

ESSAY TOPIC (750 word maximum) Who or what in your educational experience has influenced your direction in life?

I met Seiji Takagi when I was in 7th grade. While he was simply “just my ski coach” at the time, Seiji quickly became a close friend and mentor in my athletic and academic endeavors. Seiji was the person who paid attention to the athletes who struggled or who weren’t the “stars”. While I was placed at the top echelon of skiers, I experienced a tremendous struggle with EILO, a breathing condition that closed the vocal cords, making it very difficult to breathe during exercise. Given that I decided to partake in competitive Nordic skiing in a state that produces numerous Olympians, I faced more challenges than the average skier. With these struggles, I was mentally and physically exhausted - the question of whether I would pass out or have a breathing attack during or after a race haunted me; I felt embarrassed about this “inability” to achieve greater things, restricting me from reaching out to others. However, there was never a moment that Seiji didn’t ask about my breathing; he built up my confidence before and after racing, always making me feel seen.

Seiji and I developed a friendship over 5 years that changed my viewpoint on life. We shared a love for baking, exchanging homemade treats constantly (he baked my birthday cake every year). As we skied on the trails on slow distance days, we talked about glioblastomas, which I had learned about during my internship with an Ear Nose and Throat doctor. We discussed our passions for medicine, and I even convinced him to pursue Med School, something he was on the fence for a while. I asked him about chemistry questions I had, and we discussed our fascination with neuropathic functions and endocannabinoid circulation in the body. While I initially saw Seiji as my biggest supporter in my athletic undertakings, he was also unconditionally supportive of my academic interests and always encouraged me to aim high.

Seiji worked as an assistant ski instructor for five years, working 4 hours or more a day. Plus, he worked a full-time job at the local ski shop, AMH. For Seiji's last year of coaching, he was studying for the MCAT full-time. Today, he will be attending one of the best Medical Schools in the nation, UW. Seiji’s ability to juggle his future career as a doctor, coaching skiing, and being a friend was something beyond comparison. Seiji showed how balance between school, sports, and other hobbies offered a life with passion; it doesn't have to be just one thing that provides one with purpose, it can be many.

With Seiji, I have been educationally inspired, motivated, and enlightened. I learned how to broaden my scope of knowledge through conversation and connection. And because of Seiji and I’s lengthy conversations about our interests, I feel intellectually stimulated when I talk - whether it's on the trails or during one of my AP Research presentations, I find power in using my voice. Additionally, my fascination with medicine has only been heightened since my talks with Seiji about science and medicine. In fact, I hope to earn my white coach some day, just like him.

Today, I find peace in my setbacks because of Seiji. He has shown me there is more to life than just sports and one thing; humans are multi-faceted and we must embrace this beautiful characteristic. While Seiji is no longer my ski coach, he has left an indelible impact on my life, showing me that every seemingly unattainable thing is closer within reach and that I should never give up.