

Dear MIT Media Labs,

I've written thousands of words so far. Pages upon pages upon pages of distinct and articulate text that goes through the motions of explaining in a matter-of-fact manner why I think I am the perfect student for you. I have written out countless ideas, I have wrestled with sappy stories of my youth, I have argued my merits.

And after all of that—none of it has felt right. None of it has resonated or felt particularly real to me. And it's because I can't speak to your questions: "explain your longer-term professional goals" and "set forth the issues and problems you wish to address". I can't speak to them because, for me, at this juncture in time, the answers to those pressing and pertinent questions are so very elusive.

At the age of twenty-three my destiny is not clear to me in my thinking. I have not yet chosen a path. My objectives are huge abstractions that live far off in the future. They are monumental goals of *change*, of *affect*, of *vision*, of *purpose*, and of *passion*. I can't articulate for you my methodology of achieving those dreams for I hardly understand them myself. I can only quote Leo Rosten and his brilliant musings:

*"I cannot believe that the purpose of life is to be happy. I think the purpose of life is to be useful, to be responsible, to be compassionate. It is, above all to matter, to count, to stand for something, to have made some difference that you lived at all."*

And that is the exact reason for why I am applying to the MIT Media Labs: to pursue this idea of a greater purpose, one that I can hardly begin to articulate and much less imagine. I know of the itch inside of me burning to manifest itself in some shape and that is the extent of it. I will be successful, I will make a difference, I will live a life of purpose -and, I hope, MIT will guide me towards that vision. I imagine that my experiences at MIT will bring me closer to realizing the question of "what am I to do with myself?"

I am not an academic and I've never been particularly successful at school—unless I see the relevance of my studies. I was the victim of an ADHD diagnosis at a young age and school has always left me feeling grossly misunderstood. I am one to flourish in an open-ended environment where I am afforded the opportunity to explore. My high school transcripts are trash, but ask the physics and English professors, with whom I spent many of my lunches and after school time asking pertinent questions, and they'll tell you I'm capable. Ask my parents, who are far too aware of the backyard projects: The jet engine that belched fire, the fifteen foot trebuchet, the 100psi pneumatic squirt gun that instilled fear in the neighborhood kids, the countless chemistry explorations using household chemicals, the two story tree house.

My college experience was much of the same—I was unmotivated in the classroom but succeeded monumentally when I was given room to explore. I pursued a research grant, and I built a treatise to my educational philosophy of "learning by doing" – the [Balloon Project](#). Designed to conduct high altitude pesticide research the

project won statewide university research competitions in engineering, was featured on the New Scientist tech blog, and secured me the “Outstanding Integrative Approaches Award”—given to a single student who exemplifies work done across disciplines. When the project launched I was simultaneously launched into the belief that I truly am capable of a number of things. I have no traditional academic background in engineering, [art](#), [photography](#), or [writing](#). Instead of taking classes I knocked on professors’ doors and asked questions. I conducted interviews, was gifted with independent studies after proving my value, and I worked diligently to fulfill the objective of creating for the sake of creating -of learning for the sake of learning. Because of this my ideas were allowed to manifest and my experiences grew exponentially. My professors became my friends and education transformed from tests and grades to this beautiful Socratic “walk through the park and talk about ideas.” I loved it.

I was hired as an “unknown quantity” for Space Exploration Technologies immediately after graduation as an Avionics Systems Engineer. SpaceX is a company that is building the next generation of space vehicles that will bring people and payloads to space inexpensively and reliably. I was brought in temporarily, and told not to expect to stay longer than three months. With a degree in Liberal Studies and a mostly self taught background in engineering no one at SpaceX knew if I was actually capable- so their apprehension at hiring me was understandable. A year later I left the company after they made me a permanent job offer. Although the job was satisfying and infinitely challenging I knew that I had more growing to do—there were certainly more experiences to be had. [“K-SAT”](#) – the experimental communications satellite that I had designed, built, and tested for the company was launched into orbit several months after I left. As it transmitted its first messages to mission control my contribution to the company was made clear: Millions of dollars in communication costs could potentially be saved; proof that although my academic pedigree does not proclaim it, I am capable.

I want more of this. I want to pursue ideas with fervor and passion. I want you to know that I have no idea what the outcome will be—only that I have great expectations of myself and a growing history to support this claim. The stories I’ve articulated above and those in my [portfolio](#) illustrate my drive, my own vision of purpose that doesn’t, as of yet, have an end goal.

When I visited your building in October I was absolutely floored. The MIT Media Labs seems to be a place of unbridled creativity and imagination. You are taking science and giving it meaning, you are manifesting the future, you are breaking every convention and tenet that I believed academia was all about. I found myself sitting in on a meeting that was none of my business, and as I listened to the ideas flow from the minds of students and professors I knew that I had stumbled on a place where my contributions would be valued.

MIT your philosophies and practices are those that I have been looking for. Allow me to continue to grow myself and my aspirations: to be useful, to be responsible, to be compassionate, to matter, to count, to stand for something, to have made some difference that I lived at all.

Regards,

Kosta