

Jillian Kuhn
University of Pennsylvania
Early Decision Application
Essay 6a
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like a patient undergoing electric shock treatment. As each second passed, the fear built up inside me like a raging river applying pressure to a weak dam. That night was going to be one of the most important of my life. I had never played such an exposed solo, and I had never performed anything from memory. I would be alone, just me and my clarinet, in front of an entire stadium of high school football fans. For the time being, I resolved to remain hidden under my childhood security blanket.

Suddenly my comfortable bedroom disappeared, and I found myself standing on the outdoor track that surrounded the illuminated football field. Despite the sweltering early-autumn heat and my heavy marching band uniform, I shivered uncontrollably. My body had gone numb. My fellow band members were liberally applying my back with pats of encouragement, but I could barely feel their hands. I simply smiled and pretended to be brave.

The buzzer screamed across the stadium, signaling both the end of the first half and the beginning of my first all-out panic attack. Despite my internal chaos, my inner voice kept reminding me that I was qualified, well prepared, and, most importantly, fearless. I hoped it was telling me the truth.

Ignoring the fear, the pain, and the pressure, I took a deep breath and marched confidently out onto the field. The band marched the first three songs of the half-time show better than it ever had before. Then the trombones broke into the low, menacing strains of *Swing, Swing, Swing*. That was my cue. I was a roller coaster, perched atop the first intimidating hill and waiting to be dragged toward the ground. Staring at the steep incline, I braced myself for the plunge.

Holding my breath, I strutted to the intersection of the forty-yard line and the front sideline. I stood there for a moment, letting my nervous eyes absorb the scene. My stomach flipped inside my torso like a skydiver caught in a hurricane; and then, like the eye of the storm, the entire scene suddenly melted into slow motion. The shouts of the crowd froze in midair and fell away into an uneasy silence. I tore off my hat, leapt onto the black podium, and took the deepest breath of my life.

I cannot even remember playing the solo. All I can recall is the instantaneous rush of adrenaline and the frenzy of the crowd. With the final note of my solo came a sudden rush of relief. All of those horrible, tentative feelings that had accumulated inside me burst like an overinflated balloon. I grinned at the packed bleachers, and they smiled back. I felt invincible. My performance had earned thunderous applause from a stadium full of fans who usually never even watched the half-time show. I had worked so hard for that moment that I wanted to capture my emotions on film and display the picture in a glass case like a trophy.

The rest of that night felt like an amazing display of Independence Day fireworks. Everything

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Why Penn?

The University of Pennsylvania never truly came alive for me until I stepped onto the campus. Although I have read admissions brochures, searched Internet websites, and attended regional information sessions, none of these resources proved to be as fulfilling as my three visits to the Penn campus.

I was pleasantly surprised to discover that, despite its large enrollment, the university feels like a close-knit, personalized community. One morning during my third visit, I woke up early and read a novel on a bench in front of Steinberg-Dietrich Hall. As I read, I watched Penn students travel up and down Locust Walk. I felt like a part of the university community. The scenery was beautiful, and the students were cheerful and approachable. Although they hail from different backgrounds and regions of the globe, they all reminded me of my friends, my acquaintances, and, most importantly, myself.

Penn is located within an Eastern metropolis but still seems as comfortable as my own backyard. While on campus, I completely forgot that I was in a major city; however, just blocks away I witnessed the opportunities that Philadelphia provides for students. I live in a residential Chicago suburb and work in "the Loop" during school vacations. Since I truly enjoy the mix of rural and urban elements that my hometown provides, I know I will also love the diverse environment of the University of Pennsylvania.

I hope to major in communication. This course of action would successfully combine all my favorite areas of study, including journalism, French, English, music, law, and technology. Penn's communication department appeals to me because I want to learn more than just basic techniques of communication; I want to learn the effects of communication. Also, both on and off campus, I have thoroughly examined the Daily Pennsylvanian: Penn's "unofficial journalism department." It is a widely read, highly acclaimed collegiate publication, produced exclusively by students; and any experience I gain by working on this newspaper would provide an excellent background for whatever profession I choose.

The School of Arts and Sciences would allow me the freedom to explore academic areas outside my major. During a recent visit I attended Professor Childers' fascinating history lecture about the Third Reich. The course proved to be informative, entertaining, and nothing like I had imagined. I look forward to taking similar classes as a Penn student. In addition to my classroom pursuits, I anticipate returning to France to learn more about its language and culture as a participant in Penn's study-abroad programs, hopefully in either Paris or Lyon. Also, I have heard Penn Band members describe their performances and activities, and now I cannot wait to experience them for myself.

The more I learn about the University of Pennsylvania, the more passionately I believe that it is the perfect school for me. In fact, now that I have fully acquainted myself with so many aspects of Penn life, I am absolutely convinced that I have made the right choice.