



Counselor Letter of Recommendation for Sanjna Narayan

There are few students I've worked with in my career as dynamic as Sanjna Narayan. She has a strong, positive affect on almost every aspect of our community. Born in Toronto and raised in Seattle, Sanjna credits a lot of her personality to her upbringing. Her formative years were in very diverse cities, and although she is from a more "traditional" Indian home Sanjna was able to break free from her parents' norms and create her own space. Sanjna says that Toronto, Seattle, and now Pittsburgh have helped her shape her "fiery" personality; she is a passionate learner, actor, and friend, and feels empowered to always be the best version of herself. Sanjna seems to be a part of every aspect of the Shady Side community, making the most of every opportunity and throwing herself into all of her passions. Last year, Sanjna was asked to take on a different kind of role for the winter musical, *Little Shop of Horrors*, as she was cast as the alien plant, Audrey II. The prop and design team built a six-foot model of the plant that Sanjna needed to crawl into to control its movements. The play's director said that she knew "instantly" that she had to cast Sanjna, as no one else would be able to make the plant come to life as well as she could. Every movement was perfectly choreographed, and she memorized every line in the entire play so that she could be in sync with each movement. Sanjna practiced at all hours, and she later told me that she lost weight from performing as she was trapped in a large puppet for hours. But this experience somehow perfectly encapsulates Sanjna: a fearless young woman, unafraid of trying something new or different, who wants to explore her creativity and curiosity all while making everyone around her better too. We could not ask for a better leader on our campus.

Academic Achievements

- Sanjna is near the **top of the class in GPA and consistently takes on a rigorous curriculum**. Last year she took on a number of difficult classes, including AP Calculus BC and French 4A (accelerated). Furthermore, Sanjna took on two very difficult science classes as a junior: Organic Chemistry (typically an all-senior class) and our Summer Research Seminar. In Orgo. Chem., her teacher noted, *"she is serious and focused, but thankfully equally ready to inject a witty comment or a probing question. Her agile mind is a serious benefit to our class."* This year, Sanjna has taken on an equally challenging course load that includes Advanced Biology, AP French, and a trio of math electives that are the highest level that the math department offers.
- Summer Research Seminar is a specialized science class that a select number of students are accepted into; last year the students studied the discovery of Crispr and its use as a genome-editing tool. Sanjna's teacher said that she is a delight to have in class and readily contributes to class discussions. Sanjna spent the summer in a laboratory at the University of Pittsburgh **researching transcription factors that lead to eye morphogenesis using zebra fish**. She completed the course by presenting her research findings to a large audience, including the Head of the Senior School, the President of Shady Side, and a number of Pitt faculty members.
- Sanjna loves all of her classes at Shady Side, and she says every year her favorite subject changes. Last year her favorite classes were French and US History. She said that she found a new level to her writing and was excited to explore her new skills in her research papers. The final US History paper was a passion project for Sanjna. She wrote a strong paper that analyzed how the Cold War led to human experimentation via drugs and nuclear weapons. Last year was the French exchange trip where students had the opportunity to host a French student in the fall and then travel to southern France in the spring. **Sanjna was called an inspiration and a beacon**, and the exchange was a rousing success in part because of her enthusiasm for the culture and language.
- At the end of her junior year, Sanjna was presented with **two major awards**. First, Sanjna was selected by the English department for the Irvine Prize, an award that "recognizes the work of a junior who combines a high degree of ability in English, both written and spoken, with those personal qualities which give promise to a life of honor and distinction." Sanjna was also presented with the Visual Arts Instructors' Award, given by the Arts department "to a member of the junior class who has demonstrated a keen interest in, and unusual ability for, the study of art."

Extracurricular Life and Areas of Impact

- **Music:** Sanjna is a musician, artist, actor, club leader, and administration liaison. One of her primary passions is music, as she plays the clarinet, saxophone, and piano. She is a first-chair clarinetist for both Shady Side and for the Pittsburgh Youth Concert Orchestra (PYCO). Sanjna is an exemplary clarinet player and has been asked to perform a solo for PYCO, a rarity for the clarinet. Sanjna is also learning more about music theory on her own, as she wants to know about the “why” as well as the “how.”
- **Acting:** An accomplished actor, Sanjna has now played a major role in seven different shows at Shady Side. From Oedipus Rex to student-written plays, Sanjna loves the challenge of getting into character and trying to understand the nuances of each role. She says that being a part of the theater department taught her a lot about leadership, teamwork, and handling stress. After 10th grade, Sanjna was invited to perform at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland. She says it was the best experience of her life and, although she does not want to be a professional actor, Sanjna says that she certainly wants to act in some capacity throughout college and possibly beyond.
- **Community Service and Product Development:** In the summer before her junior year, Sanjna was selected for one of Shady Side’s Parkin Fellowships, a scholarship given to a few students to engage in global community service. Sanjna went to Manilla in the Philippines where she took on a number of projects. Concurrently, she taught both an arts and robotics class, volunteered for Project Pearls that helps educate the poorest children, and collaborated with other volunteers to set up a math tutoring chat-bot that would help those in Manilla in perpetuity. The chat-bot project was noticed by Microsoft and Sanjna is currently working with the company to create a more comprehensive program.
- **Discipline Committee:** This year, Sanjna was selected as one of six students in the school to sit on the Discipline Committee (DC). The DC listens to every case of major disciplinary infraction at the school and provides possible solutions or outcomes to the administration. This is a difficult job as we are a small community and a position on the DC often requires students to make challenging decisions about classmates and teammates. Furthermore, Sanjna is also an Admissions Ambassador, meeting with prospective families and giving tours as one of our few student representatives for the admissions office.

In the little free time she has, Sanjna loves to paint. She has won a number of awards, including a Gold Key, from the National Scholastic Art Competition. Like everything else she does, Sanjna is not interested in art for the accolades. She says, “*The process of creating a unique piece of art that nobody can completely decipher except for me is exhilarating.*” At the risk of using a heavy-handed metaphor, Sanjna in herself is exactly that: a completely original work of art. There is truly no one else like Sanjna in our community, and I feel incredibly lucky that I have had the opportunity to get to know her. She studies for the sake of learning, she is kind because it’s the right thing to do, and she is humble as she believes that she can always be better. I am certain that she will be a force at any college or university, and she will greatly influence both the classroom and community, just as she has done to ours. I am honored to give Sanjna Narayan my highest recommendation for admission.

Sincerely,

Lucas Frankel
College Counselor