

SAMPLE MARSHALL SCHOLARSHIP RECOMMENDATION



MYTHIC
UNIVERSITY

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I am pleased to transmit to you the Marshall Scholarship application of a most extraordinary person, John Lerner, a senior in our Engineering Science curriculum.

The engineering science curriculum at Mythic University is an honors program that, in its inception, pre-dates the University Scholars program. It is a program whose rigor normally inspires students to stretch out their academic career by scheduling less-than-full loads. John Lerner has taken the opposite approach and attacked this program at full tilt. In every semester that he has registered at Mythic University he has taken at least the maximum number of credits permitted, if not more. One spring semester he took 20 credits, an overload of one, of which 12 credits or four courses involved honors work—a commitment above and beyond the standard syllabus. In addition to requiring rigor beyond that contained in an already rigorous program, the engineering science honors program also requires an honors thesis. Working with two of our professors, John has undertaken a program of senior-year research on the heterojunction of amorphous and crystalline silica, e.g., materials for solar cells, that is of a publishable caliber.

In the current Fall semester, John has maintained his impressive pace. A graduate course in applied mathematics jostles with a performance course in piano. Normally, the latter is restricted to majors in piano performance, but his ability led to the exception. These courses are accompanied by two advanced courses in semi-conductors (transistors, solar cells, and the like), his honors thesis, and a course in the Old Testament.

John's approach to academics has a surprising consistency with something he said about himself with respect to his talent as a pianist. In discussing his choice of the First Movement of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 as his competition piece for soloist for the Johnstown Symphony in Pennsylvania, he admitted that it was a popular, if not overdone piece. But, responding to a question about choosing something more academic or esoteric, he said that "its crashing chords" and broad sweeps appealed to him, that they revealed his nature. Instinctively, and instantly as he spoke, his hands reached out, fingers spread, to reply to those chords. His headlong fling at his coursework matches this view of his nature.

John suspects that his piano talents may have some bounds, but is confident that he has ample talent to pursue a career in music rather than the obvious successful engineering career predicted by his grades. Aware that he carries within himself two academic successes, two potential careers, he has been reading and studying above and beyond anything required by Mythic University to help him to understand himself and, thence, to map and project the contribution that he can make

in the future. The program of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics that he has planned is ideal for him. Without losing touch with his applied science background, the program will help him to understand and, thus, to voice the complexities of today's world. He is ready to contribute.

He senses that solar cells, on which he is working for a senior thesis, represent a passive technology that can be used for betterment in the Third World without the cultural disruption associated with more active technologies such as mechanized farming. He is intelligent enough to know, however, that even solar cells—batteries that are never used up—can produce disruption to some societies. He has said, and it is more than credible, that the answers for him will come out of philosophy, political science, a dose of economics, and even a strong lacing of theology.

Pleasant in demeanor, quiet in his approach, yet quick to smile, there is nonetheless firmness in his purpose and steel in his resolve. It is eminently clear that John Lerner means to contribute of himself in a selfless and substantial way. This giving is more than the ordinary charities that are automatic to his agrarian and Mennonite background (the gathering of crops for the less able or the provision of succor for the less well)—he is searching for the tools that will consolidate his interests into a platform for the doing of good that is expected of him by his traditions.

If I have any concerns about John's future possibilities, they are that he has so recently entered the traditional academic and social world. Coming from a farming and Mennonite family in Pennsylvania, John began his college career at Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Pursuing mathematics and science at EMC, he began to sense his dual career possibilities. A music teacher there, according to John, opened an ordinary talent into an extraordinary one. At the same time, he became intrigued by engineering and fashioned his move to Mythic University. Both engineering as a field and Mythic University were well beyond the wall of his upbringing. He is firm in his tradition and his faith, but, clearly, he wants to wed the best of what he is learning from beyond the cloister with the simple benevolence of his background. Growing up in a simple, religious tradition meant that some of the trappings of culture came later to him than they do to others. Music and dance are newcomers to the Mennonite tradition; he began his piano lessons only in the fifth grade (at age eleven). He reads at a gallop to catch up on the richness of literature, philosophy, and theology that, if not denied, is not contained either in his early education or in a standard engineering curriculum. He reads to understand his own religion and those associated: Quaker, Shaker, etc. As he discusses what he knows of his background, he assumes a fragile solemnity, as if to say, "Do not find this trite, for it is too important to me to be so," when he suggests that it is a Shaker axiom "to do the common things uncommonly well."

The award of a Marshall Scholarship will ensure that John Lerner will do uncommon good.

Sincerely,

Janet Teacher

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Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Vice Provost