Grand Prize Essay

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I had one relentless bully in high school. Despite my best efforts, I was always seemingly singled out, driven to the point of tears on a daily basis. The idea of transferring schools crossed my mind, but I knew this wouldn't solve my problem as this bully was ceaseless and followed me everywhere. Although a deep sense of helplessness developed within me, I managed to escape the wrath of my high school bully—math.

Unfortunately, this bully came with me to college.

Naturally, the prospect of having to endure more math classes at a collegiate level frightened me. Knowing this was an inevitable fate, I decided to dive straight in by taking a math course my first semester—STAT 1100Q with Professor McLaughlin. I had never taken any statistics courses during my high school experience, making this completely uncharted territory for me.

But something strange happened. I found myself not only succeeding within the classroom, but also finding genuine enjoyment and interest within the subject matter. Professor McLaughlin led class in a way that met the needs of a wide array of learning styles, ensuring that everyone was able to follow along. I could tell she truly wanted every student to understand the lesson, and she was very receptive to everyone's questions in the class. As extra credit opportunities arose, I found myself taking them not for the purpose of gaining extra points, but because I felt a sincere curiosity about the topic and wanted to learn more for myself.

On top of learning about means, random sampling, and standard errors, this course has taught me about my own capabilities as a student. I entered the situation with a pessimistic

mindset, preparing myself for a semester of struggles and considering failure as an option. Based off of my experiences in the past, I allowed myself to believe that math was an incompatible subject for me, and that I was simply "not good at math". Adapting this mindset allowed me to excuse my shortcomings in the subject, as I believed it was a matter outside of my personal control which was simply not true.

This morning I sat at my laptop with bated breath, feverishly refreshing my grades, awaiting the latest statistics exam to be posted. For a moment, my mind traveled backwards, to the days of high school where I was met with continual disappointment and frustration in my math career. Before I could fall too deeply into this pessimistic mindset, I was brought back to reality with a click of my mouse. The grade for the exam had been put in. 100.

Seeing my hard work pay off was an inexplicably rewarding moment, that was only heightened by the realization that I was deriving enjoyment from the subject. Professor McLaughlin's class has helped me to look beyond math as just a bully, and see it as a friend who needs help solving a few problems.