



CRAFTING A PRODUCTIVE & ENJOYABLE HS CAREER

Russell Li
June 25, 2022

 **MOMENTUM
LEARNING**

Crafting a Productive & Enjoyable HS Career



Russell Li
Harvard '26

June 25 (Saturday) 7-8PM CT

Crafting a Productive & Enjoyable HS Career

RSI Scholar

5-time Scholastic National Gold/Silver Medalist

Editor-In-Chief of School Newspaper

Captain of Varsity Cross Country & Tennis Teams

Brief Bio

- In addition to RSI, Scholastic, school newspaper, and captaining two sports teams...
 - Attended Mathworks HSMC twice
 - Played a lot of tennis (UTR 8 in middle school)
 - Led a lot of clubs in HS, like Science Olympiad
 - Founded a tutoring organization (Five Star Tutoring)
 - Participated in some competitions (AIME, etc.)
- Mindset
 - Get excited about everything
 - Look for role models

Making a Positive Difference

- Become holistically developed
- Serve as a mentor and guide for others
- Explore three fields
 - STEM
 - Writing
 - Leadership

STEM

- Anchors the world and its beauty
- Hard skills that you'll find hard to lose
- Intangibles that change the way you think and act

Writing

- Communicate effectively
 - Practical implications
- Keeps you grounded in reality
- Reading always comes first

Leadership

- Practice reinforcing your own skills while helping others
- Create something bigger than one person
- Build habits centered around holding yourself to a higher standard
 - Resilience
 - Decisiveness
 - Openness
 - Planning

Synergy

- The three fields reinforce each other
 - Whole is greater than the sum of the parts
 - Consider someone like Bill Gates: technical genius, expert communicator, visionary
- May seem like a time crunch, but the activities reinforce each other and help improve mastery
 - Similar to cross-training in sports
- Avoid burning out from over-participating in one activity
 - Burnout can impact anyone, from Olympiad competitors to Division 1 level runners

Three Key Principles

- Broad exploration
- Thoughtful choices
- Opportunity exploitation

Principle 1: Broad Exploration

- Don't be afraid to try and fail
- Process-centric over outcome-centric
 - Outcomes won't be relevant beyond high school or college, but skills and relationships last
- Once you find a passion, latch onto it

Finding a Passion

- Consider your role models for preliminary ideas
- Imagine what you would do on a summer day, with no schoolwork, if the following were true...
 - Friends on vacation
 - Family busy
 - YouTube, TV shows, video games, and social media blocked

Example: Research

- Inspired by research class taken at school
 - Read papers about virtually any topic and present takeaways each class
- Some programs help connect high schoolers with qualified mentors
 - Pure and applied math at Mathworks HSMC
 - Starting as a second-year student; can apply in 8th grade or 9th grade to be a first-year
- Research is special in that everyone charts their own path
 - Nonlinear
 - Individually empowering
 - Especially reflected at RSI

Example: Critical Writing

- Read often; enjoy skimming Wikipedia and news outlets if I don't have time to read actual books
 - The genre doesn't matter too much, but close reading does
 - Awareness of social issues
- Once you find a topic that you care about, start writing
 - Repeat for multiple topics; practice yields improvement
 - Ideas over technical proficiency
- When reading books, consider modern-day connections and reasons for each author's choices
- Can submit work to contests like Scholastic through your school

Principle 2: Thoughtful Choices

- Pick the activities that matter most to you
 - My metric is whether I would be excited to get out of bed and do them every day
 - Quite literally, as I get up around 5 am most days from August to November for cross country
- Be conscious of even the small choices you make because you begin building a habit for the larger ones
 - Where to sit, how to walk from one place to another, etc.
- Don't purely base your actions on those of others
 - Different goals, different paths

My Reasoning for Choices

- Is this activity something I will enjoy?
 - The best of times, the worst of times
- Will I be able to gain something tangible (a skill, a friendship, etc.) out of this activity?
- What will my long-term participation in the activity look like?

Time Management

- Make plans and to-do lists on the macro and micro levels
 - Google Calendar for Zoom meetings, deadlines, etc.
- Estimate amount of time taken to do certain tasks
 - May start inexperienced and wildly misjudge time commitments, but gradual improvement will follow
- Incorporate breaks into your plan
 - Like most people, it's hard for me to focus for 5+ hours
- Multitasking doesn't exist... with a caveat
- The power of the power nap

Example: Newspaper vs. Debate

- Two-time national quarterfinalist in LD debate; only losses in eighth grade were to eventual champion
- Size of school debate team vs. established newspaper organization
- Wanted a broader skillset
 - Felt that I had already absorbed much of what debate had to offer but needed to work on writing
- Impact on others
 - More direct advocacy and community reach when writing articles

Example: Tennis vs. Cross Country

- Past extensive experience playing tennis
 - Two-star, three-star rating on tennisrecruiting.net
- Influences
 - Mentorship of coach on cross country team
 - Team culture
- Time investment of playing tennis year-round
- Personal enjoyment of the run vs. the match
 - Didn't want to hit in the sun all day; chose cooler mornings

Principle 3: Opportunity Exploitation

- Get into the mindset of actively participating and stepping up
- Look for opportunities where an additional hand may be needed
- Asking can only help
 - Decision-making superiors won't notice you unless you give them a reason to
- Back up your words with actions
- Smaller opportunities lead to larger ones

Example: Covid News Articles

- Staffer on newspaper as a sophomore; some classmates in higher-ranking positions
- Had written some articles but arguably not any groundbreaking ones
- Approached advisers when Covid hit and entered editor deliberation room
 - Placed on the article; turned it around for publication in 48 hours
 - Became known in the organization as a beat writer for Covid
 - Wrote several other articles on Covid impact (sports, businesses, etc.)
- Likely a significant factor toward editor promotion
 - Opened door to becoming editor-in-chief

Action Items

- Brainstorm a passion if you don't yet have one
- Start following that passion
 - Don't be embarrassed if you're not where you want to be at first
- Block out time to reflect every day
 - Internalize what you explored that day
 - Wrestle with a choice in your life while you are not distracted
 - Mentally prepare for the opportunities that you predict will present themselves soon

Potential Resources

- <https://mitadmissions.org/apply/prepare/summer/>
 - Gain advice from the blogs
 - Life is not always a grind
- <https://www.artandwriting.org/> and <https://americanliterature.com/short-stories>
 - Become inspired by past great writing
- <https://blog.evanchen.cc/>
 - Establish a healthy and productive perspective

Pre-Submitted Questions

- How to improve writing skills? Would you recommend any books, magazines, or websites?
- My kids mostly enjoy reading fiction. Will reading fiction improve writing skills as well?
- Can you discuss your scholarship application experiences?
- Can you provide some research resources?
- Do you recommend any writing competitions?
- What was your research experience before RSI?
- How did you develop good writing habits? Did you ever go to any writing camps?
- Could you recommend a book list?
- Could you share your experience with Scholastic Art and Writing national awards?

Q&A

Momentum Learning Wechat Group



All seminar recordings and slides can be found at: <https://www.momentumlearning.org/open-house>

Join Momentum Learning Wechat groups



MOMENTUM LEARNING

www.momentumlearning.org
 info@momentumlearning.org



- ◆ **Best** contest math and coding competition (USACO) preparation classes
- ◆ **Structured curriculum** from the elementary level to the highest Olympiad Math (IMO/USAMO)
- ◆ We use **Zoom** to live-stream classes. **Recordings** are available
- ◆ Over **200** students receive **Distinguished Honor Roll** (top 1%) and **Honor Roll** (top 5%) on AMC8, including **15-20 perfect scores** each year
- ◆ **MATHCOUNTS National** individual round **winner, runner-up**, and multiple students who made **count down** (top12). Team round **National Champion** 3 years in a row
- ◆ Each year, over **260** students qualify for **AIME**, over **60** qualify for **USAMO & USAJMO**, and **4-8** qualify for MOP
- ◆ Team Sweepstake Winner for **CMIMC, HMMT, and PUMaC**
- ◆ Over **50** students qualified for USACO **Gold/Platinum** in last 2-3 years
- ◆ Trained the **2nd place** team in **National Science Bowl** and students who made **USABO Finalists** (Top 20 in the country)

MOMENTUM LEARNING

www.momentumlearning.org
 info@momentumlearning.org



Scan me to register

Senior Seminars

Register here:
<https://www.momentumlearning.org/open-house>



Jarvis Xie
 Yale '26

June 17 (Friday) 7-8PM CT
 How to become a top debater

Peak at Rank #1 among all LD debaters on multiple national metrics
 USAMO Qualifier
 USACO Platinum Qualifier

June 18 (Saturday) 7-8PM CT
 USACO Practice and Strategy

2-time USACO Finalist
 USAMO Qualifier
 Competitive Programming Initiative Founder



Daniel Guan
 MIT '26



Rowechen Zhong
 MIT '26

June 19 (Sunday) 7-8PM CT
 Learning to Learn: How to Master three Arts

US Physics Team '22
 Blue MOP '21
 USAMO HM '21
 USACO Platinum

June 24 (Friday) 7-8PM CT
 Science Olympiad and Social Impact

RSI Scholar
 Coca-Cola Scholar
 3-time Science Olympiad National Champion
 3-time USABO Semifinalist



Stephanie Wang
 Harvard '26



Russell Li
 Harvard '26

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 Crafting a Productive & Enjoyable HS Career

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July 2 (Saturday) 7-8PM CT
 ASK ME ANYTHING!

3-time IMO Gold Medalist
 USA IOL Team Member
 Regeneron Science Talent Search 10th Place
 2-time MATHCOUNTS champ



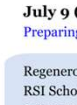
Luke Robitaille
 MIT '26



Isabella Quan
 MIT '26

July 3 (Sunday) 7-8PM CT
 Girls in Contest Math

RSI Scholar and Rickoid of the Year
 MOP Qualifier
 8-time AIME Qualifier/7-time MPFG Qualifier
 IEEE CCCW Best Paper Awardee



Amber Luo
 MIT '26

July 9 (Saturday) 7-8PM CT
 Preparing for USABO and Regeneron

Regeneron STS 3rd Place Winner
 RSI Scholar, Top 5 Paper & Presentation
 2-time USABO National Finalist
 ISEF Grand Prize Winner



Nicholas Wei
 MIT '26

July 15 (Friday) 7-8PM CT
 My Science Research Journey

ISEF Grand Prize Winner
 CSEF Project of Year
 USABO Finalist
 Paid Research Intern at Stanford

August 13 (Saturday) 7-8PM CT
 Balancing Academics and Athletics

4-time AIME/MPFG Qualifier
 Maryam Mirzakhani AMC10 Winner
 Speedo Sectionals Qualifier
 UIL Swimming District Champion



Christine Huang
 MIT '26

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Thank You!