

Personal Vision and Mission (Snapshot, Age 21)

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Who am I?

I'm a mechanical engineering student focused on using my design skills to positively impact people and communities. I come from a family of educators, caretakers, and engineers who have instilled in me the values of hard work, commitment, compassion, and creativity. I believe that people are inherently good but often self-serving out of perceived necessity; thus, I find it more valuable to question intentions before jumping to conclusions. I believe in the value of diverse perspectives and that few things in life have one right answer. I believe we are shaped by the environments we are exposed to, and that most humans are remarkably adaptable when forced to be. I believe in the value of tradition, but not at the cost of innovation. I think that many people believe their life has only one right answer, heavily influenced by other people's expectations of them, which inhibits the individual's capacity for self-exploration. Nevertheless, I'm conflicted about my views of fate—whether or not the timeline of our lives is predetermined and if free will is real. I value my capacity to reflect on myself and on my life, and I enjoy philosophizing and pondering the nature of things.

I think identity is an ever-changing set of factors and traits, a few of which might remain constant throughout one's life. I identify as a white male who is determined not to represent exclusively the norms of other white males; as someone who values acceptance and open-mindedness towards the cultures and paradigms of others; as a lifelong learner who never wants to stop learning new tricks; as an optimist who nevertheless values being prepared for anything; as a futurist and technologist who advocates for proceeding with caution; and as a person who cares deeply about my relationships with others. I have (often unhealthily) high standards for myself, and I am slowly coming to terms with the fact that perfection is usually futile. Having high expectations helps me know what I'm capable of, but then I'm scared to do any less once I've reached that point. I'm still learning how to go easier on myself, how to be my own person but still value feedback from others, and how to accept myself and my flaws.

I value making people feel included, making people laugh, and making people feel good about themselves. I feel like I have the capacity to learn new things efficiently, and then I have the responsibility to use my skills to make a positive impact on the world. I believe in equity, the right to a good education, and the right to pursue your interests and passions. I want to be able to give back to those who have given me so much, but at the same time, I don't want my career to be solely focused on accumulating fortune. I want to continue to take pride in my work and have it be something that contributes to both my livelihood and my personal satisfaction. While I often wish I had all the answers to my questions, I want to keep an open mind about where the road of life will take me in the future.

What is my place in the Olin community?

I came into Olin with the perspective that I had something to prove. I had come from an environment where I spent so much of my time trying to prove my own capabilities to others based on what I perceived they expected of me. Olin was a new place with new people—time to start fresh. At first, I relied heavily on what I was already familiar with to build my identity, like spending hours on end designing and 3D-printing anything that happened to pop into my head. Looking back on my first year at Olin, I feel like my personal values didn't start to morph into any semblance of their current state until my second semester. It's hard to pinpoint the beginning of the shift, but my best guess is my decision to register for Caitrin Lynch's Engineering for Humanity course. I vividly remember Caitrin towing a suitcase full of student-designed devices into the dining hall one evening and trying to convince us first-years to take the class. Right around that time, my great-grandmother passed away after suffering from dementia for several years. This class felt like a fleeting opportunity that I knew had to take. Engineering for Humanity was the first time I had heard of human-centered design, and it made me realize that this is the mindset I'm meant to approach engineering with. For me, Olin soon went from being a unique hands-on college experience to a vessel for enacting positive change in the world. Having recognized this shift in value, I wanted to put it into practice as soon as I could.

I kicked off the following summer by participating in the LeadingAge Hackathon where engineering students worked alongside older adults from surrounding communities to develop a helpful product. We quickly identified mobility in older adults as a prevalent issue, so we co-designed a smart shoe that alerted users when there was an upcoming obstacle. The feeling of creating real value for real people outweighed the thrill of time-crunched problem solving and winning the competition, and I had proved to myself that I was capable of making an impact on people's lives. My first year at Olin had shown me that I don't need to prove myself to others; in a place where everyone is skilled at so many different things, the biggest challenge became proving your own value to yourself. I found myself admiring the highly technical work that my peers were doing, but at the same time wondering why I wasn't as drawn to it. Did that invalidate my qualifications as an aspiring engineer? Would a career focused more on doing good in the world be at odds with a well-paying highly technically oriented career that so many others seemed focused on? I eventually decided that aspiring for a successful career in the traditional sense wasn't a bad thing, but that my own happiness and fulfillment should come first. If I wasn't happy with my own place in the world, or even my place in Olin's community, how could I possibly be expected to live an authentic life and believe in the work I was doing? The individual decisions to pursue a more self-directed pathway through Olin's trajectory didn't always register at the time, but looking back, I feel like the path I chartered was just what I needed.

As I progressed through Olin, I found more ways to get involved in things I was passionate about, often verging on the curse of overcommitment that befalls many an Olin student. At some point, a friend from the class below me mentioned how well-known I had become in the Olin community, and the comment genuinely took me by surprise. First-year me may have been thrilled to learn about achieving some semblance of status, but by now my mindset had shifted to a much more self-directed one. I remember being somewhat frightened by the realization that I now unintentionally had an image to uphold. I was settling into a role as an upperclassman, and I would have to decide how to walk the line of being a role model versus keeping more to myself. Looking at all the things I was involved in, though, stepping back didn't seem like a realistic option. I personally value commitment and follow-through in what I sign on to do, and I've learned just how bad I can be at saying no to things. In proving my value to myself, others had taken note too. Somehow, I had found myself in a position of leadership in several facets of the community, and it seemed like the best option was just to embrace it and try to

find as much value in it as I could. I realized that I was in a position to spread values of positivity, creativity, inclusion, and reflection. I tried to make sure that my main motivation to do so became not one of upholding my own public image, but rather doing it because it is the right thing to do. If my goal in life is to have a positive impact on the world, I'd better take steps to have a positive impact at Olin.

After four years, I find myself laying claim to far more than I ever anticipated at the beginning of my journey. I find it valuable to reflect both on what I got out of my experiences, and how my experiences might have benefitted the larger Olin community. At the end of my first year, I agreed to take on a leadership position in OARS because I was presented with an opportunity to alter the club's trajectory into something more ambitious and more meaningful. We ran into countless challenges and missteps along the way, but I'd like to think the team is now more focused on how our technology can have a positive impact in the world than it was before. I took on the position of a writing NINJA not just because it was a job that suited my skills, but especially because I would have the opportunity every year to directly engage with first-year students on especially interesting topics. I took on a leadership role with the Design Challenge not for the status or extra resume line, but rather because it was an opportunity to make Candidates' Weekend a memorable and meaningful experience for the next generation of Olin students, just as it had been for me. When presented with the offer of being an inaugural student worker and eventual manager at the Weissman Foundry, I accepted not just to gain access to more creative resources, but because I believed in the mission of uniting the BOW community to spread the spirit of making. While it is undeniable that I have gotten personal gain out of most of my big endeavors at Olin, I've put conscious effort into ensuring that my net impact is a positive one for others involved.

Reflecting on my four years at Olin now, I think my biggest missteps along the way have been focusing so much on meaningfully engaging with my work that I lose sight of other important aspects of the college experience. My suitemates and I have commiserated way too often that we don't spend enough time with one another. I need to get better at balancing work-oriented relationships and personal relationships and to appreciate the inherent values in both of them. The last thing I want for myself is to be so caught up in my career, regardless of how fulfilling it is, that I let the other important aspects of my life slip away. While I'm proud of all that I've achieved at Olin, I wish I had used my college experience as more of an exercise in establishing a healthy balance for life. I find myself falling into the habit of offering others advice on this front, but often failing to heed my own advice. I believe that half the fun of college is diving in and figuring out how to navigate the experience for yourself, but always take advice with an open mind. Then, at the end of it all, you can look back on your time reflectively and reminiscently, but hopefully not too critically or regrettfully. Perhaps the best advice I could give to a first-year coming into Olin—or maybe the advice I wish I could have given myself four years ago—would be the following:

This college is a ball of clay inevitably shaped by each one of us, so relish in the opportunities it presents. Try out many things to discover what you're most passionate about, but be honest with yourself about your limitations. Reflect on what is most meaningful to you, as well as what changes you hope to see. Success comes in many forms, and no one expects it from you all the time. Some days your victories will be sweet and well-earned, while other days will inevitably disappoint. Take lots of pictures along the way, as you will remember these days fondly. You will likely meet some of the most amazing people in your life here, so build relationships and hold them close. Make friends, make connections, make cool things, give it your all to make a difference.

After a little more thought, why restrict this advice to the context of Olin, or even one's college years at all? The *whole world*, and my experience within it, is a ball of clay, and I should be able to shape it into whatever I see fit.

What are my goals?

Spirit of Generosity

I don't want to get to the point in life where money is the only thing that motivates me. At present, my main motivation with money is to be able to live comfortably and take care of those close to me. Growing up, I was fortunate to be surrounded by an extraordinarily generous family, often generous to a fault. My great-grandma, an entirely self-made woman who went from an orphanage to running her own accounting practice, would happily let me take home various odds and ends from her condo or slip me a five for taking out the trash. My aunt and uncle wouldn't bat an eye when taking the whole family out to a nice dinner or buying me just what they bought their own children. My mom, a single parent with a job in education, poured her heart and soul into making sure I had everything I wanted and needed. Just as I have been so well treated in my formative years, so too will I strive to do for others.

I want to accumulate wealth not for the sake of indulging myself, but rather to be able to indulge, care for, and surprise others. I want to be able to perform random acts of kindness for those in need, to simply be a force of generosity and kindness to others. I want this for myself not for the recognition and self-glory, not even because it's just a good thing to do, but rather because I know how it feels to be on the receiving end, and I want to be able to give for a change. To achieve this goal, I'll have to start small—I will need to consider how much I'm able to give based on what I have, but it's a habit and a mindset I want to continually foster. Generosity shouldn't have a threshold you have to reach before you can begin. I want to keep this in mind and constantly assess my ability to use my resources in the spirit of giving.

Inspiring a Mindset of Making

The making mindset was instilled into me at a very young age. As early as preschool, I remember building marble towers out of blocks and ramps in the classroom—they were creations that I could make and engage with, rather than just drawings that would hang passively on the wall. My exposure to open-ended toys and the freedom to create at a young age has certainly helped shape me into who I am today. I believe that children have an innate ability to think creatively, and this ability is way too easy to accidentally stifle. Therefore, I want to be able to create and provide resources that foster open-ended learning, making, and building, and show how valuable such a mindset can be.

My capstone project in ADE has shown me that people in low-resource contexts don't always discover a passion for making or design due to a lack of exposure. I want to figure out how to make the concept of making more accessible such that anyone could find value in it. I'm very interested in the makerspace movement, where a single space serves as a hub of making to the community. Such spaces are excellent for those already acquainted with the making mindset, and for those who have the resources to pay for machine access, materials, and training. But what about the people who don't? I want to consider ways to make the offerings of a standard makerspace even more accessible to a community, whether it's integrating it into schools directly or coming up with a different financing model. Libraries across the country—including the one in my hometown—have started doing this to some degree by incorporating 3D printers and other smaller tools into their offerings. Some makerspaces collaborate with local schools to directly reach students, but what I'm most curious about is how the mindset of making is communicated. How, in fields of objectivity and absoluteness like math and science, does the subjectivity of design and creative problem-solving get communicated? I'd be interested in building on the work of my ADE capstone project—creating a STEM-focused after-school

program in the rural Mississippi Delta—by making projects or resources that challenge people to shift their mindset about how to solve open-ended problems.

Creative Space Design

I've always been one to obsess over how a space is used or designed. A person's interactions within a space can influence their emotions, their actions, and even their creativity. I strongly considered becoming an architect, but I realized I wasn't happy with the tedium the job often held. I want to be able to take charge of designing innovative spaces that rethink how people interact with their physical environments, using my design skills and engineering knowledge as tools to do so. One need that I'm particularly interested in addressing is repurposing underutilized space to make efficient and low-cost housing solutions. In recent years, the tiny house movement has gained traction as people start to more seriously consider how to do more with less. Condensed living has the potential to address housing crises in large cities, create low-cost shelter in higher density, and even add flexibility to one's lifestyle.

I've been designing tiny houses since I was in middle school, and it has always been a goal of mine to get one of my designs built. I was first inspired by Tumbleweed Tiny Houses, but their goals are more focused on mobility and sustainability (two admittedly admirable goals) and less on accessibility. Other companies like ICON are 3D printing small houses with CNC concrete machines at costs of just a few thousand dollars, but their success and practicality remains to be seen. Still others like Resource Furniture create shape-shifting furniture that lets a single room take on multiple functions. While it could be fun to work for one of these companies, I want to be able to drive my own creative vision and experiment on my own terms. Because of this, I see this goal as something a little further out that I might try to ease into. When I have the resources to do so, I want to design an innovative space for my own use, gradually test and refine its capabilities, and then eventually pursue turning it into a career.

Design for Inspiration

I can recall a few times in my life where I've interacted with a space, a work of art, some other creative medium and walked away feeling totally changed and inspired. The City Museum in St. Louis, the North Forest Light exhibit at Little Rock's Crystal Bridges Museum, Chicago's Pritzker Pavilion, the music of Jacob Collier, the novels of Blake Crouch, to name a few, are all things that I've walked away from with a distinct feeling of awe. Each one challenged the norms of their respective disciplines and left me wanting to emulate their creative spirit. I hope one day to make something that will inspire others in a similar way. In each of the examples, I felt totally encapsulated in the experience they each had to offer. They made me feel like I was part of the experience in my own unique way. They made me realize how much I like the feeling of total immersion. I could see myself falling in love with museum and exhibit design just as much as I love house design. It would let me experiment with how to combine physical space, sound/music, interactive components, and the written word—four elements that I currently love to create with. There are, of course, many other ways in which I could make this goal a reality, and there's a small chance I've already done this. It's a hard goal to be sure I've achieved, as each person's experience with art is uniquely their own. A good starting point is to keep this goal in mind in the things that I do create and try to make my work as user-focused as possible.

Better Understanding and Accepting Myself

The more time I spend with myself, the more I realize how complicated I am. I'm complex not just in the bits of identity that define me, but also in my feelings about myself. I wish I could so straightforwardly love every part of myself and all the things I do, but it's not that simple. As I believe is the case with most human beings, there are aspects of myself that I wish I could change and improve.

Sometimes I find myself believing that when you can't love the constituent parts of something, it's much harder to objectively love the whole. Of course, I can think of countless movies, books, albums, and so on that have parts that don't appeal to me, yet I still love the whole. Why, then, do I struggle to say the same about myself? Maybe it's because I find it hard to articulate exactly what about myself I don't like. I want to get better at first identifying my own perceived flaws, looking for ways to improve upon them, or simply finding a different perspective for looking at them. I believe that we should always be striving to become the best versions of ourselves, but I need to figure out how to better appreciate the various imperfect stages of myself that exist along that journey.

Another step along this journey should be trying to build more balance into my life. I'm aware that my working habits and expectations for myself are often unhealthy, and I want to find ways to start breaking away from them. I want to get better at coping with (or rather, altogether avoiding) burnout, and recognizing the signs of when I might be reaching a breaking point. Perhaps most critically, I need to get better at asking for help. It's foolish to think that I can or should try to navigate some of these issues alone. I'd like to think that it's not a matter of pride, but rather something I simply haven't given myself room to practice. However, it might be that I'm scared of relying too much on others as I don't want to reach a position in life where I feel trapped. I'm sure there are many others who have navigated similar feelings, and I should seek other perspectives. Why is it so easy for me to reflect and offer advice, to wax poetic about life, but so hard for me to heed my own advice?

In my life, I want to try to find work that is so fulfilling that it doesn't even feel like work but then I fear that other relationships in my life would get relegated or neglected. I know I'll need to figure out how to continue building meaningful relationships in the next stage of my life, as I know it will require different strategies than in college where an entire social network was laid out before me. At the same time, I want to continue fostering the friendships I made while at Olin. I know that the less I regularly engage with things (or people) in person, the more likely I am to grow apart from them. I'm determined not to let that happen with my Olin friends though, as this community is truly one of the most remarkable groups of people I believe I'll ever meet.

How will I get there?

Spirit of Generosity

Identify specific transformative experiences in my life that resulted from the generosity of others.

Thank them for it and let them know why these experiences were so meaningful.

Make a list of things I'd like to be able to provide for my own family some day, and the costs of doing so.

Identify low-cost random acts of kindness I can consistently do for the most important people in my life. Better understand what it means for myself to live comfortably—what does it cost, how much is it worth, etc.

Keep these goals and values in mind when looking for or negotiating job offers.

Have confidence in my own ability to do good and make the most of the resources I have—generosity doesn't always need to be expensive.

Inspiring a Mindset of Making

Reflect on the most salient takeaways from my ADE capstone experience—write them down somewhere.

Remain involved, or at least in the loop, with the ADE project as much as I can post-graduation.

Reflect more on the experiences and resources that made me who I am, but constantly check to make sure I am not imposing my own worldview onto others because I view it as superior.

Come up with creative design-thinking activities that require out-of-the-box thinking, and utilize my connections with educational groups (or find additional groups) to try them with.

Identify community maker resources in the communities where I spend the most time.

Identify groups in the community, likely students, who might need additional exposure or enrichment in their lives.

Provide these groups with some of the resources my team has developed in ADE, or additional resources I find or create post-graduation.

Explore ways to connect with students and understand their goals and dreams to understand how best I can be a resource to them.

Find other people interested in joining the cause.

Establish partnerships between local maker-related resources and students.

Identify groups or organizations that might be willing to finance ways to make these maker-related resources more accessible or affordable.

Don't necessarily expect to make a full-time career out of this, but certainly keep the possibility open.

How can I engage in this work in my free time?

Creative Space Design

Curate my own list of my favorite design elements I've seen so far in other works.

Digitally design my own ideal innovative/efficient space that I would personally want to live in, and identify associated costs. How can I design innovatively yet affordably?

Make enough money to comfortably afford building my design, and then live in it for a while.

Seek frequent feedback along the way and iterate accordingly.

Identify other groups doing similar things and assess if my goals align enough with theirs. Join or partner?

Identify underutilized spaces in my community that could be used for creative housing or shelter.

If things are going well, look into finding investors and/or incorporating as a business.

Identify key users and their wants/needs. Codesign!

Help others with wealth/power see the value in this endeavor—how might they get involved?

Design for Inspiration

Make a more comprehensive list of that which inspires me most.

Take better note of the specific things that inspire awe or creativity in me when I experience them.

Better understand the world of mixed media creation—what kinds of people do this for a living, in what contexts, and how do they make money?

Seek out design- and engineering-related jobs with a direct creative application.

Spend more time considering the intersection of creating engaging experiences and improving the lives of others.

Stay true to myself in my own creativity—don't sacrifice my own values for what I think other people want to experience, but figure out how to merge the two.

Constantly keep in mind, or try to understand, how people will interact with the work I make—keep the users involved.

Better Understanding and Accepting Myself

Read the book "*The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*" by Brené Brown.

Make a note of things I appreciate about myself when they come up, as well as things I want to improve on.

Try to get a better sense of what I'm comparing myself to when I identify these things—are they realistic/healthy expectations?

Try to use more constructive language like "things I want to improve on," rather than "problems I want to fix."

Make more Plans of Action for self-improvement with realistic goals and deadlines.

Try coming up with my own affirmations.

Reflect on how much control I do in fact have over my own life and experiences.

Keep a good collection of positive resources and role models in my life, and try to be the same for them.

Try to implement a personal daily check-in system for myself where I honestly reflect and record my emotions and self-perceptions.

Find others who might have also struggled with asking for help and see what I can learn from them.

Wherever I end up, be open to trying out new social experiences that might push me beyond my comfort zone.

Recognize that Zoom has come into my life at a crucial moment and that I should build habits around using it to keep in touch with my friends beyond college.

How am I empowered?

After four years here, I can say wholeheartedly that Olin has empowered me not just to become a successful engineer, but a successful member of society as a whole. By that, I mean that Olin has equipped me to jump into almost any scenario, quickly learn about or make some sense of it, and make connections to other disciplines or experiences. I find myself better able to empathize with others, to break down complex problems into manageable parts, to synthesize a variety of perspectives, and to reflect on the whole experience. These traits are part of what makes Olin students so unique as engineers, and more broadly as individuals too. This is why, even if I never touch another integral nor write another line of code in my life, I still feel like Olin has given me a foundational education to be successful in life.

Talent

One of the most meaningful and Grand Challenge-like projects I've gotten to work on in my time at Olin has been my ADE capstone project. For four semesters plus a summer, I've worked with the Community Development team as we strive to make meaningful change to the educational landscape in the Mississippi Delta region. We've established an out-of-school program in Clarksdale, MS that delivers technology, arts, and entrepreneurship activities to students who otherwise wouldn't get exposed to it. The single greatest source of talent that has helped to make this project a successful one in my eyes is our advising team of Kofi Taha and Amon Millner. One of my favorite things about ADE is that students enter the class with lots of relevant skills and knowledge, but they apply those skills to a context they're likely very unfamiliar with. This was certainly the case for me, and it is because of the expertise of my advisors that I was able to put my skills to such good use for this project. Kofi has a rich understanding of working in low-resource areas, breaking down systems of inequity, and the history and legacy of slavery and segregation that our project deals so much with. Amon has tremendous expertise in the maker movement, the deployment of STEM content in resource-poor areas, and creating meaningful engagements with youth. Together, they've given me a nuanced understanding of

what it means to apply my knowledge as an engineer to meaningful and potentially life-changing contexts, and I couldn't imagine trying to navigate the context of our project without either of them. The skills I learned in ADE will no doubt aid me in my ability to consider the real-world implications of my work beyond Olin, which I hope will result in me making a noticeably positive impact on the communities I'm a part of.

Multidisciplinary

The inherent and unavoidable multidisciplinarity of Olin is one of my favorite things about my college experience. I've had so much freedom and flexibility to navigate this, and my first standout experience on this front was my Engineering for Humanity class in my second semester first year. The course was my introduction to anthropology, which ultimately became my humanities concentration. Rather than teach anthropology from a theoretical perspective, we learned about the humanity of older adults by directly engaging with and designing for them. That was the class that made me realize that I wanted to pursue engineering with a direct application to people. That class opened the door to a summer research opportunity with the professor, Caitrin Lynch, where we studied the effects of deindustrialization on local textile workers. We as engineering students were given the freedom to work alongside the employees and seek out areas of opportunity in the factory that we could improve on, and then eventually execute our work. The project that we implemented—an improved fabric chute between floors—increased the efficiency of material flow through the factory and is still being used today.

One of the biggest opportunities I've had to engage in multidisciplinary work has been in my role as an inaugural student employee at the Weissman Foundry. As a cross-college nexus of making, the job requires an inherent understanding of how to engage with design work across disciplines. I feel like I get to use all of the multidisciplinary skills I've built up throughout the years at Olin as a means of helping others apply design and making mindsets to their own projects. Whether it's helping Babson students create prototypes for their businesses or making a sculpture that reflects the community at large, the unpredictable nature of the Foundry has led to some truly valuable multidisciplinary experiences. Between Olin and the Foundry, I've had opportunities to both learn, execute, assist, and manage this kind of work. I therefore feel confident that I'm well prepared to put my engineering and design skills to use outside the contexts of traditional desk jobs. If human-centered design is the route I'm passionate about pursuing, I know my multidisciplinary experience will come in handy.

Entrepreneurship

Olin's lens of entrepreneurship, "the creation of real value for real people," means a lot to me because it distances itself from the mindset of getting rich. While I like money just as much as the next guy, I don't want my own personal monetary gain to be the reason I do good work. On this front, I've had the opportunity to explore creating value for people in several ways at Olin. The LeadingAge Hackfest the summer after my first year let me work directly alongside older adults from nearby retirement communities to identify problems and design a product solution. Our invention was SmartStep, a smart shoe that sent a haptic alert to the sole of your foot when the shoe detected an upcoming obstacle. Even though our first prototype was a little rough around the edges, the judges saw the merit in what we had created and declared us the winners. This meant that a few months later, we'd fly out to New Orleans and present our product at the LeadingAge Annual Expo. I got to share our work onstage in front of 7,000 people, pitch the idea to investors, and run a booth in the expo hall. We had prototyped a product that could help real people in their daily lives, and we got to share that value with other industry experts in one of the most exciting ways possible. I was able to continue working on the project for another couple of semesters, even integrating it into my QEA class's module on wearables.

The whole experience was so thrilling for me and showed me early on in my Olin career that I really do have the power to make things of real value for real people.

Multicultural

I'm incredibly thankful that many of my multidisciplinary projects and experiences at Olin have also been multicultural ones. It's often far too easy to get caught up in the cultures of our own families and backgrounds, of our collective generation, of the supposed norms of future engineers, and even of our own college. The standout multicultural experience for me over my four years here has been my summer internship through ADE. For a few months in summer 2018, I worked in Clarksdale, MS with the Shifting Rhythms summer pilot program developed the ADE team I'd ultimately join. Although I grew up in Oklahoma, abound with southern culture in its own way, the Mississippi Delta was a new experience entirely for me. For the first time in my life, I was the only white person in the room, the one viewed as an outsider by the community. I looked for connections and similarities to build rapport with the groups I worked with and got to practice the valuable art of code-switching. Integrating myself into a culture with different race, values, and communication styles from my own was a formative experience that made me realize how important it is to understand the cultures and contexts that I work in.

Culture can take on many other forms than race, language, and region; this was one of the lessons I learned in my work as a Scout at the Weissman Foundry. The mission of uniting Babson, Olin, and Wellesley through a single shared space proved to be a very challenging one, largely due to the cultural differences across each of the three colleges. As Olin students, we often fall into the habits of stereotyping or even poking fun at the cultures of our neighboring institutions. While there might be some occasional merit to these generalizations, helping them propagate only leads to the colleges growing further apart. Working at the Foundry helped me to get a better perspective of the students at each of the three colleges. Developing an understanding of the intentions, values, and even lingo of these three cultures has helped me to better navigate the collaborative landscape of the Foundry. When you understand what each person has to gain and why they're acting the way they are, it becomes easier to understand how to help them and even collaborate to combine our strengths. This mindset is one I'm continuing to develop—I like the perspective of trying to understand people before judging or making assumptions, but it's definitely a practiced art.

Social Consciousness

Coming into Olin, I had a sense that I would learn the tenets of engineering, but in a nontraditional and more engaging way. What I didn't have a sense of is how much my experience at Olin would shift my worldview, especially with regards to the role I can play in the world as an engineer. One of the biggest realizations I've had is that there is far more to an engineer's job than the time spent developing or delivering a product. We, as creators within the world, bear the responsibility of the effects our work has on the world. We bear the responsibility not just to get things right, but to understand why things go wrong and take steps to remedy these wrongs. In this way, I believe that the best engineering necessitates an understanding of social consciousness. This is one of the reasons I'm particularly drawn to the field of human-centered design. When I make it a point to engage with users at the individual level, to understand their wants and needs and cultures, it becomes easier to make sure my designs are fulfilling their purposes. I don't believe in engineering done from exclusively behind a screen or at a desk. I don't want to work in an engineering job where I'd have to break through layers of red tape to even be allowed to consider other perspectives. The best way for me to be an agent of positive change in the world is to allow the needs of others to direct my work, rather than the perspectives of my superiors. My most salient work at Olin—ADE, Engineering for Humanity, hackathons, research, working at the Foundry—has been work where the needs and values of other

real human beings are at stake. I believe this is the environment where I thrive, and where I envision my future self doing my best work.

What lies beyond Olin for me?

I've seldom felt as much of a sense of belonging as in the Olin community. While the experience certainly hasn't been perfect, it's helped me to understand what values and characteristics I want to seek in future communities. Specifically, I want to be involved in communities, both professionally and personally, that promotes continual learning and improvement, values a breadth of perspectives, celebrates success and reflects thoughtfully on failures, encourages collaboration, isn't afraid to question its own paradigms, values fun along the way, and seeks to make positive change in the world. One thread that ties most of these traits together is simply open-mindedness. As I have learned at Olin, every single person on this planet has something that they can learn from one another, and we'd be foolish to intentionally close ourselves off from that. I also believe in staying engaged with communities for as long as possible. I've remained meaningfully engaged with my school prior to Olin, because just as it invested in me, so too should I remain invested in it. I want the same to be true with Olin, both for my peers and my professors. I want to keep in touch with all the community partners and friends I've made in Mississippi with my ADE project and to stay apprised of the work the team is doing.

At the same time, I recognize that one of the biggest opportunities for personal growth is to increase my exposure to new groups. It was for this very reason that I was adamant about moving out of state for college—I need to experience what else is out there to grow as a person. As I settle into life post-college, I want to seek out communities that can offer a change in perspective yet also cultivate a sense of belonging. For example, I'd like to find (or create?) a community of makers with a breadth of backgrounds, experiences, and eventual goals, but who can bond over a shared love of creating cool things. I'd like to find (or create!) a community of people interested in engaging with and improving local educational resources. I want to engage in a workplace community that values collaboration and personal relationships, rather than keeping everything entirely professional. At the same time, I want a community of friends who don't all have the same job, come from the same place, or have the same goals in life. Diversity, especially in perspective, keeps life interesting. Finally, I want to be a part of a community that sees value in me, a community that is willing to both celebrate my successes and help me work through my failures.

While I value making a thorough plan and being prepared, I want to keep an open mind about where I'll end up in life. I'm growing more and more at peace with the idea that there isn't one singular thing I'm meant to do in life, but rather perhaps several interconnected meaningful things. This document, though difficult to write, has been immensely valuable in helping me reflect on my identity, experiences, and goals as an individual. I'd like to be able to use it as a tool for future reflection. What will myself three years from now think about my current perspective? A decade out? Fifty years from now? I'm hoping for a long and meaningful journey in the life ahead of me, and although it seems quite hazy right now, it's one I look forward to navigating.