

**As we review your application, what more would you like us to know as we consider your candidacy? (1,000 words)**

A thunderous knock reverberated against the bathroom stall. "We know you're in there, you fag." His voice was thick and piercing and he punctuated his insults with malicious intent. "Come out, Chinaman." I sat on the toilet seat and chewed through my fingers, my eyes slanted downward on the steel toe boots I prayed would soon disappear.

As a gay, first generation Chinese student at an all-white, Catholic school, I was thrust into an unfiltered, cynical world that for a long time, felt as if it was caving and collapsing upon me. I was confined to walk the narrow range of career paths set forth by my parents, who served as a constant reminder that I was standing on the shoulders of giants. And for their sacrifices, my future, both personal and professional, would be indebted to them. That is until I made a single life-altering decision that would leave me abandoned in a foreign land, without support, without love, but with direction, with purpose—with a dream.

My path to design has been the result of a search equal part methodical and instinctual, of thought processes both logical and emotional, culminating in a decision both inevitable and unexpected. Growing up, genuine expression was a luxury I wasn't afforded, constantly forced to closet my bruises and sexual orientation from my ultra-conservative parents. In order to release that tension and authentically express myself, I found refuge in drawing. I spent hours studying the craft in secrecy—and the visions of aesthetic innovation, superlative construction and emotional sustainability began gradually influencing my expression, my choices. Completing a piece felt like having just traveled down a visually and emotionally draining roller coaster. It was cathartic, and the thrill was infectious. Each drawing further fueled my enthusiasm to pursue innovative work, which subsequently deepened my own personal experiences. From there, I began designing websites, which gave me the chance to connect with an online community of designers—people who were interested in *me*, not the color of my skin or the sound of my gayness.

While design was my refuge, it would take me many more years before I could make it my calling. I came out at NYU, where I found a supportive LGBT community, and began living an openly gay life as a technology consultant. But whenever I went home, I was closeted. I was 24 when I mustered up the courage to inform my parents of my orientation and my decision to pursue design. I still remember the look of disgust on their faces. Overnight, I was ostracized, and was forbidden from ever associating with them again.

In Chinese, the word for "crisis" is 危机, which also bears the meaning of opportunity. While breaking with my family was heartbreaking, it was also liberating. I had been living under their expectations and depriving myself from the design career I truly desired. I quit my technology job and booked a one-way ticket to San Francisco, the mecca of design. It was like opening the curtains and seeing the daylight. Awaiting me, was my dream, my purpose. I knew my persistence, commitment and desire would be

tested. Lacking hard design skills, I began studying, attending workshops and taking on pro bono projects to build a portfolio. Within 5 months, I landed an internship that usually requires a design degree, and I have since risen to a senior level position in a highly competitive field.

Unlike many of my coworkers, instead of thinking entirely in pixels, I also think in systems—how the digital products we design come together to provide a customized consumer experience. My background in cognitive psychology affords me with the ability to rationalize with various ideologies and tastes, to bring to light the complexities of consumerism hiding in the dark.

While at Hatch Design, I lead the patient portal redesign for Epic. Epic's C-level hired us to collaborate with the technology team, led by a bright woman named Paula. Each week, I would present our designs to her team and she would rip them apart, blindsiding us with information to which we weren't privy. It was a classic case of "in-group vs. out-group," and I needed to make her feel included in the design process. At our next meeting, I suggested that we spend the time brainstorming together. I facilitated a "how might we" design sprint, and we came up with several new ideas for the patient portal. Everyone left the meeting inspired and motivated to approach the project with a fresh perspective. From there, I organized subsequent co-creation workshops to further flesh out these new concepts, and they became an integral part of our overall solution. At the end of our engagement, I invited Paula to unveil the new patient portal experience with me, and we were able to get C-level approval because of our united front. Sometimes clients want to feel personally invested in the outcome, and often times this means facilitating and helping them tap into their own creative potential.

Hatch Design gave me an external perspective on design's role in an organization, but I wanted to go native and understand its place within a company's cohesive operating model and strategy. My curiosity and ambition would lead me to Cole Haan, where I was forced to adopt an entirely new business mentality. Executives weren't merely interested in ideas backed by surveys. They wanted to see design's return on investment through quantifiable data. In recent years, consulting firms such as McKinsey, Deloitte and Accenture have been snapping up design studios. And when thinking about iconic design-driven companies such as Apple and Nike, there is always a direct line between the head of design and the CEO.

As an eventual leader in the design industry, I must speak the language of business and learn the skills of general management to give design a seat at the table. An education at INSEAD will give me the opportunity to take bold strides in fascinating directions. I look forward to learning from Professor Singh, who specializes in the intersection between Design Thinking and Business. And I expect to be an active member at the Innovation Lab, which houses several entrepreneurs-in-residence who are champions of design thinking in business, such as Alexandra Gordon (MBA '01). Finally, after speaking with student Greg Johnson (MBA '16), I learned about INSEAD's opportunities for pursuing business and design after graduation. The Design Club he leads has strong relationships with design consultancies such as IDEO and Frog Design, both of which are companies I

would enthusiastically target for jobs after my MBA. With more experience, I hope to start my own design consultancy that helps organizations improve tolerance and diversity in the workplace.

My decision to pursue design was the result of an emotional search, yet my instincts ultimately decided for me. The struggle for acceptance has long been a personal battle of mine. And sometimes you can be left with nothing. But if you view those impediments as opportunities, if you jump into that current, and drift away from the cynicism and the ridicule, it may carry you to the places you always envisioned. And when time slows, and the chorus of voices grow quieter, and that look of disgust and that foreboding knock on the bathroom stall recedes into your memory, with a laser-like focus, you can live in that dream for the rest of your life.