

# Why Penn?

by Carlin Yuen

I still remember seeing the Why Penn? question when I was going through the college application process. I vaguely recall writing some funky statement about how I wanted to study artificial intelligence with some professor I never ended up meeting, and how I wanted to change the world by inventing robots that would cook for us or something like that. I thought I knew what college was all about: ace the classes, get a baller job, make millions, eat Shin ramen every day, and play video games for the rest of my life.

It all seemed so simple.

And then on one bitter cold day during sophomore year, I applied for APALI. Little did I know that this nifty program held by PAACH (which I kept calling “potch” for the rest of the year), would change my life: it introduced me to the APA community and opened a whole new world for me. And after that, I joined APAHW, I joined CSA, I joined Penn Lions, and I started ECAASU.

I found something special in cultural extracurricular groups and programming that I couldn’t find anywhere else on campus—not on the Class Board, the Engineering School, or the Club Water Polo team—and I was hooked.

But what was this special something that kept me so involved? It’s somewhat hard to describe: it’s simply a gut feeling. It’s that feeling I get when we introduce dumplings to someone for the first time and they love it. It’s that feeling I get when a little kid edges over to pat the lion head costume after a performance, and then runs away giggling in wonder at its ferocious fluffiness. It’s that feeling I get, when I see someone on Locust Walk wearing our club T-shirt, and I smile. I suppose it’s a sense of pride in sharing little bits of my identity with the people around me—even people I don’t know—it’s being happy that we made a contribution to their lives and that we made difference.

But why does that matter? Why do I care—care about the well-being of the people around me, about the things I do and invest my time in, and how they affect the world?

If you, like me, are not hell-bent on making millions and rolling around in the arms of members of the opposite (or same) sex, then perhaps this might resonate with you as well: at the most basic level, it is about becoming more than a basic contributing member of society. It's about making a positive difference in people's lives, about making the world a better place, because I will be living in this world for the foreseeable future, and so will my family, my friends, and you and everyone else. It's because despite whatever beliefs or morals I have, I still inevitably reaffirm and reference my life to those around me: the people in my life add the beauty of color, both bright and dark, to an otherwise monochrome existence.

Some of the greatest things about Penn and college are the opportunities for people to get involved and meet each other; it not only allows us the chance to develop and learn about ourselves as leaders, but also as human beings in a community. Our actions or lack thereof influence each other in subtle and important ways: an idea unaddressed may be an idea lost forever, an organization that could improve may decline, and a group you belong to may change beyond recognition, for better or for worse. The world is a small place, and what we do in life, truly, echoes in eternity—even if only as a soft whisper.

With this in mind, I challenge you to make the most of your Penn experience. Make it yours; make a difference. In another five years, when the next generation of students arrive wide-eyed and open-minded on campus, will you remember Penn? Will Penn remember you? Why did **you** choose Penn?

At the end of the day, when you ask yourself—who am I? What have I done?  
What will you say?  
What will you say.