

Pack Expo Scholarship Essay

When I was in high school, I had very little idea what I wanted to do. But one Thursday, in a digital desktop publishing class, we were given a unique assignment: design a candy bar wrapper, with our own branding and information, that would fit around a king-sized Hershey bar. Quickly, I became enthralled. I had never considered packaging at all, let alone the thought that goes into it. Everything seemed so carefully developed - the psychology of the coloration, the specific placement of the logos and other elements, even the substrate it was printed on played roles in determining how the final product was viewed on the shelf. It was an industry hidden in plain sight. Once I knew to look for it, it was everywhere.

By the time I discovered this, I was applying for colleges. And I made a fantastic discovery: Clemson University, which had been in my backyard my entire life, not only had a packaging program, it was (and is) one of the best in the nation. This sealed my fate. I applied, was accepted, and began my journey into the world of packaging science.

The first thing I discovered was the diversity of the major. I could specialize in distribution, using physics to ensure the package got from A to B unharmed. I could focus on materials, developing the foundation of a package, altering the friction, permeation, strength, and clarity of a substrate. I could concentrate on the design of a package, altering the structure and graphics to pull attention and elicit specific responses. I could work with food packaging, international packaging, flexibles, marketing, sales; the paths were limitless, with a multifaceted curriculum and an enthusiastic and supportive faculty to help guide the way.

This variety, however, also makes it difficult to decide on a specific career path. I tend to enjoy the design aspects of packaging more than the mechanical, so ideally, I see myself in a

position where I can create. Whether that is designing structural packaging, working with graphics, developing products, dealing with marketing and perception, or something else entirely seems almost unimportant at this point. The creative aspects of packaging seem tightly interconnected all of the other dynamics of the field, and this collaborative nature is another strong motivator for me. This team approach to product development, where contributions from all divisions builds comradery and creates an engaging work environment, is very appealing and seems relatively unique. Additionally, the universality of packaging steps beyond boundaries and augments many other industries, with nearly every product requiring some form of packaging, despite location, culture, or even industry. Due to this, I see countless opportunities for my future, even if I have not chosen a specific path yet.

Having completed about two-thirds of my required major courses, I realize my opinions may seem overly optimistic. However, it's through the connections I've made with industry professionals that have led me to this positive outlook. The people I've met, whether they were an invited speaker, or a recruiter at a career fair, or a visiting company representative, have been remarkably constructive and welcomed interaction with students. Their passion for what they do is infectious, and that makes this career seem more like a calling than just employment. Everyone I've encountered has welcomed questions and eagerly sat with me to discuss what they do, what they wish they could do differently, or just any advice they wish they had gotten when they were learning.

When I first arrived on campus, I was eligible for work study, and I anxiously took a job working with the Packaging Science department, not expecting to be fortunate enough to work in my major. While I lost that eligibility once my older brother graduated, I've been able to keep my job with the department. While the job continues to be an important source of income, it's

grown to be more: it allows me to better know the faculty by interacting with them daily; to introduce new students to the major and function as an advisor by serving as a College Ambassador; and to participate in projects that are not part of the normal classroom experience. Our curriculum requires a co-op experience, and I've been banking the money I've earned, earmarking it specifically to help cover the extra costs I'll incur while I'm away. This scholarship will release some of my tuition burden and allow me to be open to co-op opportunities I may not be able to consider otherwise, like those without housing stipends or those located in areas with significantly higher living expenses.