

Dear President Young,

My name is Aleksandra Petrovich and I am a lecturer at the International and English Language Programs. I am also an immigrant who still believes in the American Dream: get a good education, work hard and you will be rewarded. I moved from my native Serbia in former Yugoslavia to the U.S. 14 years ago. In 1999 Serbia was doing much better than at the beginning of '90s: the transition from communism to capitalism was mostly completed, the wars of former Yugoslavia were in the past, and the country was moving toward a democratic society. My life was also good: my family was doing reasonably well partially due to my father's job in Austria, we haven't lost anyone in the war, I graduated from high school, and started college studying to be an English teacher. Unlike many people I didn't have a pressing need to move from where I was living. In fact, when I came to the U.S in 1999 as a part of an au pair program, I came to improve my English skills and experience American culture.

What ultimately convinced me to stay in the U.S. were the freedoms and opportunities available to anyone. While living with my host family I met many successful people who all had different stories: some were from wealthy backgrounds, some were immigrants, and some were the first in their family to go to college. But they had one thing in common: they were all highly educated and capable individuals. Unlike in Serbia I have not heard of anyone who paid to pass their college exams or anyone who got a job because the manager was their cousin. These stories convinced me that America is a meritocracy and the place I want to live in.

So far I have followed the same path to success: I graduated from college, then earned a Master's Degree in International Studies and another one in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. As an international student I paid a non-resident tuition, the last four years of which were to the University of Washington. Throughout college I struggled with financing my education and I wouldn't have made it if my family and friends both in Serbia and in the U.S. had not supported me. Ultimately, I got my dream job teaching at the University of Washington. My day-to-day work with students is extremely satisfying and I also enjoy collaborating with my fellow teachers. I am proud to be one of only two non-native speakers who are teaching English as a second language in the International and English Language Programs.

In general, I am very proud of my achievements and the fact that I have accomplished everything by myself. Unfortunately I am still waiting for the fulfillment of my American Dream: I got a good education, worked hard, and got my dream job but I don't have any job security or appropriate financial award. Every quarter I anxiously wait to hear whether I will get to keep my job for another quarter. Every quarter I sign a new contract with the UW. I am embarrassed to tell my friends and family how little money I make despite having two Master's degrees. When I finally told my father what my salary was, he said: "Come back to Serbia." But the U.S. is my home now, it's the place where I chose to live, and I hope my American Dream will be fulfilled after all.

Aleksandra Petrovich