

# Spotlight on Eric Zhou

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This month I am interviewing one of my inspirations and a genuinely wonderful human being, Ashland High School (AHS) Senior Eric Zhou. I am lucky to call Eric my friend and am constantly awed by his achievements and talent. I decided that with his graduation looming in the near future, he deserved a little spotlight in Ashland before he goes on to take the world by storm. Below is my interview with him.

**Q: You got accepted into Harvard and that is a pretty incredible achievement. Do you have any advice for students currently going through the college application process?**

A: Well, as to getting into Harvard, I have next to no clue. As far as I know, college admissions can be pretty random because it depends on who reads your application. The people who read your application have personalities and opinions, too. For the record, although I got into Harvard, I was also wait-listed by Columbia, Yale and Princeton. This just shows you that a lot of stuff is beyond your power. They're looking for stuff beyond grades in those upper level schools, but you can't tell exactly what they're looking for.

My advice is don't stress about it too much and just do what you have to do. Do your essay, do your interviews and something will work out.

**Q: How would you define "success"?**

A: Well, I'm gonna quote one of my conductors in tenth grade. Success, he said, is contribution. That is something I have really taken to heart. When you are in a big group or classroom, it's really easy to worry about where you're ranked in that group. Things like, he's so much better than me, I'll never be that great or I'm going to practice really hard so I'm as good as her or he's never going to be as good as me . . . those sort of rankings really detriment the group. That can all be changed by thinking success is measured by contribution, while another type of success means competition. Contribution can also be applied to the larger world; you can contribute to your community and people around you—that is how I define success. That is also what Harvard and most upper level schools look for, contribution to the community—not just good grades. It's cliché, but true.

**Q: You are definitely one of my role models. Who would you say your role model is?**

A: Probably the various conductors I've had through the

years. Their ability to lead hundreds of people towards a common goal and create something remarkable. Also, their ability to inspire others. Professional musicians are actually some of my favorite type of people because they do it because they are passionate about it. I've never met a musician who goes into it for money or to live a luxurious life. They go into it because they love it. Every single professional musician I've met spreads that passion to everyone else.

**Q: What were your best experiences as part of AHS?**

A: My best experiences, actually a lot of them happened this year, especially with Academic Decathlon. AcaDec was so involved this year, I think it was absolutely great. I think that first competition, going to Wilson's restaurant (shoutout to Mandarin Café in Natick), Bollywood parties, they were the best memories of high school. Also, this year's swim team was also my best year. The groups I've been part of this year have been really memorable.

**Q: Personally, I think you are a very strong leader, especially in Academic Decathlon. What would you say are the qualities for a great leader?**

A: Someone who genuinely cares about what they're leading. I honestly don't think leadership requires any skills because when I started leading AcaDec, I was very reluctant since I'm generally an introvert. I was very unconfident in myself when I started leading AcaDec, but all that really mattered was that I really cared about making the club better. If you have that genuine ambition to make whatever you are leading a better organization, I think that's all it really takes.

**Q: What are your hobbies? What do you like to do to relax and have fun?**

A: If you were my college interviewer, I would say I like to play piano for fun. Which is true because it helps me diffuse myself when I'm feeling emotional or fatigued; the piano helps me have a vent for those emotions and really helps me energize myself. But what I actually do



for fun is watch Japanese anime!

**Q: How do you balance school along with all your extra-curriculars? In other words, how do you manage the stress that a lot of high schoolers feel piling on?**

A: I definitely feel it piling on, too. But what I do when I'm stressed is just do my work. If you think about it scientifically, you have all these hormones going off in your body which will stress you out. I think of my time as something very fluid. My time is allocated not only for schoolwork - it just depends on what I am in mood for. I also spend it playing video games or doing AcaDec or writing newspaper articles. My free time, I keep it flexible and if I am feeling stress from schoolwork, I subtract from that. In short, I'm just really good at getting work done when I need to get it done!

**Q: What are your goals for the future? Where would you see yourself 10 years from now?**

A: I can't really say anything. I'm the type of person who can't see that far in the future. I really have no clue. For long-term goals, I don't have any clear idea, but for the short-term, I am very clear. I have a lot of short-term goals that may or may not be accomplished. I want to compose

music, learn computer science, sociology, there's a whole list of random things that I want to pick up on. For a career though, that's a good question—I'll figure that out in college!

**Q: What is the achievement you are most proud of?**

A: I'm actually most proud of our AcaDec team this year. Just how far we've gotten since I was a freshman, not just the physical achievements—the trophies, of course—but the vibe has totally changed. In freshman year, people were just there because they had to be there, but this year we have done so many extra things and people are genuinely enthusiastic about AcaDec and what it represents. I think changing that whole atmosphere and the mission of AcaDec, driving home the message that learning can be fun is something I'm very proud of.

Special thanks to Eric for taking time out of his busy schedule for this interview! I wish him all the success with his endeavors in the future. For more about the happenings at AHS, tune into my monthly column :)



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