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The Math Was Never the Hard Part

To be honest, if you had told me in high school that I would pursue a Bachelor of Science in Business Economics, I would not have believed you. I probably would have laughed.

Growing up, I loved anything and everything creative. I read constantly, wrote stories, sewed, painted, and made things simply for the joy of making them. I loved holding a finished piece in my hands and knowing it came from my own effort, and I loved the process of getting there almost as much as the result.

I also grew up watching my little brother excel at math. From a very young age, family and friends praised his abilities. He was solving long division problems at four years old, and he has been a numbers whiz ever since, eventually earning a perfect score on the math section of the ACT and on his AP Statistics exam. Since it was just the two of us, I quietly put myself in a box. Jackson, my little brother, was the math whiz. I was the creative, outgoing, artistic (and sometimes bossy) one.

I told myself I simply had not inherited the "good with numbers" genes my brother had, so why even bother? Math did not click for me the way it did for him, and that excuse slowly became a self-fulfilling prophecy. I performed poorly in my high school math classes and accepted it as just the way my brain worked.

When it came time to choose a major, I looked back on experiences like my job at Collins Farms, where I joined the founding team of a café serving more than 1,000 Washington University students and staff each day and helped build its marketing from the ground up. Business felt like a safe route. Even so, I was nervous to start taking math classes again my freshman year. When I saw that statistics was a requirement for every business major, I panicked. I had done terribly in statistics in high school, and I seriously considered switching majors. Instead, I worked hard in my pre-business math courses and earned my place in the upper-division coursework.

Then, sophomore year, it was time to declare. Eller College of Management offers many great options. Marketing seemed natural because I already had experience with it. Management

seemed safe because I knew it was versatile. So why would someone with a toxic relationship with anything math and numbers related choose economics? It is a field that explains the world through numbers, graphs, and data, all the things I had hated and told myself I would never be good at.

That was exactly the reason. I was tired of letting a story I had written about myself as a kid decide what I was capable of as an adult. When I looked back, I noticed that I had never grown much in the places where I felt comfortable. I grew in the moments where I was not sure I would succeed. Choosing economics was my way of walking straight toward the thing I had been avoiding for years.

That decision was tested almost immediately. I walked into Financial Accounting knowing nothing about accounting, but I had heard it called "the language of business." I liked the word language. I could be good at this, right? Wrong. I did not realize that "the language of business" really meant the most complex foreign language I had ever tried to learn. I finished the class with a C.

The old voice in my head came right back: you and numbers just don't work. It doesn't click, and it never will. I spent that entire winter break beating myself up and questioning whether I belonged in business at all. Managerial Accounting was waiting for me the next semester, and the thought of it terrified me.

I decided I wanted an A, no matter what it took. I went to office hours constantly and spent long nights studying, and I was still barely scraping by. I was earning A's on my homework and C's on my exams, which put my projected final grade at a B. I was not satisfied. I sat down with my professor in office hours, and together we calculated what I would need on the final exam to earn an A in the course. The answer was a minimum of 86 percent. I had never scored that high on an accounting exam in my life.

Walking out of that office, I told myself that if I wanted that A, it was possible. I studied for countless hours and pulled more than one all-nighter. I walked into the exam room with sweaty palms, took the test, felt cautiously good about it, and left to wait. Three hours later, the email arrived: 86 percent, on the dot. I finished the class with an A.

Today, as a junior, I am excelling in Macroeconomics and my other business courses. In BNAN 277, the statistics class I once dreaded, I worked in Tableau and other platforms to analyze data and build models, and after many visits to my professor's office hours I earned A's in most of my math-related classes. My GPA now sits at a 3.67. More than any grade, I learned something I wish I had known at twelve: talent does not outshine perseverance and audacity.

What surprised me most is that economics did not ask me to stop being creative. It asked me to use my creativity in a new medium. At its heart, economics is the study of why people make the choices they make. Every graph tells a story about human behavior, and every model is a kind of sketch. Like a painter deciding what to leave off the canvas, an economist decides which details matter and which can be set aside so the picture becomes clear. Building a model in Tableau felt more familiar than I expected. It was the same process I loved as a kid: start with raw materials, shape them with intention, and finish with something tangible that I made.

Economics also rewards the trait that has always defined me most, which is curiosity. I have always been the person asking why. Why does one promotion bring in a lunch rush while another falls flat? Why do people in one country spend differently than people in another? Economics gave me a framework for questions I was already asking.

I saw that framework come to life last summer as a Business Development and Marketing Intern at Artificial Society in Seoul, South Korea. I helped an EdTech platform plan its expansion into the U.S. market by researching thousands of American schools, districts, and tutoring centers, and by adapting our messaging so it would resonate with U.S. educators. It was economics in motion: understanding a market, its incentives, and its decision-makers, and then creatively translating a product across cultures. This January, I will continue that journey with a semester at the Institute of American Universities in Barcelona, studying Macroeconomics and the Political Economy of Europe. I am excited to see firsthand how economic and legal systems differ between the European Union and the United States.

After I graduate, I plan to attend law school and build a career as an attorney, and I can't imagine a better foundation for that path than economics. Law and economics are deeply connected. Contracts, regulations, and court decisions all shape the incentives people respond to, and understanding those incentives makes it possible to see how a law will actually work once it leaves the page. My minor in Law and my involvement in Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity have shown me how often legal questions are really economic ones: who bears a cost, who benefits, and what behavior a rule will encourage.

Economics has also trained me to think the way a good attorney must. It taught me to break a complicated problem into parts, to support every claim with evidence, and to anticipate the counterargument before it arrives. Yet the practice of law is also deeply creative. An attorney gathers facts and shapes them into a persuasive story, much like the stories I loved writing as a child. Economics is where my analytical side and my creative side finally learned to work together, and that combination is exactly what I want to bring to a courtroom, a negotiation, or a client meeting.

Most of all, economics taught me something no textbook could. The hardest part of that accounting final was not the material. It was silencing the voice that told me I could not do it. Law school will bring its own long nights and intimidating exams, and I will face them the same way I faced that 86 percent: with persistence, a plan, and the audacity to believe that hard is not the same as impossible.

The girl in high school who laughed at the idea of majoring in economics was not wrong about who she was. She was creative, curious, and stubborn. She was only wrong about what those traits could do. Choosing economics was the first time I bet on myself in the area I feared most, and it paid off. With the support of this scholarship, I will keep making that bet, through graduation, through law school, and into a career advocating for others.