

Comments for the O'Donnell Foundation's AP Arts and Music Theory Incentive Program

April 9, 2014

Nicole Small

First of all, thank you so much for having me here today. I am honored to be part of such a momentous occasion. Let me start by congratulating each and every one of you for receiving such an honor. Raahil, Samuel, John, and Amber- I know it has meant hours of hard work and dedication to your studies and your talents, but no doubt today makes it all worth it.

So....now what. You have worked so hard for this amazing opportunity. With this honor comes opportunity, excitement, and responsibility.

So there are a couple of great quotes that I just love:

One is from cohost for the Jason Project:

"I would hope that every woman would at least try to challenge themselves to grow outside of their comfort zones. I know a lot of young women grew up in different households, with different social factors, and different things going on in their lives, and what I've always found to be true is to risk yourself, risk doing something new and challenging yourself...take that big dream that you have and really actively pursue it, and find people in the community that can help you."

And the other: "*You miss 100% of the shots you don't take.*"

Wayne Gretzky

So despite the fact recently, my 8 year old proclaimed me old and boring- after all, I just got rid of my blackberry- It wasn't too long ago that I was a high school student. I vividly remember sitting on my bed, looking out the window talking with my mom. I was weighing, what at the time, was a critical life decision about which sport or student council or club I should pursue, when I asked her – "what would you have done when you were in high school?" And she looked at me, and said - "what do you mean? I didn't have these choices." And surely, I gave her that blank stare- you know, the look that my daughter gave me recently when I tried to explain, that yes, phones once only worked when they were attached permanently to the wall. Anyways, it wasn't until that moment that it sunk in that perhaps, just perhaps, I had some greater responsibility that I hadn't previously been aware of until that conversation. Because, having an education is about providing you a foundation to determine who you are in this world, who you want to be, and what you might want to do, and, as Ghandi says- to be the change we want to see in the world.

We are always tempted to identify ourselves with a particular arena - an athlete, a writer, an artist, a musician, or a scientist. But when I think about the world we are in and the world the future we are facing- it is about being a whole person- it is about the intersection of innovation and creativity. Based upon today's amazing accomplishments we have clearly established that YOU all are perfect examples of our future leaders- you each have an incredible mix of skill sets- you are clearly bright, creative, and ambitious. And as you all are learning- to have such talents is not only a gift but a responsibility- what will YOU do in this world?

So my 8 year old recently came home and told me that she was learning about cinnamons. I said a bit confused, cinnamons? I thought, interesting, they are learning about spices for something? And she said, yes you know when words mean the same thing? Ah... I said. Synonyms....and she said yes! The assignment had been an art project (yes, in language class) to pick a word and then use a thesaurus to pick synonyms to place around the word. I found it fascinating that the word she had picked was "fearless". The synonyms for fearless include- courageous, bold, heroic, and brave. Now I am still not sure whether this subject matter was chosen because of random selection, the heart of a 8 year old, or from a recent Taylor Swift album, but I loved the choice.

I loved the choice because with all the talents you possess, combined with the willingness to be a little bit fearless- you can achieve some incredible things. It is about taking all that you know and being fearless enough- to go out into the world to explore all that you are yet to know. The responsibility to go out into the world and do something with that knowledge, with that passion, with that energy. Opportunity is only a word if you don't do something with it. For me, my passion has been about inspiring the next generation of Nobel Laureates. So many of the challenges our world faces today are going to be solved by science and engineering that it is critical that every child in our community have access to the kind of education that you have. No doubt, many of you or your family have been touched by a disease- cancer or Alzheimer's. No doubt you have watched TV and been scared of the West Nile virus. And lastly, there is no doubt that some of you have real fears about climate change or where your water is going to come from? All of these challenges must be met by our generation and need scientific know how to solve them. The good news is based upon your rumored AP science scores, I feel pretty good about this group!

SO over a decade ago, I had the opportunity- to as Wayne would say- take my shot. My shot was the chance to be part of an exciting project to try to help inspire our community to get excited about science- the Perot Museum- that we hope will change the landscape of North Texas forever. Getting this building built wasn't easy. But the opportunity was there and our board, our community and our team, were committed to finding a way to get it built. In so many ways- it is really the perfect example of where

creativity, innovation, science, art, architecture, education, and so many other things intersect.

So by combining those skills, with passion, perseverance (another great life lesson), and a little bit of fearlessness, we were able to get the Perot Museum open and have had over 1.6 M minds inspired opening.

As I look out today, I see a set of individuals who are fueling the engines the change. With each of your creativity, competence and commitment, I feel confident you will be able to achieve something that will not only change this community but change the world. So, Whatever it is that is your "passion" or "your cause", Whether its running a museum, raising a family, building educational games to inspire our kids, or teaching, I encourage you to take it on.

As Wayne Gretzkys said : "***You miss 100% of the shots you don't take.***"  
Wayne Gretzky

So go ahead.....Take your shot.