

Below are selections of Cassidy's brainstorming and list tracker for Episode 516 of the [College Essay Guy Podcast](#).

Check out Episode 1 [here](#).

Check out Episode 2 [here](#).

Check out Episode 3 [here](#).

Check out Episode 4 [here](#).

Second Montage Draft

Circular black eyes, square head with rounded edges, disproportionately small body -- no, this isn't an otherworldly species (or me, for that matter). These are my childhood obsessions, tiny figurines that captured my heart from a young age: Funko Pops!. Rather than rocks or seashells, I fell in love with collecting pop culture minifigures. Yet it is not just the characteristic Japanese chibi style of the Pops that endears me to them, but also the shards of myself that I glimpse in their reflections.

Fluffy white ears, red vest, and a tiny golden pocketwatch the size of my pinky finger: my White Rabbit Pop!. He mirrors my ability to take an entropic situation and learn how to thrive in it. At twelve years old, my dad died suddenly, uprooting the foundations of my life and drastically reshaping our family dynamics. I learned to adapt to having only one parent, from carpooling more often to surrendering my mom's attention to my younger brother. Though tragic, it taught me how to adapt. Confronting challenges, to me, means reshaping my mindset to adapt to the situation, rather than trying to force the situation to fit my expectations.

MJ, from Marvel's Spiderman franchise, may not be the picture of happiness, but her dry humor and ability to lighten tense situations echoes my love for laughter. Whether it's bridging the gap between seventeen and seven years old at ballet or softening my family's sorrow, I've learned that laughter is a powerful force. Now, I constantly utilize it to build relationships with others -- including volunteering at the hospital. While I can't perform a joint replacement surgery, I can support patients' emotional health by stopping by their rooms to chat after my hospital "task list" duties are done. Cracking jokes at their bedside, I see how laughter allows others to see me as someone they can connect with -- a faint reminder of their granddaughter, or friend, or child -- and more than just the girl restocking the gloves.

Belle's saffron dress billows out mid-spin, her character reminding me of the power of empathy. I am, as Gen Z has coined the term, a yapper, meaning that I have a tendency to overshare -- never ask me what my favorite book is, because I'll go through my top 10 recent reads in each genre (including a pro-con list for each one) before remembering the actual question. However, the death of my dad revealed to me the importance of listening, of empathizing with someone simply by remaining quiet. I see it at House of Grace, hearing the stories of addicted women seeking liberation and responding with silent recognition. Discerning the gratitude in women's

voices when they grasp that they're not alone -- it's clear to me that a listening ear speaks to the heart more than a rambling mouth ever could.

Tail swishing, bag of whozits and whatzits in hand, Ariel reflects my curiosity. Whether I'm holding avid study hall discussions with my AP Bio teacher about RFLP (riff-lip, or restriction fragment length polymorphism) analysis, or researching the effects of long ER wait times on the progression of traumatic brain injuries, I am driven by an insatiable craving for knowledge. This has, in turn, allowed me to help others succeed -- whether that means leading monthly AP Bio study groups or informally tutoring my friend in IM2.

Posed in a warrior stance, Mulan guards all of my red books. She reminds me that there is strength in vulnerability, something especially manifest in my identity as a Christian. At school, I can find myself feeling insecure about being in the minority as a person of faith, my desire for belonging warring with my authenticity. As I begin exposing my raw self and opening up about my beliefs to people I once feared would cast me out, my insecurities of being mis-labeled seem to shrink in the midst of their growing understanding of who I really am.

Long ago, these figurines captured my heart; now, they live in it. As society demands rocks or seashells, I'll continually fight to be a Funko Pop, leading by example and thriving in my singularity. I aspire to be to others what Funko Pops are to me -- square head notwithstanding, of course.

The “Everything I Want Colleges to Know About Me” List

Instructions: Click [here](#) to begin the activity. Depending on how you choose to complete the assignment, record your answers below.

The Top 10 Things I Want Colleges To Know About Me

- 1) I’m a huge family-oriented person -- my dad passed away when I was twelve, and my brother has a lot of health issues, so I’ve grown to take on more responsibilities in my family. I feel like this has made me both more self-sufficient and more empathetic.
- 2) I love ballet -- not just for the art of it, but also for the community that it builds. Long Saturday rehearsals are the best part of my week because I get to learn/practice choreography (my favorite part of ballet) but I also have more downtime to bond with my friends.
- 3) **I’m a very adaptable person** -- but I haven’t always been. Specifically after my dad passed, I learned how to go with the flow (which took me a while, since I’m stubborn at heart). This is especially evident in my studies -- for example, I had to self-study the last couple units of AP Bio because my teacher rushed through them in less than a month.
- 4) I really try to learn from the experiences I’ve had as a “follower” or “participant” in an activity so that if/when I rise to a leadership position, I know how to combat issues that I’ve seen. For example, when I first started volunteering at my local hospital, I was super confused about my tasks because my training was really rushed/incomplete. Now, as a unit lead, I’m implementing new practices to ensure that new volunteers are comfortable with the task list (shift shadowing), seasoned volunteers get an annual re-training, and everyone knows that I’m super open to all questions.
- 5) I’m interested in pursuing a career in the **medical field**! I’ve been looking at oncology lately because I thought the cell communication unit

in AP Bio was super interesting and I think that being part of a strong support system for someone who is at their most vulnerable is really special and really important.

- 6) I used to be really scared of making phone calls (eg. to place an order at a restaurant). When I applied to volunteer at House of Grace (women's substance abuse rehabilitation program), I didn't realize that manning the phones was the main task, so I had to get over my fear really quickly (exposure therapy I guess...). **However, it taught me that oftentimes, you can make a greater impact on someone by listening to them instead of talking.**
- 7) I love **reading**! It's a form of escapism for me, and it's also super fun to talk about books with friends.
- 8) I participate in all of my friends' clubs at school. I think that this not only helps me bond with them outside of the classroom, but it also allows me to explore interests that I wouldn't have considered on my own (eg. creative writing).
- 9) I'm **Korean American**.
- 10) I'm a huge fan of **finding efficient ways to study** -- Pomodoro timers and active recall learning are my studying musts! They help me maximize my time, prevent burnout, and kind of "gamify" my learning.

My College List + Essay Tracker

Below are some selections from Cassidy's college list + essay tracker spreadsheet. For a blank copy, click [here](#)!

College List:

WILD CARD (Less than 10% chance of getting in)
Stanford
UCLA
REACH (Low chance of acceptance, based on my profile)
USC
UC Berkeley
UC Irvine
UC San Diego
MAYBE (In range for my profile, but tough to say)
UC Davis
UC Santa Barbara
Cal Poly SLO
San Diego State
CSU Long Beach
LIKELY (I've got a pretty good shot here)
UC Riverside
Chapman
Pepperdine
UC Santa Cruz
Biola

Essay Tracker:

School	Essays Required	Word Limit
Common App	Personal Statement	650
	Common App Activities List	150 chars per
	Add'l Info, if needed.	650
USC	Many of us have at least one issue or passion that we care deeply about – a topic on which we would love to share our opinions and insights in hopes of sparking intense interest and continued conversation. If you had ten minutes and the attention of a million people, what would your talk be about?	250
	Describe how you plan to pursue your academic interests and why you want to explore them at USC specifically. Please feel free to address your first- and second-choice major selections.	250
	Describe yourself in three words.	100 characters
	What is your favorite snack?	100 characters
	Best movie of all time	100 characters
	Dream job	100 characters
	If your life had a theme song, what would it be?	100 characters
	Dream trip	100 characters
	What TV show will you binge watch next?	100 characters
	Which well-known person or fictional character would be your ideal roommate?	100 characters
	Favorite Book	100 characters
	If you could teach a class on any topic, what would it be?	100 characters
Stanford	The Stanford community is deeply curious and driven to learn in and out of the classroom. Reflect on an idea or experience that makes you genuinely excited about learning.	250
	Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate — and us — get to know you better.	250
	Please describe what aspects of your life experiences, interests and character would help you make a distinctive contribution as an undergraduate to Stanford University.	250
	What is the most significant challenge that society faces today?	50
	How did you spend your last two summers?	50

	What historical moment or event do you wish you could have witnessed?	50
	Briefly elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities, a job you hold, or responsibilities you have for your family.	50
	List five things that are important to you.	50
Chapman	Out of the thousands of universities and colleges, what excites you about attending Chapman University specifically?	200
	Choose one: Our committee would like to hear about a personal experience or lesson that has helped you better understand who you are now and/or appreciate a perspective different from your own. How would you utilize this understanding to contribute to the values and welcoming fabric of our campus community? Part of the Chapman experience is to help students expand their perspectives. How will you grow personally and/or learn more about others throughout your time at Chapman?	200
	Please tell us about your interest in the major you selected.	200
	What is your dream job?	
	What is a family tradition that you want to continue?	
	What song should we be listening to while reading your application?	
	Name one dish you would cook for our admission team.	
	Where do you feel most at home?	
	What is the top thing on your bucket list?	
	What makes you happy?	
	If Chapman's admission team came to visit your hometown, what site would you take them to?	
	What can you give a 30-minute presentation on without any preparation?	
	What are the best words of advice you have received?	
Pepperdine	Pepperdine is a Christian university where all are welcomed and encouraged to challenge each other in the pursuit of truth. Students, faculty, and staff members from all backgrounds participate in conversations of faith inside and outside of the classroom. Considering that Pepperdine is a Christian university, why are you interested in attending and how would you contribute to conversations of faith on campus?	300-500

Biola	Describe how and when you made a decision to follow Christ.	300-400
	Using personal examples, share about your recent spiritual growth.	300-400
	Why are you interested in attending Biola University?	100-200
UC Schools	PIQ1: Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.	350
Riverside, SC, Davis, SB, Irvine, SD, Berkeley, LA	PIQ2: Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.	350
	PIQ5: Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?	350
	PIQ6: Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.	350