. Participating as a Research Rookie will help me understand the college level research process for my future courses as well as my honors project. Also, being a part of the program can help me connect with professors that I may have the honor of studying under in the future. When I first heard about this opportunity at orientation I thought to myself, "Wow, that sounds like something that would be so interesting to do." However, I imagined that this program would only be awarded to students majoring in research aligned careers, such as Biology. But, after some further reading, I was excited to see that the past research projects for this program pertained to all different types of majors. I was especially fascinated to find a finance project. If I am not awarded this opportunity, I will be disappointed, but just the action of completing this application has strengthen my knowledge about universities. I learned about the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, and that Northern Illinois University is classified as R2, meaning higher research activity. Although I realize that this pertains to graduate level research, I was happy to see the other universities and colleges that at the same level classification, and it gave me great confidence that I made the right college choice.