

Dear Mr. Merrill,

Even though I don't know you in person and you have most probably never heard about me before, I feel very much bound to and familiar with your personality. I discovered the incredible stories of your past when reading your book, *The Journey* and I could relate to your ideas that you described in *The Walled Garden*.

We might probably share the same passion for travelling, getting acquainted with strangers and discovering foreign cultures for the benefit of a better and responsible democratic society. If this is the message that you wanted to convey through your support of the student exchanges, I will be more than happy to convey it further and share it with as many people as I can.

Let me, Mr. Merrill, express how much I feel honored and obliged to thank you for all your support thanks to which had the great opportunity to study at Hampshire College. I am not sure whether I can precisely articulate how happy I felt when the news that I was about to become the next "Merrill scholar" 2015 was announced to me. It was an exceptional moment, because I worked hard to merit it and I knew that I would use this opportunity to the best of my knowledge.

And so I embarked on my first journey to the United States, full of ideas and enthusiasm for attending the American college, knowing that I do not have to worry about anything but my academic results. I choose to spend my academic year 2014/2015 at Hampshire College, well known for its liberal arts approach. I definitely subscribe to the idea that education faces a serious problem if the arts and humanities are being cut away to the advantage of economic growth promoting academic areas such as technology, engineering and science to some extent. When I first arrived at Hampshire College, we – the group of the international students - were supposed to introduce ourselves and say

what brought us to the Hampshire College. One of my friends, from Pakistan, said that the Liberal Arts College was his natural choice because here he did not have to feel ashamed for studying music and piano, whereas in Pakistan he would not count for a lot unless he was willing to become a doctor, an engineer or a lawyer.

From my personal experience, the educational system in Europe challenges the opportunity to get educated in the configurations of disciplines of arts, humanities and natural and social sciences at the same time. Those diverse disciplines are not treated equally and many people think that literature does not complement science and vice versa. The opposite is true, moreover the humanities and arts cultivate students so that they can become more sophisticated critical thinkers, seeing issues from different perspectives and through the lens of many types of susceptibility.

Languages being my passion, I have recently obtained my BA degree in French and English Philology. Thanks to my extracurricular work in various environment-protection oriented NGOs, organizations struggling for human rights and extensive travelling, I came to know that languages are not my goal but a tool, or a key opening up space to various possibilities. And so I wanted to build up on my interests and study how I can contribute to the sustainable global development. At Hampshire College, I had this amazing opportunity to study economic development, environmental human rights together with literature and Hindi. This is what Hampshire provided me with and what I have enthusiastically accepted as a challenge to benefit from the variety of classes in the Liberal Arts College.

After finishing my year at the Hampshire College, I will continue in my dream of becoming an interpreter and I will never cease to gain from this academic experience

that gave me the opportunity to acquire a holistic education, made me a better critical thinker and helped me to better develop and articulate my ideas.

This study is a great asset for my future career, which will be focused on communication, languages, multicultural environment complemented with problem-solving skills on national and international levels. I am convinced that international experience, foreign language skills, and ability to communicate across cultures are highly valued by employers in the above mentioned fields. Apart from that I am willing to pursue on my interests in the field of sustainable development and ecology and I am eager to share my oversea experience and the gained knowledge, in my community and in the activist organizations.

Thank you very much again, Mr. Merrill, for making it possible for the students like myself to expand their abilities and gain immensely from this unique education style.

Yours Sincerely,

Tereza Valkova