

I have never been the 4.0, valedictorian student. I've never been a student defined by their grades or the classes they take. However, throughout my educational career I have been someone who isn't afraid of a challenge. While many of my peers avoided AP offerings for fear of losing their GPA or free time, I managed to take over half of my school's AP courses and have learned exactly how and what I like to learn.

In choosing my courseload every year, I decided not to back down from a challenge. As a sophomore, I felt I could handle the concepts involved in AP European history and found myself as the only underclassmen in class that required me to engage in daily discussion on new and complex topics. I see this as a crucial step in my development as a student; it taught me that I enjoy and respond well to being academically challenged, it also showed me the difference between learning for a grade and learning for understanding. It's easy to fill out the paper or take the test, so easy it often left me bored, but it's much harder to analyze history and philosophies, and show your comprehension through participation in a group discussion. I had such a great experience in that class that I chose to challenge myself, even more, the following year by signing up for AP Language & Composition, AP World History, and Physics. Similar to my sophomore year, my junior year showed me a variety of new concepts from universal gravitation to ethos, pathos, and logos. This year of classes confirmed for me the vitality of testing myself academically. When peers asked me why I took so many difficult courses, I told them it's because I want to make the most of my free education.

The next step came when I chose to apply this attitude to things outside of school as well, and it turned out as well as it could have. First, I joined the debate team to try out a new activity and wound up the 5th best public forum speaker in the state by the end of my first year and the 4th best extemporaneous speaker on international topics. I then competed in a local American Legion National Oratorical competition which I won and earned myself a ticket to compete at the state level. Finally, I applied for American Legion Boys Nation, a summer leadership program, where they chose me to be one of Alaska's two delegates to the American Legions Boys Nation with 99 other highly qualified young men from across the country. If I hadn't learned early on to take chances, I fear I would have missed out on these and many other life-changing experiences.

Now, as a senior preparing for college I feel comfortable taking these chances, whether it be an internship, job, study abroad, or any other opportunity, I am confident in my abilities and look forward to taking advantage of every opportunity that I can. As I go ahead in life I hope not to lose this attitude, I never want to be controlled by fear or uncertainty, and I think I've learned through experience that taking a chance for personal growth is always worth it. Additionally, along the way I've certainly had my losses as well, and realizing that rejection is better than not trying at all has been paramount in my continued efforts. Thanks to my educational experience, I will continue to challenge myself and seek all opportunities afforded to me.