An Examination of Selective Achievement in Gifted Males

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Selective achievers are intrinsically motivated individuals whose performance matches ability only in specific areas that satisfy their interests and personal goal orientations. Through a qualitative research design, this study investigated the phenomenon of selective achievement by examining the experiences of 2 gifted university males. The findings indicated that strong intrinsic motivation, combined with independence and resistance to conformity, played important roles in shaping who these young men were as gifted selective achievers. These gifted males demanded serious intellectual challenges associated with acquiring practical knowledge that could assist them in reaching their personal goals. In addition, the young men identified educators' personalities and teaching styles as critical in determining whether or not they would put forth effort. Implications of the findings are presented along with recommendations for educators, counselors, and parents struggling to understand gifted young people who are selective in their approach to academic achievement.

"Johnny is not performing up to his potential." Teachers have written this comment on countless report cards for decades and perhaps nothing is as frustrating to educators and parents as a young person who appears to be wasting a strong intellect. Underachievement represents one of the most serious concerns of educators of gifted students and, although extensive research on this complex phenomenon has been reported, the issue remains an unsolved problem (Reis & McCoach, 2000). The complexity is intensified by the variety of prevailing definitions of underachievement as well as numerous explanations for the origins of underachievement among gifted students. In comprehensive reviews of the literature on underachievement, researchers have highlighted studies that found personality, family, environmental,

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social, and school-related factors as contributors to underachievement (Baker, Bridger, & Evans, 1998; Reis & McCoach, 2000).

Mindful of the multifaceted nature of underachievement, Schultz (2002) challenged the gifted education community to consider a new approach to research on the phenomenon. He maintained that rather than examine underachievement as a problem that needed to be fixed through interventions, researchers should investigate the perceptions of those students bearing the underachiever label by examining their experiences and expectations. Speirs Neumeister and Hébert (2003) responded to the challenge, reflecting that, "To shed new insight on the problem, perhaps educators and researchers need to deconstruct the all-encompassing label of underachiever by looking beyond the underachieving *behaviors* and, instead, critically examine the *attitudes* that drive those behaviors" (p. 222).

Speirs Neumeister and Hébert (2003) reported the perspectives of the educational experiences of Sam, a gifted university student who had been labeled an underachiever by teachers and family members. In their early data collection with Sam, they soon discovered that he was not an underachiever. Sam's internal characteristics were not consistent with those often associated with underachievement, such as poor self-regulation, inappropriate coping skills, or low self-image (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Instead, Sam's story was that of a goal-directed self-regulated learner who did things his way. Through Sam's case, Speirs Neumeister and Hébert were able to demonstrate that behaviors typically associated with underachievement are not always indicative of actual underachievement, and therefore do not always require an intervention. As a result of their work, they coined the term "selective achiever" to describe the inconsistent achievement-related behaviors uncovered in their study. Speirs Neumeister and Hébert conducted an *intrinsic* case study (Stake, 2000) of Sam in order to develop a better understanding of this specific case. Such research is conducted because of an intrinsic interest in the particular individual, and is not designed to develop new understanding of some abstract construct or provide grounded theoretical explanations (Berg, 2007).

The present study examines selective achievement through two *instrumental* case studies (Stake, 2000) to extend the work of Speirs Neumeister and Hébert (2003). Stake (2000) indicated that instrumental case studies differ from intrinsic case studies in that they are

designed to "provide insight into an issue or redraw a generalization" (p. 437). The objective of such research is to "help the researcher better understand some external theoretical question, issue or problem" (Berg, 2007, p. 291). With the work of Speirs Neumeister and Hébert serving as a foundation, we define selective achievers as intrinsically motivated individuals whose performance matches ability only in specific areas that satisfy their interests and personal goal orientations. To extend the work of Speirs Neumeister and Hébert, we examined two additional cases of gifted collegiate males. In doing so, we compared the experiences of these two young men in order to increase understanding of the important differences between underachievers and selective achievers.

Research Methods and Procedures

To understand the experiences of the two gifted university males in this study, the instrumental case study design enabled us to pursue an analysis of the phenomenon of selective achievement through intensive description (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). The goal of this study was to examine the school experiences of the two gifted collegiate males and understand their inconsistent achievement-related behaviors. The names of the individuals and institutions described were changed to protect the identities of the participants.

Selection of the Participants

The study took place on two college campuses, where the participants were full-time students enrolled in the final year of their degree programs. The participants, Shannon and Greg, were recruited for involvement in the present study through reputational-case selection; that is, they were selected based upon the recommendation of experts (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Educators involved with gifted education degree programs in their respective universities submitted nominations for Greg and Shannon. The university professors making the recommendations were asked to nominate males identified as gifted during their K–12 school experience who displayed inconsistent

achievement-related behaviors similar to those reported in the published report on Sam (Speirs Neumeister & Hébert, 2003) as well as other research literature. University professors were asked to consider behaviors such as inconsistent class attendance, sleeping through lecture-hall classes, surfing the Internet or checking e-mail on their laptop computers during classes, not purchasing textbooks, or failure to submit completed class assignments (Hébert, 2001; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Olenchak & Hébert, 2002).

Data Collection

We collected our data through a combination of in-depth interviews, observations, document review, and artifact analysis. The documents and artifacts we reviewed and interpreted included the students' university transcripts, résumés, personal web pages, and photographs of their campus social lives. As suggested by Hodder (2000), these materials provided meaningful evidence of the academic and social culture experienced by the two participants. In addition, we conducted observations of Shannon and Greg in campus settings that included classrooms, student lounges, student dining halls, and during social functions associated with the extracurricular activities in which they were involved. During the observations we maintained field notes, preserving a written account of what we saw, heard, and experienced while observing the behaviors and activities of the two participants (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

We conducted four in-depth interviews with each participant, each lasting 2 hours. The interviews took place over the course of one academic year. In conducting the in-depth interviews, we followed an interview guide that enabled us to ask open-ended questions and probe for details throughout each conversation in order to capture the participants' school experiences and explore their meaning (Patton, 2002). The interview guide used in the study is featured in the Appendix. The following research question guided the inquiry: How did the gifted university males interpret their school experiences and inconsistent achievement-related behaviors?

Data Coding and Analysis

Inductive data analysis procedures were used to analyze and interpret the data. This process involved managing data through coding, categorizing into themes, and determining relationships among the themes (Huberman & Miles, 1994). In the initial stages of analysis, we analyzed all documents, interview transcripts, and observation field notes by combing through the data for categories of phenomena and for relationships among those categories. Codes were systematically organized with words or phrases that identified similar patterns, themes, recurring ideas or relationships, and consistencies or differences between and among segments of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This coding procedure compacted data into equivalent categories and enabled us to organize, manage, and reconstruct meaningful components (LeCompte, 2000). These codes served as analytic tools that explained or complicated the data, allowing us to examine the data from multiple perspectives and to hypothesize further about the meaning of the data, which provided more possibilities for generating theory (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

The preliminary stage of coding was followed by an examination of single instances in the data, and meaning was drawn from them without looking for multiple instances. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) indicated that this strategy shifts the data analysis process toward interpretation as coding is "about breaking the data apart in analytically relevant ways" (p. 31) in order that we ask further questions of the data. In the next phase of analysis, we determined meaningful patterns and identified areas of consistency between two or more patterns or themes within the data. Through this process, we established generalizations that explained the consistencies in the data. To conclude our analyses, these generalizations about the participants' experiences were contrasted with the Speirs Neumeister and Hébert (2003) study and other published literature on achievement motivation in gifted students.

The analysis process in this study can be understood through the following example. In our first stage of coding, we noted similar patterns or commonalities in the data that were labeled using terms such as *focused*, *bound and determined*, *desire to work hard*, *determination*, and *internal drive*. In our second stage of analysis, we searched for

single instances in the data and noted that Greg spoke of his desire to acquire a coveted sports car. We had to consider how such an external reward might be consistent with internal motivation. When we examined the interview data from Greg more closely, we realized that what he was describing was in fact consistent with Shannon's experience. Greg simply highlighted the example of working hard to acquire a sports car as an example of a goal he established for himself and worked doggedly to reach. We concluded our analysis by establishing consistencies between several patterns in our earlier coding. In the final stage of analysis, it became apparent that relationships existed between and among these concepts, and they were eventually merged into a category labeled *intrinsic motivation*.

The Participants

Shannon

Greeting everyone in a loud, animated voice, Shannon reveled in presenting himself through his signature style. He wore spacious cargo jeans, tightly fitting white T-shirts, and heavy black leather boots. He maintained a muscular bodybuilder's physique, and kept his head shaved bald. To add a final touch, he wore a single looped earring that matched the heavy silver chain that held his keys and hung from his belt. Shannon was a graduate student in instructional technology at a major university in the Southeast and was employed as a computer support technician in the College of Education. A young man who enjoyed entertaining others, he arrived at work one day wearing a Superman T-shirt and proceeded to drop his trousers revealing to office secretaries he was wearing matching briefs. Although this behavior did not please his supervisor, Shannon was so respected for his knowledge of computers that university administrators would only shake their heads and look the other way when they heard stories of Shannon's daily antics.

Shannon was the product of a close-knit Irish Catholic family from a large urban community in Pennsylvania. He was the oldest of three children and was close to both his younger brother and sister.

Extended family members lived nearby in the city and Shannon enjoyed close relationships with several uncles whom he admired. Shannon underwent a complex identity search as an adolescent, experimenting with different identities that included dancer, rapper, cheerleader, actor, computer junkie, artist, creative writer, and poet. He joked that his early adolescence could have been compared to a movie, emphasizing it would be "one of those bad Saturday afternoon TV specials."

Shannon's struggles as an adolescent were exacerbated when his father moved the family from the urban Northeast to a suburban community in the deep South where he struggled to connect with teenagers from much different cultural backgrounds and philosophical worldviews. Following graduation from high school, he attended a community college for a year and then transferred to the state university's flagship campus. In spite of his continuing identity search, Shannon enjoyed his undergraduate years. He completed his degree with a double major in English and technical education, and acquired a position as a computer support technician at the university. Soon thereafter, his abilities were recognized by instructional technology faculty members who recruited him to join their graduate degree program.

Greg

Greg celebrated his role as a comedian and enjoyed his daily visit to the honors program student lounge. While other students were engaged in studying for final exams, he was sharing jokes with friends. Greg was an undergraduate mechanical engineering student at a technological university in the Southeast and enjoyed the camaraderie of the students in the honors program. An alumnus of the program visiting campus entered the room and called out, "Hey, Gearhead!" as he greeted his friend. Greg was delighted to connect with his old buddy and they instantly began discussing the latest innovations they had made to their sports cars. "Gearhead" had a passion for repairing old cars and had established a reputation as a knowledgeable car mechanic. Early in his collegiate experience, Greg determined that university life had become boring and he needed more to do, so he led

a team of fellow engineering students in his dormitory in designing and building a hovercraft from old car parts and model airplane parts.

The well-known car mechanic was a short young man with a wiry build, a Mediterranean complexion, and dark hair with cowlicks protruding in different directions, giving him the constant appearance of someone who has just gotten out of bed. With his disheveled clothing and a large backpack of textbooks strapped to him, his friends teased him for looking like an absent-minded professor. The teasing did not bother the good-natured comedian, as he was known amongst his peers as one of the most easygoing young men on campus.

Greg arrived at his university as a product of homeschooling. The oldest son in a family of nine children, Greg was 16 his when an automobile accident left his father unable to work for over a year. Greg thus became responsible for his father's business, and with the flexibility of a homeschool schedule and a newly acquired driver's license, he spent that period installing water purification systems throughout the county. Greg explained, "I grew up much faster than a lot of people my age." Being raised in a rural Tennessee community and being homeschooled meant that the typical high school experiences of athletic teams and extracurricular activities were replaced with time spent on his uncle's farm repairing tractors, mowing fields, and selling cattle. After completing high school, his strong ACT scores earned him a 4-year university academic scholarship. As a university senior, Greg was looking forward to the day when his family would take up an entire row of seats at graduation and celebrate his being the first of his family to earn a college degree.

Findings

The participants in this study demonstrated behaviors that are typically associated with gifted underachievers. Shannon described himself with some bravado as a "slacker" and reported that he had been voted "Most Likely to Be Homeless" by his high school senior class. He indicated that computer technology was where he dedicated his energy. He laughed as he explained, "Michael Jordan plays basketball. I do computers." Shannon was nominated for the study by a professor who noted he would consistently refuse to attend particular classes

that he felt were not worth his effort, did not interest him, or were not challenging. He saw no need for science and had failed biology for two consecutive semesters because he did not make it to early morning classes. In his third attempt, he admitted sleeping through many of the auditorium-size lectures; however, he passed the course with a grade of D. In his sophomore year, although he held a position as a computer support technician in a university computer lab, he failed his computer science class as he did not attend classes or submit assignments.

In Greg's case, if the content of a course involved material that he believed he already knew, that particular course "simply got back-burner attention." He clearly delineated his reasons for his selective achievement, "If the class doesn't add anything new to my understanding, it's just busy work." Greg noted that he did not stop attending the "back burner course"; it simply became more difficult for him to enjoy the course and he did not deliver his best academic performance for that professor. He took no lecture notes, he submitted little homework, and he tackled the readings the morning of an exam. He indicated that his classes in computer programming, measurement systems, and freshman English composition classes were his "back burners." Moreover, Greg decided that mechanical engineers did not need to learn foreign languages and his negative experiences with several semesters of Spanish and German reflected his refusal to take the classes seriously.

In Greg's case, the university honors program director became concerned when she noted that unlike the other students who visited the honors program lounge daily, he never appeared to be studying. Greg's friends in the honors program interpreted his comic behavior as that of a bright young man "slacking off" in school. He explained, "I got a rap as a slacker because I do slack quite a bit and I had a reputation for being a bit of a jokester." He maintained that because of his homeschooling background he viewed homework differently from his peers. "The basic mentality with some college students is the idea that time spent doing homework equates to productivity. Homework is something I do when I don't understand what's going on." He indicated, "I think that accomplishment equates to productivity. So if I can get my homework done in an hour and a half, then I don't see why I need to study for 3 more hours."

An examination of the themes uncovered in the data helps to explain the patterns of selective achievement within the two participants. Evidence of strong intrinsic motivation, combined with independence and resistance to conformity, played important roles in shaping their identities as gifted selective achievers. Another theme in the data indicated that these young men demanded serious intellectual challenges that were associated with acquiring practical knowledge. To them, learning had to be challenging, practical, and applicable to reaching their personal goals. In addition, Shannon and Greg saw an educator's personality, teaching style, and expertise being critical to whether or not they would put forth effort in a course.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is understood as undertaking a task to satisfy one's personal needs for competency or mastery (Shaffer, 2000). Shannon and Greg were intrinsically motivated young men. Strong intrinsic motivation is evident in Shannon's reflections on his experience of learning to read as a young child. He recalled how his preschool teachers read to him and how he would spend long periods of time completely engrossed in the books, wanting to know what they said. He explained, "It bothered me that I couldn't, so I just decided to learn it, so I taught myself to read. It's one of those things that I've always had. If I set my mind to something, I could do it." Once he taught himself to read he explained, "My mother bought me *Highlights* Magazine and I used to go schwoooom cover to cover with them."

Shannon's intrinsic motivation was also evident in his desire to learn a foreign language, "I wanted to learn Czechoslovakian from my grandmother, the poor woman. I was 7 and life revolved around comic books. There I was asking, 'Grandmother, teach me how to say Spider Man in Czechoslovakian!' I wouldn't leave her alone." This strong desire to learn another language was rekindled when Shannon spent a summer in Germany as a teenager. He explained, "I was bound and determined when I got there that I was thinking nothing but German. I didn't want to do anything else." He realized that if he spoke rapidly enough he could manage to "skip a few grammar rules" and still manage to communicate. He emphasized, "I was just so determined that I was going to speak German all summer. If I set my

mind to it, it's going to happen. I'm going to follow my goal through to the end."

Strong intrinsic motivation was also evident in other aspects of Shannon's life. As a high school student, he enrolled in a dance school and became involved in numerous musical productions throughout his large metropolitan community. His strong internal desire to work hard at something he enjoyed is evident in his description of his involvement in the program:

> At one point, I had a ballet routine to learn, a tap routine to learn, the jazz class routine to learn, and the company stuff that I was doing on top of all of that. I got involved in the music. I showed my dance teacher how to do something on his computer. We just sat at his computer and mixed it up. We needed extra measures per song, and we would cut and paste the music and record it on tape. So I had full control of the music and enjoyed doing more of the behind the scenes stuff. I had tons of stuff to do but I really loved it. I was into it. I was like, "Work me that hard. Make me know all this stuff!"

Greg was similar to Shannon in that his determination and internal motivation also was strong in several aspects of his life. Greg explained that one spring semester he decided he wanted to own his favorite sports car, a Datsun 280-Z. Smiling proudly, he explained, "By September I had it. That's how I tick. All summer I saved my money. I didn't spend. My objective was to have X amount of dollars so I could buy a Z and that's what I did." The purchase of the sports car was a goal Greg had established and met. Establishing a goal was critical to Greg, as once he determined his specific goal he worked furiously to meet it. This goal-directedness was equally evident in Greg's academic life at the university. He explained that his involvement in the honors program provided him with an important goal, specifically to graduate with an honors diploma. He explained:

> The honors program has provided me the motivation to set a goal. I must have a 3.5 as a senior to graduate with honors. This is something whereby if I do the work and do what I'm supposed to do, I will end up with this. End of discussion.

> So motivationally, that's given me the 3.5. I'm very goal oriented. If I decide that I want something, then I will obtain that something regardless of how much effort I have to expend in order to do so.

Although he had the reputation for being a comedian within the honors program population, he remained serious about reaching his goal. Greg's intrinsic motivation fueled by his self-established goal and his healthy sense of humor are evident in the following message he published his senior year on a listserv to university honors program students:

> Greg's long awaited and much acclaimed plan:
> My plan
> Step one: Get up
> Step Two: Go to class
> Step Three: Make good grades
> Step Four: Repeat 1–3 until done with school

As a product of homeschooling, Greg realized when he arrived at the university there were gaps in his knowledge that needed to be addressed if he were to succeed in his coursework. He realized he did not have the math background he needed, and more specifically, that he was lacking in his knowledge of algebra. He explained, "That meant that I needed to learn math. End of discussion. Either do math or not do engineering." Following the math placement test during freshman orientation, he was placed in pre-calculus with Dr. Gordon. He explained, "I learned within the first week that he was known as the 'demon professor,' but I had decided that I would work hard." Following poor results on several exams, he approached his professor: "I said, 'I don't know algebra. Please explain.' Once he did that I was able to go home and figure out everything I needed to learn from Algebra I and Algebra II." Greg went back later in the semester to thank Dr. Gordon for teaching him algebra and his professor pointed out that Greg had simply followed his advice and he had mastered the content on his own.

Shannon and Greg were both proud of working very hard to reach a meaningful goal that was important to them. External rewards designed by others were insignificant to these young men;

the challenge of reaching a personally selected goal was much more important to them. Greg's reflections on his university experience highlights his personal view of intrinsic motivation:

> When I got to Tech, I set a goal of graduating *in cursu* in mechanical engineering. I was motivated by that external goal. There were things I needed to do to achieve that goal. Internally I want to be the best I can be. I like external goals that I can shoot for but the motivation has to come from between my ears. You can't set up an arbitrary external motivation scheme that will always work for me. I have to buy into a goal.

Independence and Resistance to Conformity

Both participants in the study displayed a strong sense of independence and resistance to conformity. The gifted young men were confident in their independent approach to life and they insisted on doing things their way. Both were determined to play according to the rules they established for themselves and not those determined by society. Shannon described how his independence and nonconformity were highlighted in his e-mail signature. Possibly inspired by Thoreau, he included a quote that expressed how he felt about living life deliberately: "Beware of any new adventure that requires new clothes." He grinned and explained, "You are not going to change me. I'll play dress up for awhile, but it's not going to last."

Shannon's sense of independence and nonconformity was also evident in his views of himself as a student. "I've never been an overachiever and I don't see myself as an underachiever. I've always been able to skate by what I didn't feel like doing and save my time for something that I really wanted to do." He explained that in school he remained protective of his own time. He indicated, "I'll do this because I want to, and I'll do it on my time and that's it."

Nonconformity was a characteristic that Shannon had celebrated since childhood. He provided many examples of how he enjoyed being his own person and described how he enjoyed always "pushing the end of the envelope." He reflected on how he managed his image in middle school as he described his various styles. For a period, Shannon

enjoyed the bike rider style. "Whatever the bikers were wearing in the magazines, that's what I would wear." Later, he changed his image when he purchased all the "surfer looking gear" he could find. He reveled in this new look and how it made him stand out from his peers:

> I had spiked hair. I dug the spikes because they were kind of rebellious. I was messing with my mom's gels and changing the color of my hair. In eighth grade, I went from red to purple. If people picked on me about it, I took an "I don't care attitude." I was all about self-expression.

Shannon's commitment to self-expression continued throughout his adolescence as he maintained his nonconformity. He described another colorful episode during middle school, which provides further evidence of his adolescent self-expression:

> My dad had a briefcase sitting around and I dug it. I decided, "I'll take this briefcase to school and look professional." That was wild. There I was, t-shirt, jeans, carrying a briefcase thinking I was Alex P. Keaton. Wow! Did I get picked on for that. But I didn't care. I carried it around for a month. By that time, I had pretty much solidified the fact that "Shannon's just a little out there."

Shannon enjoyed people noticing that he was marching to the beat of his own drummer. In high school, when he enrolled in a local dance school and served on the cheerleading squad, he had a lot of explaining to do with his peer group. As a nonconformist, he enjoyed his rejoinders to the negative remarks made by other students:

> When people found out that I did ballet and jazz dancing they were like, "What are you man? Kind of funny? What are you, a cheerleader? Dancer?" I came back with, "Look dude, while you were showering with a whole team of nasty smelling guys, I'm hanging around with your girlfriend in tights! I don't want to hear it!" Being able to say that really gave me a step up as the new freshman.

Shannon acknowledged that his nonconformist approach to life got him into trouble with some teachers and coaches throughout high school. He grinned as he noted he, "did ROTC, got kicked out, did

the dive team, got kicked off." During his sophomore year he became involved on the high school yearbook staff and found himself in a power struggle with the teacher in charge. He admitted that he went out of his way to antagonize her. Although he realized he annoyed the teacher, Shannon knew that his computer skills were valuable to the group. He figured out a computer program that allowed the staff to index every student's name in the school. He also handled the artistic arrangements and got the computer program set up to do it all. When he had accomplished this, he had defined himself as an invaluable resource so the yearbook advisor could not get rid of him. He felt he had won the battle. He explained, "She was a control freak. She wanted everyone in the class to think like she did. When she realized she threw out her net, and it caught everybody but me, she was defeated."

Shannon and Greg were similar in that they believed they were able to design their own rules and could beat the system. Shannon explained:

> If ever there is a set way of doing something, and everyone thinks it has to be done that one particular way, or if the administration thinks they have something so controlled, I want to give them something they can't control. If someone thinks this is the way things have to be done, I'll try and do it a different way. I love finding a challenge to beat the system.

Greg set out to beat the system when he came up against a bureaucratic challenge at the university. As a homeschooled student, Greg had completed courses in American Sign Language (ASL) during high school; however, the state Board of Regents did not recognize ASL as a foreign language. The university considered this a "high school deficiency" and had determined that Greg would have to complete an additional foreign language course as part of his requirements for graduation. He made an attempt to survive Spanish until he withdrew from the course when he realized he would fail it. He appeared infuriated as he explained that he could not understand why a senior with a 3.5 grade point average had to take a remedial foreign language course to satisfy a high school requirement in a subject not required by his major field. This issue became his challenge and he was determined to beat the system. Greg noted, "I'm ninety-nine point seven

percent sure that there is someone on this campus who can sign off and agree that I don't have to do this." Greg persisted as he pleaded his case to numerous university officials. Frustrated with this situation, he explained, "I have yet to find anyone in the administration who has done anything other than say, 'Get over it. You have to do this.' I don't do well with that one. That's me." Greg lost this battle as he was unable to obtain an administrator's signature waiving the foreign language requirement. Instead, during his final semester of his senior year, he enrolled in German, struggled for a semester, and barely earned a C in the course.

Demand for Serious Intellectual Challenges Leading to Practical Knowledge

Both Shannon and Greg were intelligent young men who demanded serious intellectual challenges throughout their schooling experiences. They were willing to work hard if course content was personally meaningful and practical. This internal motivation to learn occurred naturally for Shannon when he became completely enamored with computer programming in his gifted education program in second grade. He thrived in the gifted education resource room, where he had the opportunity to work on writing computer programs in Basic. He described how his fascination with computers was supported at home and explained that when his father brought home a computer and put it in his hands, "things came together" and from that moment on, he was hooked. He saw computers as the perfect match for him intellectually, "the greatest combination of creativity and logic." He explained, "To me a computer is a huge endless palate, and if it doesn't work, you can make it work."

Shannon viewed computers as providing him with intellectual challenge through problem solving. He noted, "I could never be a car mechanic because there's no freedom there. It always has to work in one direct way, but with computers there's freedom, there are many paths you can take to solve a problem." Along with intellectual challenge, Shannon appreciated that the knowledge he gained could be practically applied. This practical application was the ingredient he needed for learning to be meaningful.

> With everything I do with computers, there's information that I have to use. It's all practical application. I remember things that I need and use. If I have no practical application for a piece of data, it doesn't stay in my head. That's why I don't do well with multiple-choice tests but I rock at essays. I can remember things that I need and use them in developing my arguments. . . . With biology, I said, "Screw this!" Give me an essay test on evolution and I'll ace your class. Don't have me reiterate the steps to mitosis and mycoses. That's pointless. I'm not learning anything.

The two young men were not impressed with theory and they demanded coursework that enabled them to acquire practical knowledge. Greg was influenced by his father's pragmatic view of education as he explained, "My dad has met more than one person with a Ph.D. who isn't worth shooting. They've educated themselves into idiocy." Greg viewed the university as a place to acquire the necessary skills to succeed as an engineer and saw little value in theoretical courses. He explained,

> If I have knowledge in my head and I cannot move it to your head or to someone else's head, it's worthless. In theory, there's no difference between theory and practice. But in practice there is. Theory is great but if it doesn't work in practice, then what good does it do?

Having met an engineer employed by the Tennessee Valley Authority, he had also been influenced by this man's delineation between two different types of engineers. Greg explained he now realized that there were engineers who were "really good at writing reports, engineers who could make things sound good but couldn't engineer themselves out of a wet paper bag." Greg saw the second group of engineers as "people who understand what's really going on, engineers who don't necessarily write flowery reports, but can solve problems." Greg decided, "That's the kind of engineer I want to be."

Both participants maintained that knowledge acquisition was far more important than simply making good grades. Greg elaborated on his educational philosophy and highlighted this perspective:

> Grades themselves are tertiary. The most important thing to me is "Do I understand what you [instructor] are doing?" When I leave here I don't want someone to hand me a problem and find that I don't remember anything from the class. To me, grades defeat the purpose of education. That isn't the point. The point is for me to be able to answer the question and know what I'm doing. So that's first, "Do I know what I'm doing?" Second, "Do I pass the class?" Third, "I'd like to make the highest passing grade in that class that I can. Have I done that? My focus isn't on the grade. My focus is on understanding what I'm doing, but I am going to receive a grade, and I might as well earn the best grade I can.

Greg's selective achievement approach to school was also evident in how he chose to invest energy in earning grades. He decided that any A he earned in one of his engineering classes provided him more opportunity to earn a B in one of his "back burner" classes and still maintain his goal of a 3.5 grade point average. "It sounds kind of silly, as though I'm enabling myself to make lower grades later, but that's what it is. I can make an A now and that will save me from having to make an A later in a class that I don't feel is important to me." Moreover, he indicated that he "loved to hit the sweet spot between just making an A or a B." By selecting to achieve just enough to earn the higher cutoff grade, he could dedicate more of his energy to other more meaningful or enjoyable components of his life on campus.

> I tell stories about my ME 2000 class, an introductory level mechanical engineering presentation class. My average was an 89.62. He had what he referred to as "rounding stars" which was something you did above and beyond. One of those would get you close to a point of rounding. I had an 89.62 and one rounding star, so I made a 90, which was an A. The way I viewed things I saw no reason to make a 100 average.

Because the university did not have a plus-minus grading system, once Greg earned the 90 average, he celebrated what he saw as having beat the system. As long as he understood the course content and could solve the applied problems, he was satisfied. He chose to maintain a

more balanced college lifestyle than his friends who studied constantly. Having been homeschooled, he appreciated the value of experiences outside the college classroom. He noted, "I chose to work hard enough to achieve my goal but also do other things in college like build hover crafts, play video games, spend time with friends, attend Honors Program conferences, try this, and experiment with that."

Greg's practical approach to his university coursework was reflected in how he approached homework assigned in his engineering courses. He defined homework as "something I do if I don't understand what I'm doing." He added, "As soon as I understand a concept, I no longer have to do the homework. It's practice, so if you know what's going on after 2 problems, there's no reason to do 15." He enjoyed the intellectual challenge he found in his engineering classes but had no tolerance for certain rules established by professors. He explained,

> I had some professors who wanted me to do things the way they wanted me to do things and whether or not I understood was irrelevant, it was that I do things the way they wanted things done. I did not respond well in those situations. For example, I got a D from a professor because I did not take notes in his class. I'd get tests back with 50s on them but I had every answer right. I simply didn't present the work the way he thought I should.

Greg's no-nonsense approach to his engineering major translated into whether or not he could solve engineering problems that he would encounter as a professional, not whether he had attended every class and taken impeccable notes. He emphasized, "The question at the end of the day is, when you give me a problem, can I go through the process you've taught me, draw the right conclusion, solve the problem, and show that I know what I'm doing?"

Shannon's view of grades also reflected his approach to the educational system and he took great pleasure in describing how he worked the system to avoid academic tasks he perceived were meaningless. He joked, "I probably should have gone into marketing instead of computers because I am pretty damn convincing. I could turn in a turd and get an A for it, because I would just polish it up really nice. I used to be able to pull stuff off. Teachers would buy my line of bull." Shannon

highlighted that he realized he was only putting in half effort and teachers were "handing me the B's." That did not concern him because he maintained that grades were arbitrary and they were really no indication of what he was learning. His attitude regarding grades represented his belief that schools should provide students with meaningful authentic experiences that prepare them for life beyond graduation:

> I just didn't care about grades. That drove my parents nuts, but I didn't care at all. I never failed a test because I hadn't learned it. I'd fail because I couldn't spit out the facts exactly the way the teacher wanted to hear them or I couldn't answer a bunch of multiple-choice questions. That was fine with me. Was knowing what color the grass was in *The Scarlet Letter* on page 78 going to make a difference in my life? Give me an essay and let me write about how this relates to life. Give me something substantial and I'll come up with solid arguments.

Influence of Educator's Personality and Teaching Style

Both participants in the study had strong opinions about particular educators in their school experiences. They claimed that they worked hard for adults they respected. Greg respected particular college professors for their expertise and passion for their respective fields. Shannon respected teachers who were flexible in their approach to teaching. The two young men perceived particular teachers as authentic individuals who cared about their students and were willing to allow them to learn according to their preferred learning style. When they respected the teacher and noted that teachers were flexible in their approach, they responded positively.

Greg spoke of having respect for teachers being critical to whether he chose to achieve. While being homeschooled he was involved in a community choir and he spoke of the choir director with admiration, a gentleman for whom he worked hard. "You had no choice but to give him respect because he knew so much." Greg appreciated the director's philosophical approach and noted, "He asked that you be quiet, not out of respect for him, but out of respect for others. The point wasn't 'respect me' it was 'respect the music.'" Greg highlighted a number of engineering professors whom he admired; however, those who

had the greatest impact on his motivation to achieve were instructors who were real experts in their field, passionate about passing on their knowledge to students, and individuals who taught for understanding. This way of thinking was evident in Greg's description of one of his favorite professors:

> We can walk down the corridors of Brown Hall and hear him out in the hall. He's very loud. He's as country good ole' boy as they come, but he knows thermal sciences up, down, left, and right. He's a very strong proponent of "Understand this stuff!" He knows it well enough that he can ask you the same question 15 or 25 different ways, and depending on which way he asks the question determines if you really understand the concept. He has a great fervor for what he's teaching, and his point at the end of the day is "Do you understand thermal dynamics? I really do love this stuff and I want you to understand it."

Shannon also appreciated teachers who were passionate about their work and he admitted that he worked harder for them than others. He described his experience with a significant high school English teacher who had a positive influence on him, "She just really enjoyed what she did. You could tell. She was really into it." He highlighted how this teacher's passion for her work affected him. "When I'm around somebody who's really fired up about what they're doing, then I'm into it too because I feed off of intensity. When somebody's just really intense about something, I'm like "Man, I'm right there with you!"

Along with appreciating teachers who were passionate about their work, Shannon also felt strongly about educators who allowed young people to learn according to their preferred learning style. He described his philosophy succinctly: "I will give what you're looking for teacher, if you will let me travel the way I want to. Show me where you want to go, and I'll get there running my own way." Shannon shared stories of several teachers during his K–12 school experience who allowed him to "travel his way." He described a journalism teacher's flexible approach to nurturing his talents and indicated how hard he was willing to work for this teacher:

> Mr. Jenkins never tried to confine what I was doing. As long as I had my editorials and my pictures in and I helped out with layout, it was done. As long as the paper was published on time, I could do my work whenever. I was like, "You rock, dude! You're the best teacher, Mr. Jenkins." He didn't try to put me on a leash. He didn't try to confine me. If I had something to contribute to the paper, he would let me find it, and he would nurture that. He would say, "This is the place where you chose to be, so let's roll with something, give me a little artwork here." "Okay, man, I'm all over this. Boom!" I would not leave my desk until it was done.

Shannon also described a senior English teacher who inspired him to major in education in college. According to Shannon, this seasoned professional was a woman "who would take kids like me who didn't really want to do squat and get them to perform and to do amazingly well because she just paid attention. Although he claimed "she wouldn't let too much slide," she allowed Shannon to write in his own style. He explained, "She appreciated that I write like I speak and tend to ramble, but she saw that I could get my point across and tie my arguments all together." When she assigned research projects, Shannon approached her about researching Dracula, a topic that was not included in her list of options. He explained to her, "I can write on Dracula, and I'll write the best damn paper I've ever written." The teacher accepted the topic, Shannon worked furiously on the paper and earned an A. Along with working hard for this teacher who maintained high standards for him, he saw her as a confidante. With this teacher, he shared his journal filled with teenage angst, thinly masked as creative writing. He explained, "If I wanted to talk about why I wrote it and what I was getting at, she would listen."

Discussion and Implications

We corresponded with the participants in the study following graduation from their respective universities, enabling us to report on what became of them as they entered their early careers. Shannon earned his master's degree in educational technology and serves as a

middle school coordinator of educational technology in metropolitan Atlanta. Greg earned his degree in mechanical engineering and is working in the private sector in Knoxville, TN.

The profiles of the two young men in this study were profiles of intelligent males who were mentally healthy, independent, satisfied with their accomplishments, and had positive academic self-concepts. Although some of their behaviors were consistent with those typically associated with underachievement, they were not underachievers. To understand Shannon and Greg and other students like them, educators and parents must refrain from the popular labels of "underachiever" and "slacker" to instead "examine the motivational dynamics causing the behavior" (Whitmore, 1986, p. 69).

From our work with the two participants we gained insights into the motivational dynamics of these gifted university males. We found that Shannon's achievement appeared to be shaped by adults who appreciated his identity search, celebrated his creativity, and allowed him to pursue his interests according to his preferred learning style. Greg was driven to achieve the particular goals he had established for himself: to graduate with a university honors diploma and to gain the practical skills he needed to succeed in engineering. Based on our study of the motivations, rather than the behaviors, of the young men, one can hardly consider them underachievers or slackers. These findings underscore the message Allen (1971) delivered:

> Before we assign the pejorative, slightly despairing label "underachiever" to a student, we ought to know what it is he aims to achieve. He may, in fact be achieving exactly what he wants, even if it is not what we want. (p. 530)

In comparing the cases of Shannon and Greg to Speirs Neumeister and Hébert's (2003) study of Sam, we noted both similarities and differences among the three gifted young men. Whereas Speirs Neumeister and Hébert found Sam to be reflective and metacognitive in his approach to developing an understanding of self, Shannon appeared to struggle more with an identity search as he experimented with multiple identities throughout his schooling. Greg, on the other hand, differed from the others in that he was the most goal-directed individual. It is interesting to note that in all three cases, teachers played a significant role in influencing the efforts put forth by the

young men. Sam insisted on teachers being respectful of students as individuals while Shannon and Greg worked hard for instructors who were passionate teachers, content experts, and flexible in their approach to dealing with students. In addition, all three young men were independent in their approach to life and seemed to thrive in their nonconformist approach to doing things their way.

With Speirs Neumeister and Hébert's (2003) intrinsic case study of Sam supported by the present instrumental cases of Shannon and Greg, the phenomenon of selective achievement needs to be further examined in gifted students during various stages of development. Additional instrumental case studies of selective achievers in the elementary, middle, and high school years would continue to contribute to our understanding of this issue. Another important issue to examine is whether selective achievement is evident in the school experiences of gifted young women. Educators may assume that girls are more willing to adhere to school rules and "play the game of school" than boys. Female selective achievers playing school according to their rules should be provided an opportunity to share their experiences and help us understand whether or not gender differences associated with this phenomenon exist.

Motivation literature highlights much of what we uncovered in our work with Shannon and Greg. Theorists and researchers have indicated that young people must value academics; they must see it as useful, purposeful, and interesting (Siegle & McCoach, 2005). When students enjoy a classroom activity or they value the outcome or byproduct of the activity, they will more likely remain motivated to continue with such activities. Siegle and McCoach (2005) highlighted the expectancy-value theory in their work and succinctly explained it as "the value a person places on either the task or outcome and the perceived probability of success determines the amount of effort the person will exert in attempting to complete the task successfully" (p. 8). Eccles and Wigfield (1995) have developed an expectancy value model that includes several achievement-related factors that influence an individual's expectancies and values. They maintained that a young person's motivation to complete a task evolves from three task values: attainment, utility, and intrinsic values associated with the task.

The attainment value involves the importance students attach to a task and how it connects to their view of personal identity and core

values. For example, Shannon saw himself as a highly creative individual and believed that computer technology enabled him to pursue creative activity; therefore, he was motivated to learn all he could about computers. Utility value appears to also be critical in maintaining motivation within these selective achievers, for it involves how particular tasks are connected to an individual's present or future goals. Greg did not see how learning a foreign language would help him as a mechanical engineer, however, coursework in his major held high utility value in terms of the later reward for him in his chosen career. Intrinsic value is that which comes from pleasure involved in a task. Siegle and McCoach (2005) indicated that young people are likely to be "intrinsically motivated to pursue activities that are moderately novel, interesting, enjoyable, exciting, and optimally challenging" (p. 13). Shaffer (2000) described intrinsically motivated individuals as those undertaking a task to satisfy a personal need for competency or mastery. Such intrinsic value was evident in Shannon's experience wanting to learn a new language from his grandmother as a child, his early fascination with computers, and the enjoyment he found in using his technological skills in helping to support the theatrical production. In Greg's case, we see the intrinsic value emerging in his enjoyment of working on cars, his self-taught algebra experience, and his experimentation with building a hovercraft. These two young men remind us that motivation has nothing to do with ability—which is what a person *can* do—but everything to do with what a person *will* do. As evidenced in the experiences of Shannon and Greg, selective achievers are capable of doing well; they simply are not motivated to do so in areas that they perceive as irrelevant to their lives.

This study corroborates the work of researchers and theorists who have maintained that gifted students benefit from self-selection of topics, interest-based curricular experiences, self-determination of their educational goals, and opportunities to work in their preferred learning style (Betts & Kercher, 1999; Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Tomlinson, 1999). Shannon reveled in his experience of working on a theatrical production in which he learned new dance routines and applied his expertise in computers to the technological details behind the production. Greg was delighted to report how hard he worked to do remedial work in mathematics in order to address the gaps in his knowledge of

algebra and maintain his standing with the "demon professor" in his engineering program.

It is interesting to note that these gifted males were focused on practical knowledge and had little use for anything theoretical. Educators and counselors in gifted education should consider that not all gifted individuals appreciate the highly theoretical, philosophical, abstract, or aesthetic topics typically associated with advanced programming. Shannon and Greg were far more concrete in their interests and approach to learning, and valued practical intelligence: the "ability to adapt to, shape, and select everyday environments" (Sternberg et al., 2000, p. 1). Sternberg and his colleagues indicated that practical intelligence is essentially a form of developing expertise. In other words, "individuals who have developed the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to succeed in a particular domain" (Sternberg et al., p. 1) are viewed as experts. Shannon and Greg's view of schooling was consistent with Sternberg's conception of practical intelligence as they insisted that school experiences should be designed to help them acquire the necessary skills they would need to succeed in their chosen domains of computer technology and mechanical engineering. As we reflect on the philosophical value systems of these two students and we consider Sternberg's notion of practical intelligence and expertise, we may want to consider the value of an apprenticeship or career mentorship approach for gifted students like Shannon and Greg.

Not only did their learning styles emphasize concrete and practical knowledge, but both young men in this study also demanded an efficient way of learning. Greg provided his philosophy of homework assignments as being "something you do when you don't understand what you're doing." He succinctly explained the rationale behind the strategy of curriculum compacting, a method of streamlining the regular curriculum for students who are able to master it at a faster pace. Gifted education specialists have long advocated this approach (Reis, Burns, & Renzulli, 1992) and would argue that this method would prove successful in university classrooms. Higher education has provided college students opportunities to streamline coursework by credit through examination such as the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP; College Entrance Examination Board, 2007). The findings of this study should convince more universities to expand this concept to more required college courses. This would allow able

students to test out of courses in which they have mastered the content and enroll in more intellectually challenging courses that are better suited to address their educational needs. Moreover, university educators may also want to reconsider assessment of students. The participants were very clear in their views of grades, and Greg's statement that "grades are tertiary" is representative of their attitudes. Completed tangible products shared through portfolios or other alternative methods of assessment may be more appropriate for students who thrive on intellectual challenges that result in concrete, applied practical knowledge.

The independence and resistance to conformity evidenced in the participants should not surprise teachers and parents of gifted and creative adolescents. Characteristics and traits such as questioning rules and authority, indifference to common conventions, rebelliousness, stubbornness, and independence have long been recognized by researchers in creativity (Davis, 2004; Torrance, 1962). Although these qualities may upset parents and educators, those working in gifted education are challenged to identify these characteristics in bright young people and to channel their creative energy into constructive outlets. Fortunately, the two young men in this study discovered appropriate outlets for their creativity as evidenced in Shannon's involvement in cheerleading and theatrical productions, and Greg's delving into the design and construction of a hovercraft.

Educators and parents working with students like Shannon and Greg need to understand that although such traits may be aggravating, these independent and nonconforming behaviors are often a normal part of adolescent development for gifted and creative individuals. However, the parents of a nonconforming selective achiever face a real challenge when their child delivers a report card with all A's and one F. It becomes critical for parents to investigate the attitudes and motivation that led to the decision to flunk that one particular course. Is the issue a mismatch between teaching style and student? Does the child complain of a lack of authentic learning opportunities in the curriculum? Is the teacher's knowledge level a problem? Is the classroom environment problematic?

The experiences of Shannon and Greg highlight the critical role that teachers play in shaping intrinsic motivation and achievement in school. These gifted young men appreciated particular teacher

characteristics and were willing to work hard for those whom they admired as being experts in their fields, passionate about their profession, and respectful of students as individuals. These findings are consistent with the literature on effective teachers. Teachers as socializing agents in the classroom have been shown to have significant influence in affecting student motivation (Brophy, 2004; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). A teacher who maintains a respectful learning environment and values students' experiences while remaining sensitive to their needs is integral for fostering intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi & McCormack, 1986; Oldfather, 1994).

In addition, Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) established that when teachers allow for student choice, young people are more likely to view the curriculum as related to their personal goals. Researchers have also found that students value academics more when they feel emotionally supported by their teachers (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000) and that teachers who create a climate of mutual respect by both listening and sharing are able to translate their passion for teaching and learning to their students (Oldfather & Thomas, 1998). In contrast, if students perceive that a teacher's strategies emphasize excessive control, they may engage in a power struggle to gain the upper hand (Manke, 1997) as was evident in Shannon's struggle with his high school yearbook advisor.

Instead of seething in frustration, educators at all levels need to be committed to searching for solutions. This may require taking a critical look at classroom practices. Do educators need to work on establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect? Is a more constructivist approach in order? Do students have opportunities to engage in authentic and meaningful learning experiences? This may simply mean allowing more choices or making sure that lessons are more practically oriented. Educators need to be open to change and willing to investigate ways to hone their craft and create opportunities to help students succeed.

While educators consider how they might design their classroom environments and modify their teaching, parents and counselors must be totally honest with the selective achiever and discuss the ramifications of deciding to selectively achieve. If one chooses to fail a course, how does that grade of F affect one's grade point average (GPA)? How might that lowered GPA later affect their lives when applying to competitive

colleges or graduate school programs? The selective achiever may enjoy "playing the school game" according to his rules in high school and college; however, will those rules be accepted in his professional domain later on in his life? Rather than engage in heated arguments, parents and counselors may need to provide the selective achiever a "wake-up call" by sharing concrete evidence of the competitiveness he will encounter in applying to colleges and graduate schools or acquiring his preferred job. Investigating graduate school requirements on the Internet with the selective achiever could make a difference.

From this study, we realize that counselors as well as university advisors need to be aware of the differences between underachievement and selective achievement. Underachievement is often long-term (Peterson & Colangelo, 1996), and is generally indicative of an underlying social or emotional issue (Rimm, 2003) or possibly a learning disability (Baum & Owen, 2004). Selective achievement, as demonstrated in the two participants in this study, is characterized by emotional health, a stable home life, and no real learning difficulties. Gifted students may simply be much closer to the intrinsic end of the motivational continuum than their age-mates (Gottfried & Eskeles, 2004) and this can create a mismatch in the learning environment. Remaining flexible with these young people may be the most effective approach for teaching them.

The insights gained from Shannon and Greg should inform the ways that educators, counselors, and parents value achievement in gifted young adults. The close examination of the young men in this study paints a picture that appears much different from that of underachievers. The picture reveals two intelligent young men who were developmentally advanced, creative, independent, self-directed achievers. By closely examining the attitudes and motivations of two gifted males who insisted on "playing the game of school" according to their rules, we have highlighted important differences between underachievement and selective achievement. Through the insights provided by students like Shannon and Greg, we may begin to conceive of more suitable and effective approaches to educating gifted students.

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Appendix
Interview Guide

Name and place of birth

Family background

Parents' education and employment

Family

Parents

Describe your relationship with your parents.
Describe your parents' attitude toward academic achievement.
Describe your parents' attitude toward your gifts and talents.

Siblings

Describe your relationship with your siblings.
Describe your siblings' educational experiences and academic achievements.

Extended Family

Describe your relationship with members of your extended family who influenced you during childhood or adolescence. Explain how they influenced you.

School Experiences

Elementary School

What are your earliest memories of elementary school? What were you like as a student?
Trace your elementary school experiences, K–5.

Describe any significant teachers during your elementary school years who may have shaped your views of school and academic achievement.
Describe any important friendships in elementary school that may have influenced your academic achievement.
Describe any significant events in your K–5 school experience that may have influenced you positively.
Describe any significant events in your K–5 school experience that may have influenced you negatively.

Middle School

What are your memories of middle school? What were you like as a student?
Trace your middle school experiences, 6–8.
Describe any significant teachers during your middle school years who may have shaped your views of school and academic achievement.
How did the change in curriculum in middle school affect you?
Describe any important friendships in middle school that may have influenced your academic achievement.
Describe any significant events in your middle school experience that may have influenced you positively.
Describe any significant events in your middle school experience that may have influenced you negatively.
Describe your involvement in any extracurricular activities in middle school. How might those experiences have influenced you?

High School

What are your memories of high school? What were you like as a student?
Trace your high school experiences, 9–12.
Describe any significant teachers during your high school years who may have shaped your views of school and academic achievement.
How did the change in curriculum in high school affect you?

Describe any important friendships in high school that may have influenced your academic achievement.
Describe any significant events in your high school experience that may have influenced you positively.
Describe any significant events in your high school experience that may have influenced you negatively.
Describe your involvement in any extracurricular activities in high school. How might those experiences have influenced you?

College

Describe your college application and decision-making experience.
Describe your earliest memories of your freshman year.
Describe your experiences of living on/off campus during your college years.
Describe any important friendships in college that may have influenced your academic achievement.
Describe specific experiences with significant university instructors who may have influenced you significantly.
Describe your involvement in any extracurricular activities in college. How might those experiences have influenced you?
Describe any significant events during your college experience that may have influenced your academic achievement.

Description of Self

Characteristics of Self

What do you see as your academic strengths and weaknesses?
What personality characteristics do you see within yourself that make you an interesting individual?
What special interests, hobbies, or passions do you enjoy that make you an interesting individual?
Where do you think your motivation comes from? Explain.
What do you see as factors contributing to your achievements in school? In life?

Goals for Future

What are your career goals? Where do you see yourself professionally 10 years from now? 20 years?