Honors portfolio statement

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In many ways, my first quarter at the University of Washington was as expected. By this, I mean that my long- and medium-term goals have only shifted negligibly; in other words, I did not have a "college freshman epiphany". My intended major of study is still computer science, and my course plan is still very much centered around fulfilling prerequisites to apply for the major. However, the curriculum planning assignment did get me to look more closely at the available courses, so my plan did become more concrete over a longer period (i.e. prior to the assignment, my curriculum was only concrete for this year, but now I at least have a (crude) "fallback plan" for the following three years as well).

I suppose one thing that is surprising is that although my network of friends has expanded meaningfully and significantly this quarter, this was mostly done through untraditional ways. My impression is that most people expand their social circle through meeting new people in their classes, dorm floors, clubs, and so on. Although I've met some interesting people through these means, I think I've had my most meaningful interactions online and with people I first met online. For instance, I've continued to use Quora[1] and Facebook as a means to connect to people; I regularly ask questions on both sites, interacting with a wide array of people based on shared interests. Indeed, I've attended several Quora meetups in order to interact with some of these people in person. I've also continued to become more interested in the effective altruism movement, by interacting with people online, but also by attending the Seattle Effective Altruists' meetups in order to interact with these people in person. Perhaps even more untraditional (though in some sense more traditional), I went ahead to host an effective altruism meeting at UW, which went fairly well. Moving to a college environment and having many of my interactions being shaped by people I first met online has been at once a liberating and peculiar thought—although I've always had problems interacting with people in real life, I did not anticipate that my interactions with people would be transformed in this way.

I suppose another thing that surprised me was what I learned during the honors faculty panel. The impression I got was that the honors faculty present didn't really "plan" to become professors, which is quite different from what I'd heard from other sources (that say becoming a professor requires extreme tenacity and long-term planning). The role of luck was emphasized as well, especially by the professor who taught medieval history, who was offered a position at UW along with her husband, who also teaches medieval history.

I'm not sure that I learned about too many resources in Honors 100. I thought that the scavenger hunt was surprisingly good at helping me discover "hidden" places on campus like the Parnassus café and the math tutoring rooms, for instance. However, I thought that I had already gotten extensive information from spending time on Quora, which has a dedicated group of UW students and lots of UW-specific information.

My goals for this year and for my time at the University of Washington have several dimensions.

- In terms of navigating the university system, this year I would like to be accepted to the computer science program, and by the end of my time at UW I would like to have completed the degree requirements for that major.

- Regarding intellectual accomplishments, this year I would like to learn more rigorous mathematics (e.g. get better at proofs) as well as learning things on my own like Haskell/functional programming. In the long run, I would like to become fairly competent in mathematics and computer science (at least at

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[1] A question and answer site with a concentration on science, technology (especially startups), and academia. The site also has a very active and high-quality community, unlike some alternatives like Yahoo! Answers. Stack Exchange is another good question and answer community.

the level of most programmers, for instance). However I also want to keep in mind that I shouldn't eschew my individual learning projects just to conform to degree requirements.

- In terms of effective altruism, this year I want to focus on building a core group of interested people in order to form a community for effective altruism on campus. I would also like to start on my medium-term cause prioritization project (possibly about anti-aging). In the long run, I should be able to leave UW with a self-sustaining effective altruism movement (i.e. one that doesn't crumble as soon as I leave). I also want to be set on a high-impact or high-earning career so as to finally contribute to the effective altruism movement with my career. In terms of personal effective altruism projects, I want my cause prioritization project to have a fairly active community surrounding it.

Overall, although I've gone through a lot this quarter, I'm not sure if I am realizing my full potential at UW yet. In many ways, it seems like the "college experience" is a repetition of high school, contrary to what I've been told. I am somewhat hopeful that once I begin major-specific coursework, my classes will become more interesting.