

WriteBoston

Building a Community of Writers

The Essay that Changes Your Life: Writing the College Application Essay at a WriteBoston Writing Center 2016

At the moment, it seemed just like another class assignment. Flor Villanueva, a senior at English High School in Jamaica Plain, had to write a college application essay for her English class.

She dashed off a draft about the first thing that came to mind – the time she had lobbied for more AP classes at her school. It had been a passionate moment in her life, though she felt strangely mechanical writing about it now. She submitted the essay, which her teacher passed along with the rest of the class's essays, to the WriteBoston Writing Center.

Flor was surprised, when she got her paper back, to see that the writing tutor's comments echoed the feeling she'd had while writing it: Her words lacked fire. They didn't reveal the person she was.

Intrigued, Flor visited the writing center for the first time, paper in hand. She talked with a tutor about her essay and together, they discovered the core passions that had driven the moment she wrote about: her activism and her feminism. It was just the inspiration she needed.

"The writing center felt like a safe space," she said. "I wrote the new essay there in an hour and a half. But I stayed for three to four hours that day."

And she kept coming back. From then on, whenever she had a writing assignment, Flor brought it to the writing center. She also continued polishing her college application essay with the help of excellent WriteBoston tutors like Lynn Robbins, a former English teacher who also worked in educational publishing.

"Lynn is an expert with grammar and so she read every sentence out loud, making sure I captured every pause, every exclamation, and every part of my story exactly how it sounded when I would tell it out loud," Flor said.

Lynn loved working with Flor, whom she called "a pistol," one of the many English High students whose life stories and perspectives inspire her.



Flor Villanueva, now a freshman at Bridgewater State University, sought out WriteBoston's Writing Center at English High School when she faced the tough task of putting herself down on paper during the college admissions process. Villanueva, who came to the United States from Guatemala at 11 years old, hopes to one day become a doctor or author.

"They are the most interesting people I've ever met," she said. "I start seeing the world in a completely different way."

At the end of their process together, Flor had completed an application essay she was truly proud of – one that traced her identity from her family roots in Guatemala to her aspirations for the future. In her essay, Flor wrote:

"I come from a country where the only thing a woman is allowed to change is a diaper. I have always wanted to change more than that....Instead of accepting everyone's limited views on women, I became a teen mentor for girls ages 8-14 and taught self-defense.....I especially want young women to know that we have the power to break down barriers and crush all statistics that are constantly rising against us. I want them to know that it is possible for them to change the world."

The essay changed Flor's life. As part of her college applications, it helped her gain acceptance into several schools, including the one she ultimately chose, Bridgewater State University.

A college student, Flor is now planning her next steps in life. She may want to become a doctor or an author, she said, or found a non-profit to help young people with eating disorders. But one thing's for certain: She's now a more confident writer, thanks to the WriteBoston Writing Center.

About WriteBoston

WriteBoston promotes deep learning through writing. Founded in 2002, WriteBoston provides customized professional development, student writing centers, and afterschool and summer journalism programming for young people. WriteBoston helps to create writers—thinkers, communicators, and problem solvers. WriteBoston has supported over 15,000 teachers and students in Boston and surrounding urban districts. Additional information is available at www.WriteBoston.org.