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My primary barrier to pursuing my educational goals has been my history with drug addiction. The first time I attempted to attend college, I was struggling to overcome a severe heroin problem—one that ultimately left me living in my car and unable to attend to any responsibilities, educational or otherwise. My addiction brought me pain, despair and hopelessness, and I disappointed both myself and the people in my life. Eventually, after sinking to astonishing lows, I was able to enter a drug treatment program. I moved into a sober-living halfway house and remained there for seven months while cementing my recovery. This path has led me to reconnect with who I was before addiction. I have rediscovered my love of nature, and previously unknown talents in math and the sciences. I decided to pursue an engineering degree, which will offer me a way to contribute to the pressing problems of environmental degradation and climate change. I believe that using my talents for service is a way to give something back to this world, to which for so long I contributed little.

As I began to rebuild my life, I wanted to re-enroll in college but found myself worried about the pressure school might place on my hard-won sobriety. Going back to school was terrifying, but somehow starting at a community college seemed less daunting. I wanted to begin slowly, in order to maintain a balance between my academic and recovery-based activities. I know that if I do not maintain my sobriety, I'm unlikely to succeed in anything I pursue. Community college offered an easier way in for me.

My adviser, Anna Stufano, has been very impactful. She is thorough, approachable, and seems personally invested in my success. She has been instrumental in helping me navigate academia. She consistently goes above and beyond, and her commitment to her work is clear.

I had serious doubts about going back to school because of how badly it had gone during my previous attempt, before I was sober. My advisor's clarity, guidance and encouragement helped dissipate my fear and has enabled me to move forward more confidently. Having someone to answer my questions and offer guidance is both comforting and energizing.

My short time at Cascadia College has served to reinforce my desire to contribute to this world through innovation and creativity in engineering. I plan on completing my prerequisites at Cascadia before attending the University of Washington or Seattle Pacific University to complete my bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering. Ultimately, my dream is to work as an engineer, developing environmentally sustainable technologies.

I would advise students that are feeling unsure about entering or re-entering school to start slow. Despite how it feels—especially if you haven't been doing much with your life—there really is no rush. College is both stressful and an immense amount of work. Starting slowly can help ease you in. When you aren't overwhelmed right out of the gate, you are much more likely to stay committed and succeed. I wish you all the best.