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Law Personal Statement

Flow, as described by psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, is the mental state in which a person is fully immersed in an activity, where the challenge of the task and the skills it requires match at an above-average level, and one experiences a feeling of energized focus, motivation, and enjoyment.

I first learned about flow while attempting to rationalize why my accomplishments at my first job out of college felt illegitimate and left me discontent. Did I have any hobbies or passions that elicited the eagerness experienced through flow? What came to mind were the nights I spent at Thomas Cooper Library during my undergraduate years studying for a test or writing a research paper, losing my sense of time and feeling oddly satisfied. At that moment I was only focused on re-teaching myself, let's say, basic macroeconomic models, fully motivated by working towards the goal of understanding the concepts and feeling a sense of joy as I progressed and grasped the material. While cost-push inflation itself may not be one of the happy memories that come to mind when reminiscing about college, the act of tackling and mastering a bewildering theory provided an intrinsically rewarding experience distinct from the good grade or diploma I would eventually receive.

After college, without a specific career in mind, I accepted an entry-level position at a commercial real estate firm based in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. While there was much to learn in this unfamiliar field of property management, none of it required true critical thinking, focused analysis, or other skills I had been encouraged to develop in all my years of school. I had naively assumed that most post-college careers provided some sort of intellectual stimulation, but I eventually realized that many occupations do not continue to foster the intellectual curiosity that academia advocates. Reflecting on my flow experiences, it became clear to me that the type of work I wanted to pursue had to be substantive: rigorous thinking had to be an indispensable function of performing the job.

My interest in a legal career stems from my appreciation for the linguistic aspects of the law. I grew up in Vienna with a Slovak mother and Austrian father, speaking Slovak with my maternal family members and German with the others. From a very young age I learned about the importance of meaning ascribed to a word, rather than just straightforward translation, when expressing myself in these two languages. I later moved to the United States to attend high school with conversational English ability. There, I cultivated critical language skills, as I had to carefully read, comprehend, and often restate in my own words the materials of a curriculum designed for native speakers. Although English is a Germanic language, heavily influenced by Latin and French -- both of which I had studied back in Austria -- to this day I am still discovering the vastness of its vocabulary and the many possibilities for expressing myself while taking linguistic precision into account. This emphasis on accuracy, as well as logic and abstractions, are attributes that draw me to the legal field, and ones that have appealed to me in the study of math and finance.

For the past year and a half, I have been a paralegal in the Financial Services Group of Dechert LLP, and along with its long hours and sometimes mundane tasks, my experience has confirmed my interest in practicing law. The diligence I displayed proofreading, preparing legal letters, and checking copy jobs has not gone unnoticed, and I have been rewarded with increasingly challenging assignments that require thoughtful consideration. I regularly find myself in flow, such as when I was given the opportunity to write the first draft of a set of board minutes. I analyzed the complex board materials, read up on unfamiliar topics, and reviewed the partner's notes. When a partner referred to me as being able to "find a needle in a haystack" with my research ability, I recognized that not only is a career in law fulfilling to me, but with my skills, which I will further refine in law school, I can provide a valuable service to society.

What intrigues me most about a legal career is that learning and intellectual challenge continue past the legal education and are fundamental to practicing law. This fall I will enter law school embracing the demanding academic environment and confident that I am now flowing in the right direction, which only the wrong path was able to expose.

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