

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Megan Stinson. I have just started my first year of college after taking on an integral role in the FIRST robotics team at my High School. My experiences with FIRST and PHRED, my high school team, have given me a new direction in my life and the determination and confidence to go into a field mostly dominated by men. FIRST has changed me as a person in more ways that I can count.

FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) is a life changing experience for nearly everyone who takes part in it; whether it's sparking the imaginations of young kids watching, renewing the elders' faith in our generation, or changing the lives of the students, and I was no exception to this particular rule. The FIRST experience, or more specifically the PHRED (Philomath High Robotics Engineering Division) experience, has changed the career path I wish to take, and has given me the confidence to go out in the world to pursue it.

At the beginning of my freshman year of high school, I was positive that I would major in English Literature and get my teaching degree. I wanted to be a high school English teacher. I took all the classes I thought I would need, and worked for nothing else. I knew of the FIRST program because my older sister had been on the team during her freshman year, and I was interested, but not so much that I would quit what I was doing to try it. Not to mention, my sister was not able to be part of the team her sophomore year, so I saw no point in joining.

The next year, was the beginning of my life with PHRED. My sister rejoined the team, so I decided to try it. After just a few weeks, I was completely enraptured with the concept of building something so complex in such a small amount of time. The machine shop became my second home. I worked with wonderful mentors who showed us how to do the equations, cut the parts, and of course, file down the edges. I connected with the people there immediately, and it was impossible not to get swept away in all of the excitement. Regionals was a very surreal experience for me as well. It was incredible to see all of the other robots, and know that even though we were all competitors, we also had the potential to be friends and possible work mates in the future.

After that year, I was hooked. I started taking more engineering classes, but still kept up with English classes. I couldn't decide what I wanted to do. All through my junior year, that was the norm. I would take a blend of English classes, required classes, and engineering classes. It was a point in my life where I had no idea what I really wanted to do. Then when the next season came around, and PHRED started meeting, I decided that this was exactly where I wanted to be and what I wanted to do. I still kept up with English because I enjoyed it, but the majority of my time was devoted to learning how to use the shop equipment, learning the equations, and working on the Chairman's Award submission. To me, the Chairman's Award was special. It was something that explained how I felt about the program, and how others should view it. FIRST is not just about the robots, it is so much more. I'll touch more on what FIRST stands for later, but now back to the story.

My senior year, I cranked down and took as many classes as I could on AutoCAD, Inventor, hand drafting, and physics. I applied to 5 engineering schools, and one liberal arts school, across the nation; Oregon Institute of Technology, New Mexico Mining and Tech, Rochester Institute of Technology, MIT, and Western Oregon

University, and was accepted into all but one. I was awarded scholarships at every school that accepted me, including a FIRST scholarship to RIT, and am now attending Oregon Institute of Technology. I am dual majoring in Mechanical Engineering and Manufacturing Engineering Technology. All of this was possible because of my experience with the FIRST Organization, and my time with PHRED.

Now, I took a path that followed the more mechanical aspects of FIRST and PHRED, but they encompass more than that. FIRST gives students the training they need to be successful no matter what they do, be it Electrical Engineering, Marketing, Software, or Business. It also teaches students about teamwork, cooperation, family, friends, trust, time management, and work ethic. FIRST is an organization committed to spreading excitement about technology and sciences to students around the world, who would otherwise never consider them as such. They are committed to the idea of gracious professionalism, where you are competitors, but you also work together. If another team has a problem, you work as hard, or harder, to help fix it than you would if it was a problem with your own robot. It is incredible to see opposing teams, after the championship match, walk up and hug each other. No hard feelings on either side.

PHRED exemplifies every aspect of gracious professionalism (the ability to work together and compete with one another in a gracious professional manner), competitiveness, cooperation, and teamwork that goes into being a successful FIRST team. The mentors are always ready to help, even on weekends and during the summer. The students are bright, and actually willing to listen and learn what the mentors have to say. PHRED is more than a team, PHRED is a lifestyle. PHRED is friendship. PHRED is everything that has built me to be the person that I am today, and I am thankful everyday that I was able to have the opportunity to experience something that life changing.

FIRST and PHRED have changed me as a person in more ways than I could ever put into words. Both are amazing organizations based on basic principles that get the students ready for whatever the future brings them. Thank you for your time in reading this. It was an honor to write about what FIRST has brought me, and what PHRED has done for me.

Sincerely,

Megan Stinson