

National Merit Scholarship essay  
by [Brian Tomasik](#)  
fall 2004

Note: My views on environmentalism have changed since writing this piece. For more on my current stance, see "[Applied Welfare Biology and Why Wild-Animal Advocates Should Focus on Not Spreading Nature](#)".

*Prompt: In your own words, describe your personal characteristics, accomplishments, primary interests, plans, and goals. What sets you apart? Your essay should be about 500 words.*

The single most important facet of our own existence is the impact that we have on the lives of others; the extent to which we make the world a better place is what ultimately matters most.

It is this belief that has driven many of my accomplishments. I am president of Youth Ending Hunger, a high-school club that draws attention to and seeks to address the issues of hunger and poverty by organizing "hunger banquets," volunteering at the local food bank, and donating money to larger hunger organizations. I also lead the Student Environmental Action Coalition, a club which helped to reinstate recycling of cans and bottles at the high school, which hosts speakers and circulates petitions during "Earth Week," and which volunteers at the Albany Pine Bush, a globally rare ecological site. Both with the members of these clubs and on my own, I regularly write advocacy letters to members of Congress, executive agencies, and corporate decision makers.

For the past two years, I have been working to encourage my school district to purchase recycled copy paper. After researching brands, prices, distributors, performance in high-speed copiers, and environmental benefits of recycled paper, I met with the superintendent of schools to discuss my proposal. Though he was unwilling to commit the extra money for recycled paper, the superintendent did decide to include in future bids a request for prices of both recycled and virgin paper so that price differences between the two types could continue to be compared.

My concern for the environment also extends into the realm of science. When my tenth-grade chemistry teacher required his students to carry out an independent research project, I chose to take water samples from the local reservoir and measure their concentrations of phosphorus, a chemical that affects eutrophication and drinking-water quality. I continued this research over the next two summers, and I am now working it into a formal report that I will submit to the Intel Science Talent Search this fall.

This undertaking reflects my passion for the methodical steps by which a scientific experiment is performed; yet, my academic interests extend far beyond science. I helped to found a Math Club at my high school, and I am a member of the Political Activist Coalition, which discusses current events. I am an ardent supporter of the Green Party, and I have a special enthusiasm for the history of third-party movements. In my free time, I enjoy everything from playing tennis and walking in the woods to deriving math formulas and learning about the intricacies of grammar.

Because I wish to continue exploring such a wide array of subjects, I will attend a small liberal-arts college during my next four years. I do not yet know what type of graduate education I will pursue—it may be anything from physics to environmental law—but I do know that it will in some way serve the general good of society, for it is only by applying our reason, our persistence, and our alacrity for life to this purpose that we can truly discover the greatest depths of joy, fulfillment, and meaning.