1. Please describe how you have prepared for your intended major, including your readiness to succeed in your upper-division courses once you enroll at the university.

School in San Diego is interesting journey for me because it opens many doors for me to get tremendous amount of knowledge and develop my education. I have gained new experiences by studying the general education and my major classes. The chemistry lab gives me an access to work with the chemicals and gain new technical skills that are not familiar. For example, mixing two chemicals then precipitating them, followed by their precipitation by centrifuge. Such opportunities make me more ambitious to discover more and apply for a research in the Summer that will be conducted by Scripps Undergraduate Research Fellowship. Meanwhile, the ecology/ evolution/ organismal biology contributes to my passion for volunteer work in the environment. Learning about ecosystem and pollution contribute to my precipitation with cleaning the environment. Volunteering with organization like I Love a Clean San Diego is very significant experience in Lakeside location. In this experiment, removing wastes such as empty bottles, plastics and metals next to the Lakeside’s River is very important to protect the ecosystem cycle and the animals. Moreover, precipitation with different age group and different nationalities enhanced my teamwork skills. Another skill that I have learned was writing a research paper for biology with proper citations. The research topic was about Dugong which is a marine mammal under the threat of extinction caused by loss of the marine habitat by human coastal activities. Biology as a major was my choice because it has the prerequisite classes for applying to a pharmacy school. In my county, Iraq, I have studied in a pharmacy school and my goal was to become a pharmacist. Sadly, I couldn’t get my degree because I had to leave the country with my family and come to the United States. The decision was hard to make at that time because I had to sacrifice years of the hard work. It was a matter of life or death and I was responsible for that decision. Accordingly, my future goal is to finish the biology major then get my PhD in pharmacy because this is who I am.

1. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

The most significant challenge that I have experienced was immigration from Iraq to the United States. Along with the language barrier and a different educational system, I had difficulties to adapt this new environment. I had to leave my country Iraq and I am a student in the last year of pharmacy school. As soon as I have arrived and started to ask about the pharmacy school here, I was shocked that to get into the school because it requires a bachelor degree in biology that worth 5 years. Then, get into the pharmacy school that worth another four years. I was destroyed with low self-esteem, low self-confidence and almost depressed. As a temporary solution to calm down, working in a retail store was the solution at that time. After a year, Cuyamaca College was the point to start and fight forward without looking back. The classes like English, biology and physics were hard, sadness was my best friend. However, I did not give up even if they were hard classes and I know that it was just a matter of time till the environment become familiar. Under every difficult subject, help was maintained from the tutoring center for Biology, Physics and writing center for English. Under every difficult concept, help was maintained from professors in their office hours and watching online educating videos. Trying to understand the topics, critically analyzing them and repeat. All the previous steps helped me to develop my skills, education techniques, obtain growth mindset and never give up. With every semester, scoring As for my classes, I rebuild my self-esteem and self-confidence. Gradually, I started to adopt the positive thinking as a basic strategy of my life. As Liz Murray, an American inspirational speaker had said, “I knew at that moment I had to make a choice. I could submit to everything that was happening and live a life of excuses or I could push myself. I could push myself and make my life good.” I made a choice to live a life full of achievements and be a pharmacist, this is who I am.

1. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

My interest in biology encouraged me to participate with I Love A Clean San Diego organization, along with my classmates and sometimes family. Volunteering with this organization have grow my passion about biology, environment and pollution. In one event, the volunteer work was related to preserve and restore the San Diego River watershed areas along the creek beds. This activity was called Planting With A Purpose which was held in Lakeside River Park. The purpose was to plant new native plants after the harmful and invasive plants have been removed. Another event that I have participated in was the Lakeside's River Park Conservancy activity. This activity was about planting new native plants in empty spaces around the river to help in restoring the soil. In addition, I participated in the 16th Annual Creek to Bay Cleanup that was held in the lakeside Cactus County Park location. This activity included cleaning the environment from used plastics, clothes, needles, boxes and other things that were left behind by homeless people. The purpose of this event was to prevent these materials from reaching the river or buried in soil because it will hurt the marine animals and the marine habitat. As a team, we were successfully able to remove 2 tons of wastes from the Cactus County Park. The purpose of these activities is to maintain safe and clean environment in the nature and conservation of ecosystem. Moreover, decrease the environmental pollution that is damaging the nature and effect on animals.

1. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced. **(please combine and remove sentences to make it only 350 word)**

I would consider taking the English classes and learn the new skills for writing and thinking is the significant educational opportunity for me. It is a blessing to get such great opportunity to learn it but I have faced a great educational barrier to learn it. The teaching style was new to me and the expectations were high. In my country, English was taught as grammar and punctuation but not advanced enough to learn the critical thinking skill. Moreover, I was not familiar to many significant topics about transgender, gays, lesbian, sexual assaults and involuntary commitments. Also, skills like writing an academic summary, argumentative essays, rhetorical analysis and research-based topics were completely new for me. Methods to write and think beyond what is shown in a critical way, were very difficult for me. Accordingly, I had to get all the possible help that one can get either by visiting the writing center or talk to native American students and ask them questions about the topic and the reality in the American’s society. Also, the English professor was a great help to teach me how to write, think and adapt the new situation. For the topics that were not familiar, Google and search online were the first approach to understand and obtain the required education on them. For example, transgender and homosexuality terms, problems and solutions in the American’s society, school and government, were un-familiar to me. Thankful, I was able to overcome all these problem by getting all the possible help from the previous places. Significantly, the grades for each assignment surprised me more about my capabilities and the gained skills. Meantime, these English classes contribute to my general knowledge and perspectives positively. From a person who did not know anything about homosexuality to a person who is less bias and out of the comfort zone that was conservatively constructed by the Middle East culture. I would consider my-self more open to a new culture like the American and Hispanic cultures and their social norms. Since this county is a melting point for many nationalities, races, genders and politics, it is very significant to become enlightened and less bias person to be effective member in society. Today, I am grateful for the difficult English classes and the hard topics that I have overcome to become more (your opinion)…..person.