Lativa Holder
Class of 2006

Lativa Holder, 18, is thinking about majoring in math and probably wants to go to medical school. Still, she isn’t really sure yet. To be on the safe side, she chose a college that offers both science and math courses. In the fall, she will be a freshman at Union College in Schenectady, New York, and the first in her family to go to college.

It will be a big adjustment for Lativa, but she is looking forward to it. There were just 80 students in her graduating class at St. Jean Baptiste High School in Manhattan, but there are about 550 in the freshman class at Union. She’ll have other adjustments to make, too. Lativa has never lived away from home. Although she says “college is a must in my family,” it will be difficult for her to leave her mom, Sandra Holder, a day-care teacher, and her three younger sisters to travel two-and-a-half hours to the upstate campus.

“Everyone wants me to go, but no one wants me to leave,” Lativa said. All through high school she worked hard; she knew her sisters were watching her and she wanted to set a good example. There’s no question that she did: Lativa was the valedictorian of her high school graduating class and vice president of the student council. She worked with other students in her class to bring a new catering company into her school lunchroom, hold bake sales to fund the senior class gift, and set up a breast cancer awareness day. Her class schedule was full of honors courses and she took AP® English Literature and Composition and AP United States History classes.

When asked about her favorite class, Lativa becomes extraordinarily animated, talking faster and faster as she becomes more excited. She liked English Literature best. Her class read Beowulf, Pride and Prejudice, Jane Eyre, and Frankenstein. They even read Grendel by John Gardner, the Beowulf story from the point of view of the villain of the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon epic. One of Lativa’s favorite authors is Jane Austen; she likes romantic comedy and Gothic novels—especially love stories and suspense.

Lativa likes challenges, too. She says that AP English was the most challenging of her classes because her class had to read a novel each week and had papers due twice a week. Yet it made her a stronger writer. Now she can write a “well-written essay” in a timed setting. She approaches reading differently, too, reading between the lines: “Reading opens your eyes. It’s kind of like I’m a detective looking at a crime scene who would see what someone else wouldn’t.”

She also had the challenge of balancing her after-school job with her schoolwork. Last June, Lativa began working at Banc of America Securities as an internal auditor. It started as a summer job, but the bank liked her work so much they asked her to stay on through the school year. The extra money came in handy. She plans to work on campus, too, as part of her financial aid package at Union.

When asked about her participation in sports, Lativa said, “No. I’m a girly girl.” She does like to swim but hasn’t yet had the opportunity to do very much of it.

Lativa was able to attend a private high school through Student Sponsor Partners, a program for students from low-income families that helps disadvantaged youths earn their high school diplomas. To qualify, she had to write an essay and take a placement test. Once accepted, a sponsor paid a large part of her tuition. Lativa believes, “When you are motivated academically, it really does make you stand out from the rest.”

This has certainly been true for Lativa.
Evan Lazerowitz
Class of 2006

Evan Lazerowitz, 18, could be excused for sounding especially relaxed about his future. With an Early Decision acceptance from Johns Hopkins University, Evan could have glided through his senior year at Indian Hills High School in Oakland, New Jersey.

However, a blizzard of accomplishments during his senior year proved otherwise. To name some: He was elected to the World Languages National Honor Society after maintaining an A average in his language courses; he was appointed editor-in-chief of the school newspaper; his classmates elected him student representative to the local Ramapo–Indian Hills Board of Education; he was nominated to the United States Senate Youth Program, a program run by the Hearst Foundation; and he was appointed to the Oakland, New Jersey, Municipal Alliance as a student representative.

Evan also lettered in track for the fourth year, focusing on the 100- and 200-meter sprints. By midsummer, when many high school graduates were devoting themselves to relaxing, he was working at a summer camp in Ulster County, New York, where he oversaw camp activities and “anything related to electronics,” while he kept an eye on his brother, Ross, 13.

In addition to taking the SAT® three times, Evan took seven Advanced Placement Program® (AP®) courses in high school: English Language and Composition; English Literature; United States History; European History; Spanish; Macroeconomics; and Microeconomics. All through high school, he participated in his school’s “information technology university program,” where he learned computer programs such as Visual Basic C++, SQL, and PHP. Although Evan plans to study both programming and political science at Hopkins, he confesses to being a rarity: “It’s funny,” he said. “I don’t have a math mind, but I like programming. I guess I’m good at the logic of it.”

But his favorite course at Indian Hills was a seminar on the philosophy of knowledge. “I really liked the discourse,” he said. “We looked at the purpose of education; for example, we went into what the object of learning was, from different perspectives—business; science; as well as the idea of learning for the sake of learning.”

Evan also plans to hone his knowledge of Spanish, which he has studied for seven years. Language relates to international studies, which, in turn, drew him to Hopkins’s well-known department.

Evan’s parents, Jay and Janet Lazerowitz, are both lawyers. “They’ve been very supportive of me, and they’re important role models,” he said. “They helped me while I looked for the right college by giving me insights from their experiences.”

Growing up in Franklin Lakes, Evan liked going to movies and relaxing with his friends. He enjoyed Indian Hills High School because, with 950 students, he never felt overwhelmed. He got the same impression from Johns Hopkins: “It’s a small university with all the facilities of a big one,” he said.
Ignacio Russo  
Class of 2006

At age 18, Ignacio Russo has already lived in Buenos Aires, Argentina; São Paulo, Brazil; and Pennsylvania, and speaks fluently in English, Portuguese, Spanish, and German, so it’s not surprising to hear him talk about the advantages of diversity.

Whether in Argentina, Brazil, or the United States, Ignacio and his family have always valued education. When he was just four and living in São Paulo, his mother enrolled him in a bilingual Portuguese/English program, which he continued until age 12. “I was five, trilingual, and already friends with kids from Brazil, Korea, Germany, and the United States. I discovered diversity early.” He credits this program with his start as a disciplined student.

Ignacio is the youngest of four and the fourth to attend college, so college life is second nature to him, and the transition will not be new for his family. “My mom has gone through this process three times. She’s not sad to see me leave since she knows how great the college experience has been for my siblings.” Still, he considered geography when choosing a college. He chose Penn State University for its great engineering program and proximity to home.

Ignacio will attend Penn State on a Bunton-Waller Undergraduate Fellows Scholarship to study chemical engineering. The program seeks to enhance the diversity of the student body to more closely reflect cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity found in both Pennsylvania and the nation. This is exactly the kind of environment he had hoped for in a college.

He’s already started as a Penn State Nittany Lion; this summer he attended PREF (which stands for Pre-First Year), a multicultural summer bridge program specially designed for freshmen with engineering- or science-based majors. “The program has been great at helping me prepare for the differences between high school and college.”

Seeing his elder brother and sisters prepare for the SAT encouraged Ignacio to take the exam for the first time at age 12; in fact, they all took the SAT on the same administration date. “My mom figured the sooner I started getting ready for college, the better.” In addition to taking the SAT three times, Ignacio also took AP® classes and exams in Biology, Calculus BC, and Chemistry as well as SAT Subject Tests™ in Mathematics and Biology. He was also co-president of Hershey High School’s German Club and a scholar in the National Hispanic Recognition Program.

The theme of diversity extends beyond academic preparation to Ignacio’s rich personal life. “My parents always stressed that while doing homework is important, one should not forget about life.” He enjoys playing soccer, basketball, and listening to music, which he will continue to do with students from all over the world at Penn State.

When asked why he chose chemical engineering as his major, Ignacio doesn’t spend a moment looking for logical answers. “I just love it. I have always loved it. It probably runs in my genes.” Both his parents have Ph.D.s in chemistry. His hope is to study hard enough to one day become a chemical engineer and live wherever life and great opportunities take him.