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College as Capability Enhancement

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Introduction

Through this thesis I wanted to explore the question "What would make a college environment better?". During my journey at Claremont McKenna College I have constantly asked myself why are there some students who are able to succeed in this environment more than others? My previous involvement in student government, my current position as a Resident Assistant, and the events that have occurred in the past couple years that have affected the campus climate periodically make me question what can be done for change. It was always a question in the back of my mind, so when I read *Development as Freedom* by Amartya Sen for the first time, I wondered if his theory would be applicable to college environments. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed like a topic that I wanted to further delve into.

Amartya Sen is a Nobel Laureate who inspired the United Nations to reframe its development strategy with his *Development as Freedom* framework. Sen's main argument stems from the importance and commitment to individual freedoms. This model, which frames the issue of economic development in terms of freedom has changed the way we think about why certain nations are less developed than others. His capabilities approach to development partially inspired the creation and the introduction of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDG). This was a way to quantify select measures of development primarily focused on the idea of freedom. Once the 15 years that were devoted to accomplish the MDG's ended, the Sustainable Development Goals were introduced. These goals were agreed on by 193 nations in the

United Nation General Assembly in order to "balance human prosperity and protect the environment".

In order to be able to apply Sen's developmental theory to college campuses, this thesis will first explain his theory. Chapter one will lay out and explain in detail the relevant portions of Sen's development as freedom framework. This argument is originally applied for developing nations, but I will be pointing out how this framework is relevant in a college environment. College is a subsection of society, and Sen states that his framework is flexible and can be applied to any type of society at any stage of development. Thus, it would be an application that Sen would welcome. The first chapter will discuss important definitions to understand Sen's approach. Then, they will be explained in the context of social networking theory in order to show the strengths of Sen's account.

In Chapter two, I analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of William Deresiewicz's point of view of why elite college campuses need change to inspire students. Deresiewicz is a Yale Professor and the author of *Excellent Sheep,* in which he laments the current higher education system that is producing sheep rather than passionate students who follow their dreams. While Deresiewicz does provide some insights, Sen's framework refocuses Deresiewicz's concerns more effectively and allows for more tangible solutions. This chapter demonstrates the effectiveness of Sen's framework in analyzing problem points and how the capability approach brings more insight to the problems that Deresiewicz states.

The third and final chapter includes Sen-inspired college policies that could decrease existing unfreedoms. I particularly focus on policies that would decrease

unfreedoms at Claremont McKenna College (CMC) mainly because I currently attend this school and it is the only college environment that I have ever been immersed in. This chapter is meant to show how Sen's framework can be practically used to improve the status quo incrementally in a college environment.

There are many inequalities that exist within the college acceptance process and even more systemic problems that I do not mention or discuss due to the scope of my argument. This thesis primarily focuses on the improvements that can occur within the college environment. There is a lot of literature published on why the admissions system is broken and how education has become a positional arms race. While this thesis touches upon similar themes at times, this thesis is meant to reframe what it means to develop a college.

Chapter 1: Sen's Capability Approach

Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* has a simple general framework that is highly applicable to college environments. The core of Sen's argument has to do with the idea of freedom, loosely defined as the "expansion of 'capabilities' to lead the kind of lives they value." A person is only free to the extent to which their capabilities allows, so the expansion of capabilities is equivalent to the development of freedom.

Freedom involves the "processes that allow freedom of action and decisions" as well as the actual opportunities "given their personal and social circumstances" (Sen 17). It is important to understand development as a process of the expansion of freedom and capabilities as well as the removal of "unfreedom." Unfreedom is states like "poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states" (Sen 1). Unfreedoms restrict individuals from enjoying their substantive freedoms, as they are not allowing them to use and develop their capabilities. On a college campus, unfreedom may look like unequal access or knowledge to college resources or a systematic failure to recognize a problem such as inadequate mental health care and access.

The expansion of freedom is the primary end and the principle of means of development. "Expanding the freedoms that we have reason to value not only make our lives richer and more unfettered, but also allow us to be fuller social persons" (Sen 15). To achieve this broadly defined freedom, Sen relies on an integrated process with interconnected freedoms that continuously enhance each other to break the vicious cycle. For example, a poor and uneducated woman in Africa is unable to gain income and care

for her children properly. If the woman has access to an education, she would be able to learn how to earn income, feed her children better food, and make sure that they receive an education as well. When one of the substantive unfreedoms is lifted, the cycle breaks and the other freedoms are also enhanced. Development occurs when there are harmonious economic, political, and social conditions that allow for individuals to pursue opportunities to live a life they value. Education is a means through which individuals can gain greater substantive freedom. Through education, individuals are empowered with greater skills and can start creating change in economic, political, and social conditions. It is necessary to understand these conditions to be able to improve their life. If one does not know how to access affordable healthcare, then the individual will not be able to access it. But a person has to be educated to even think about valuing their health. Education teaches individuals "how" to do things and it also points out "what" we should value.

It is important to note that freedom is a multifaceted concept. In *Development as Freedom*, there are two main distinctions that Sen makes. First, Sen compares intrinsic freedom to instrumental freedom. "The intrinsic importance of human freedom as the preeminent objective of development has to be distinguished from the instrumental effectiveness" (37). There are five types of instrumental freedoms according to Sen: political, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. Instrumental freedoms are methods and tools through which individuals can exercise their freedom. For example, political freedom includes fair elections and uncensored press. A fair elections process is a method through which people use their freedom. These freedoms interconnect, and the enhancement of one can

lead to the improvement of another. The existence of fair elections can lead to the election of a President who will create better social opportunities such as health care. Thus, the enhancement of one freedom will lead to the improvement of another. Intrinsic human freedoms are the matters that we inherently value. Such as being safe and fed are conditions that we intrinsically value.

The second distinction is between substantive and procedural freedoms. Substantive freedom refers to what freedom the individual can exercise. For example, a substantive freedom is to have property or to be able to live until old age. According to Sen, "substantive individual freedoms are taken to be critical" (18) because it is inherently important that one can do the things one has reason to value. It is also a determinant of the "individual initiative and social effectiveness" (18), which allows them to help themselves and the world around them. This agency is important to development. Sen states that "The success of a society is to be evaluated, in this view, primarily by the substantive freedoms that the members of that society enjoy" (18). The enhancement of a person's capability is the enhancement of substantive freedom. The capability to read (a capability increase) means that the individual has the ability to work a better job (substantive freedom). Procedural freedom is to have the procedures that allow one to exercise their substantive freedom. For example, the ability to transact property is a procedural freedom. Procedural freedom will enable individuals to apply and use their substantive freedoms through procedures such as the law. Substantive freedom is a precondition needed to exercise procedural freedom, as someone that does not own anything would not be able to use the procedures. These two types of freedom will allow us to pursue what we have reason to value. There is a direct relationship

between the political structures and institutions of a nation and the freedom that an individual can exercise. At the same time, procedural freedom is not valuable to a person if they do not already have substantive freedom because one needs property to have a property right (exclusion rights).

In the preface of *Development as Freedom*, Sen says that:

"This book, however, is not intended primarily for people working at or the Bank, or other international organizations. Nor is it just for policy makers and planners of national governments. Rather, it is a general work on development and the practical reasons underlying it, aimed particularly at public discussion." (xiii).

College campuses are obviously different from a nation, but college campuses are a type of society. Colleges are a microcosm of reality in which students come to develop their capabilities to be able to live the life that they have reason to value. The capabilities approach is relevant to college campuses, especially since universities are places that are supposed to enhance their capabilities. But, students have to navigate a foreign institution and learn how to best take advantage of them. Sen believes that his framework is transferable to any society in any stage of development. College is an example and a subsection of societies, it has its governing bodies and institutions that allow students to grow or fail. It also has a population that has capabilities that can enhance their freedoms, which leads to development. There are fundamental parallels in the societies, and the Sen framework is relevant in evaluating the level of development of colleges. It is an institution that students attend to question, learn, grow, and prepare for the future. According to William Deresiewicz, the purpose of "real education (a 'liberal arts' education) is to liberate us from doxa, by teaching us to recognize it, to question it, and to

think our way around it" (pg 80). There are different priorities of capabilities depending on the individual, but there are fundamental capabilities like effective communication and critical thinking. A college is a unique place because it might be the first time students interact with people from a different nationality, ideology, and socioeconomic status. Consequently, one learns how to question previously held ideas and to formulate their own opinions and values away from home. These are capabilities that allow students to live the life that they have reason to value after college. Higher education institutions should be enhancing the skills that one needs to pursue what one has reason to value but also give one the capability to identify and reflect on what one has reason to value. Instead, colleges focus on outcomes to measure the success or failure of students like Sen claims countries do when they measure their success. If we see colleges as analogous to nations in Sen's framework and we see students as citizens, then the college has a duty to the student to reduce these unfreedoms to enhance their capabilities.

The interconnection of freedoms is crucial to the understanding of Sen's framework. The expansion of one freedom leads to the expansion of another freedom, which is what develops a nation. Since the enhancement of a capability means the increase of freedom, the level of capability is the measure of development in Sen's theory. The importance of capabilities gives more strength to the argument about the interconnectedness of freedoms. What the individual can do determines the amount of freedom they have. Framing the abilities of individuals regarding capabilities is more illuminating than outcomes because it can explain what individuals can do. Outcomes cannot tell why certain metrics are higher than others and are not able to capture choice.

Sen highlights the misleading nature of output metrics such as Gross National Product (GNP) per capita as a measure of economic development. It was a typical assumption that the amount of wealth in a country, measured by GNP per capita, is directly correlated to the standard of living in that country. Life expectancy is one of the data points used to measure standard of living. Sen demonstrates that life expectancy is not directly correlated with the amount of income, but rather "through public expenditure on health care, and through the success of poverty removal" (Sen 44). Therefore, it is more likely that wealthier nations will invest more in programs to remove unfreedoms. There is a higher chance that those systems are in place because they have the resources, but having the resources does not equate to having systems to increase life expectancy. There must be actual investments from the government to grant their citizens procedural and substantive freedoms to increase their standard of living. Consequently, life expectancy is correlated to the amount of programs and the effectiveness of institutions rather than wealth. This sheds light on how economic growth does not equal development, and shows that merely measuring for GNP per capita is not reflective of the development status of a nation. This example is similar to the reality that students face in the education system. The abilities of a student are measured through test scores and awards rather than their capabilities. Test scores and awards are tokens of achievements, but they do not faithfully represent the capabilities of a person. Thus, the measurement of capabilities is more reflective of the state of society and person than outcomes. Numbers do not entirely capture the capabilities of a student or a college. Everything from the admissions system to the college ranking system rely on arbitrary scores and data points that do not necessarily accurately reflect capabilities.

As previously mentioned, colleges are places where students attend to enhance their capabilities in order to pursue the life that they have reason to value. In these higher education institutions, there are also unfreedoms that stop students from being able to take full advantage of the institution. There are also systemic issues such as admissions that limit the type of students who are admitted to the elite institutions. Furthermore, outcomes are not able to capture choice. Under outcomes, there is no difference between a person who does not eat because they are not able to afford it and a person who does not eat because they are on a hunger strike. This example is problematic because the former is not capable of eating while the other is choosing not to eat, but under the outcomes view they are one in the same. The capability approach is more nuanced and can pinpoint why a person is engaging in individual behavior and focus on helping those that need help.

In *Development as Freedom*, Sen discusses how even the United States has room for development since development is an ongoing process. There are always institutions that can improve and there are always capabilities to further enhance. Obviously, a country like the United States has a very different development plan than a country like Burundi. Overall, the meaning of development is the same, and every country has the same overarching goals. However, every country is at a different place because development is multifaceted. The United States has a stable government but faces challenges in areas like gender equality and sustainable environmental efforts. In contrast, Burundi struggles with food shortages and a turbulent political history. If we compare these two countries, it is tough to solve these inherently different problems with

one narrow solution. Sen's account allows us acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of each country and create appropriate policies to solve their respective problems.

Under Sen's framework, the enhancement of one capability will lead to the enhancement of another. This will result in a chain reaction of enhancements of capabilities and expansions of freedoms, which means that there is development. If there is an educated woman in an underdeveloped nation with children, then she will know how to feed her children better and see the importance of education herself. Education will enhance a great number of other capabilities. One of the capabilities would be her ability to take care of her children. Her knowledge will make her want to feed her children more nutritious food and also educate her children. If the children attend school, they will be able to make better choices in their lives, such as use birth control and work. If they can find a job that gives them consistent income, the children will have a higher standard of living. The fact that the mom was educated can trigger a chain reaction because capabilities are interconnected. Lifting one unfreedom can directly impact the existence of another unfreedom. If the mother did not enhance her own capabilities, she might have not known what she did not know about nutrition and the importance of her children to go to school.

Similarly, there are interconnected forms of "capital" within college campuses. Capital in this context are forms of resources that students have access to. According to social networking theory, there are social cues of engagement. The most successful students are the ones who succeed due to their level of awareness and engagement. In other words, there is certain information that some students are privy to that others are not. "An important form of social capital is the potential for information... Information is

important in providing a basis for action." (Coleman S104). A student who has more institutional knowledge will be able to use the resources and environment more effectively to live the life that they have reason to value than a student who does not. There are infinite ways in which students can increase their social capital, but not all students can do so equally. "Social capital is created in social networks and the value raised from the relationships between the network nodes" (Fryczynska 61). Social capital is reliant on financial capital, which is what a student can afford to do. If a student is unable to afford what their peers do for fun, then they will not be able to connect with their peers to the same degree to those that can afford those activities. For example, attending parties and eating off-campus are common social activities that are reliant on financial means. According to Coleman, "human capital is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways" (S100). Unlike the two previous forms of capital, the authors define human capital as a capability as Sen would rather than a resource or a network. On a college campus, human capital can be the academic success of the student, greater self-awareness, better research skills, etc. These skills will translate into more considerable success in the professional world after graduation. According to social networking theory, the enhancement of human capital leads to the increasing of financial capital, because the increase in skills and capabilities will lead to more income.

Social networking theory is able to capture the different forms of capital, but it is not very effective at evaluating the interactions within a fluid environment with organic interactions. In this theory, social networks are interactions that can be represented as nodes. Social capital, as defined by Frycynska, implies that the value of the network

determines the amount of social capital a person has. However, it overlooks that there is a precondition to having a social network, which is the ability to access a network, have the ability to socialize in a proper way, and to maintain those connections. This prerequisite points out that there is a capability underlying what social capital is. The ability to expand a social network and to have access to the information and the talents of diverse groups of people is a capability. Thus, social networking theory mischaracterizes social capital because interactions are valuable only to the extent that the individual is capable of maintaining them. Financial capital is not merely the amount of money that an individual has but is also a significant source of unfreedom that hinders individuals from pursuing the life that they have reason to value. It makes individuals incapable of participating in social gatherings as mentioned before or even access to an education under Sen. Financial capital is the number of resources an individual has, which is not something everyone can obtain. Thus, income is a restricting force and the cause of many unfreedoms. When social capital is understood as a capability rather than just a network, and when financial capital is a potential unfreedom, there is a more deep analysis of what occurs within the environment. With these reframed definitions, we will analyze one situation that occurs at Claremont McKenna College.

At CMC there is a great speaker series hosted every week at the Athenaeum. Students sign up to eat dinner, listen to a talk, and then ask questions to the speaker following their presentation. It is free to attend these talks, but students are required to wear business casual attire. If someone is unable to afford business casual clothes to attend the Athenaeum, then they will not be able to immerse themselves in the complete experience. Since the Athenaeum is a rich learning and social opportunity, the students

who are unable to attend are at a social disadvantage. They miss an opportunity for high-level discourse outside of classroom engagement with their peers to debate interesting topics at the dinner table, which might lead to knowledge that they did not have before. In fact, these students would never have the opportunity to be at the head table, where the guest speaker dines with a group of students. The recurring attendance of the Athenaeum increases networking skills due to the amount of small talk that occurs at these gatherings and teaches a student how to ask questions that challenge point of views respectfully.

Under social networking theory this situation would be an example of how the lack of financial capital leads to less social capital due to an inability to attend such events that could have led enhancement of human capital. In other words it would have merely been a missed opportunity to improve one's skills. However through Sen's lenses, the lack of financial resources is an unfreedom that stops select students from expanding their capability to discuss hard topics and network with peers, faculty, and staff. The social experience of the Athenaeum in and of itself is an enriching experience that expands capabilities. While both theories point to the fact that there is a lack of financial resources of the student, Sen's theory provides a better explanation for why the lack of financial resources is in fact an unfreedom. Furthermore, distinguishing the ability to network as a precondition (a capability) to have a network (social capital) demonstrates the importance of capabilities. In contrast to Coleman where the interconnections of capital rely on an increase in financial capital for there to be to be an increase in first social and then human capital, Sen is able to give a better explanation. Under Sen's theory, once the unfreedom of financial accessibility is lifted, all students obtain the freedom to enjoy the talks and further develop their capabilities to network, question, and

socialize. There is no specific place where the cycle has to be broken, and the theory adapts to the fluid nature of interactions. A student might learn how to properly eat at a formal setting, talk to professors outside of class, or learn how to formulate questions that are challenging yet still respectful to the speaker. These are all examples of potential capabilities that the student might acquire that do not have to be strictly social or human capital.

Ultimately, Sen's framework is a powerful way to describe and understand developmental problems in any type of society–including a college campus. His definition of capabilities is broad and allows for individuals to live a life they have reason to value, which accounts for the diverse needs of individuals. In the same way, students at liberal arts institutions should be given the agency to truly explore what they value. The term unfreedom allows us to understand what obstacles there are for individuals to be able to exercise the freedoms they have reason to value. In chapter three, I will explore a policy recommendation based on Sen's framework.

Chapter 2: Capability Approach vs. Deresiewicz

In the previous chapter, I explained the general framework of Sen and outlined the important definitions. This theory of development is highly applicable to the development of colleges. William Deresiewicz, the author of *Excellent Sheep*, attempts to tease out a problem with our current generation of students. Through his book, he gives an account on how to fix our college admissions system and the fact that our students need to find their passions and soul. When Deresiewicz's account is seen through Sen's lenses, one can identify the flaws in Deresiewicz's compelling way of thinking. While Deresiewicz does touch upon a harsh reality at college campuses, he is not able to navigate the issue effectively.

William Deresiewicz paints a picture of the problematic nature of elite colleges in America. Deresiewicz is a Yale professor who criticizes what higher education in America has become and the negative externalities that have grown out of it–everything from helicopter parents to super children who suffer from mental illnesses. Helicopter parents are overbearing parents who raise their children to learn and perfect everything from music to complex mathematics. Helicopter parents create super children, who are able continuously jump high hoops. The author, who was raised to be what he calls "super people," reflects about what college should be and what it has become. After seeing so many of his intelligent students blindly chase opportunities, he says that the goal of college should be to explore who you are and to develop a soul. He uses the term soul to describe what the inner passion students have inside, which indicates the type of life they want to pursue. College has become a place where "my peers sacrifice health,

relationships, exploration, activities that can't be quantified and are essential for developing souls and hearts, for grades and resume building" says a Stanford student (Deresiewicz 9). The education system today is what he calls a series of hoops, in which students are just collect gold stars with no sense of awareness of why they are doing what they are doing. Students, especially those who were born knowing that they will be going to college, have been trained since childhood to collect gold stars. They need to take the hardest classes, be a part of the prestigious extracurricular clubs, play varsity sports, and be able to play instruments to get into a high-ranking university that will hopefully lead to a job that will allow them to live comfortably for the rest of their lives. Deresiewicz points out that students who have been jumping hoops their entire lives have not learned what they want to do nor where their passions lie. As a result, even when they go to college, students want to go the safe way and end up choosing industries like finance, consulting, or law school to extend the amount of time in which they do not have to specialize or pick a route. College is not a place to expand their capabilities or explore themselves, but it is a series of higher hoops in a more competitive environment. Deresiewicz believes that college should be "an opportunity to stand outside the world for a few years, between the orthodoxy of your family and the exigencies of career, and contemplate things from a distance" (81 Deresiewicz). Deresiewicz describes college as an idealistic place to be able to grow as a person but does not give tangible ways to create this ideal environment. The argument keeps on coming back to the fact that students should be able to choose the life they have reason to value with more conscientiousness, but Deresiewicz does not address how this can happen. Instead, he points out some different problem points that might play a part in creating these sheep that lack a soul.

He begins his argument with how GPA and standardized test scores fail to capture the true capabilities of a prospective college student. True capabilities are what a student can do, which is not captured through awards and accomplishments. One of Deresiewicz's criticisms of the admissions system is the misguided focus on outcomes such as GPA, SATs, and prestigious awards. The more achievements and the higher numbers a student has, the better. These results are supposed to be a proxy for the capability of students. It is supposed to measure how successful the student will be in the college. The numbers are supposed to be indicative of how much more they can grow, but in reality, the numbers are a proxy of how much money and energy their parents invested in their children. It is reflective of the number of resources and time that parents spent on their children to achieve those outcomes. Similar to Sen's discussion of GNP per capita vs life expectancy, Deresiewicz poses a questions between the financial capabilities of the student's family and the success of the student in system. The system immediately gives children of higher socioeconomic status a significant advantage, because parents can prepare their children due to social and financial capabilities. If one were to compare a student who received SAT, ACT, AP preparation and attended a college preparatory high school to a student who went to a below-average public school and did not know how to prepare for the SAT, there will be a noticeable discrepancy.

Another frustration that Deresiewicz discusses is how ineffective college rankings are at measuring which school is better relative to each other. College ranking systems exist due to their profitability, and not because they are able to discern which school is better. Deresiewicz mentions how The US News College rankings were initially highly disliked by college presidents because they focused on arbitrary measurements to show

which college is the "best." Various college Presidents have asked the US News to stop these rankings at its inception, but it became so profitable so quickly that what the Presidents said could not stop the US News to stop their ranking system. Ironically, it became a vital status to gain, and the college rankings started to influence college management decisions significantly in order to be able to climb the rankings. Colleges have to report information in the fall of every academic year for college rankings, and one of them is classroom size. CMC will cap class sizes more strictly at eighteen and stop students from taking the classes they want to be a part of to protect the college's rank. These restrictions are a trade-off between allowing a couple more students in the class and the position in rankings. The data points used to configure the rankings demonstrate how the narrow focus on outcomes can blind colleges from doing what matters to develop their campuses into better places for the students.

Even post-graduation, colleges have a tendency to measure the success of a student with outcomes. The standard paths Deresiewicz criticizes are those of consulting and finance that reduce the fear of uncertainty of the future. Due to the competitive nature, high wages, and the standardized recruiting seasons of these jobs, students gravitate towards these jobs. Recently, there has been a rise of articles that measure what college gives the best return on investment. In other words, what college is good at making students rich fastest out of college. Deresiewicz recognizes the importance of financial stability and the fact that this is the life that some students might want, but our system now seems to assume that this is what all students value. One of the most common measures of "what college creates successful students" is through the average income of their graduates five years out of college. This undermines the prestige of working for

sectors that might not be as lucrative, such as non-profit, government, and entertainment. It also takes away from the fact that alumni might be in prestigious doctorate programs or engaging with works that are truly impacting the world. The current system does not allow for a fair comparison between those that are delivering outcomes and those that are creating value in other ways in the world. For example, how can we compare someone that climbs to the top of the corporate ladder to someone who is negotiating security measures in the United Nations? The way that we focus on numbers and outcomes rather than capabilities is what deters us from creating a fair system. Based off Sen's point of view, this is yet another example of how outcomes can distract people from genuinely achieving what they think they are doing.

Both Sen and Deresiewicz would agree that outcomes can be misleading and there is a need to refocus the purpose of college education. Deresiewicz claims that there is a need to encourage students to explore their passions, create a soul, and to reflect on what is the life they have reason to value. These are very abstract and idealistic opinions. It is hard to convince students that it is okay to stray away from the pack, especially when there is such a strong norm of following the given path. With the Sen approach, capabilities would be metric of success and failure rather than outcomes like income. Deresiewicz's concern regarding students that lack a soul would be considered a capability deficiency under Sen's framework. The lack of a soul is the inability to recognize what the student has a reason to value, which is how Sen defines freedom. If a student is not able to identify what they value, then the college experience should be helping that student to realize what they value. Deresiewicz claims that we have to work

to help students maintain their passion, but that is only one of the many capabilities that the student needs to be able to actually pursue that passion.

According to Deresiewicz, students fear the risk because they lack the tools to get the jobs that align with their passions. One of his examples is a Yale student who wanted to become a writer but lacked the contacts to become one, which led to bitterness (118 Deresiewicz). He also mentions how immigrant families do not know what the opportunities in America are, so their children are restrained by their family's limited-knowledge of the job market. He teases out different circumstances that are the underlying reason why students pick the safer paths. All of the interviews with different students give insight on the fact that there is something indeed wrong with the status quo. However, his account is unable to effectively summarize all of the nuanced accounts. To increase the amount of students who develop a soul Deresiewicz calls for an admissions process in which test scores are weighted, taking into account the socioeconomic status of the family. His thought process has to do with the fact that the student who is less privileged has to jump more hoops to be at the same place as a more privileged. By fixing the admissions process, Deresiewicz is hoping that the competitive nature of college admissions will change, because it is hard for parents to fake capabilities and students will need to focus on bettering themselves. But this solution relies on the fact that college admissions' system change will trickle down into parenting and job recruiting, which is highly unlikely. A change in the admissions change does not enhance the college experience while students are in college, so Deresiewicz's solution does not tackle the problems he raises. His solution raises the following question: how do we know when the solution is successful? How will progress be measured? How do we know that one

college is better than another? These are questions Deresiewicz's account is not able to answer because there is no common denominator in his framework. He is tries to reconcile the problems that exist in the educational system at large and loses sight of what he is trying to solve. The problem Deresiewicz discusses needs more than merely an admissions overhaul, but he is unable to effectively describe the problem.

Under Sen's framework, Deresiewicz's example of the Yale student who is unable to become a writer because of a lack of connections is a perfect example of social capability deficiency. In the case of the student with the immigrant family, they also lack social capability because they do not have access to information. Deresiewicz says in the discussion of the student who aspired to be a writer that "the point is that a sense of inner freedom is essential. How much uncertainty you can stand (as well as how much money you can manage on" (Deresiewicz 118). This discussion implies that there is something greater than what the student wants to do that constrains the student. He seems to be talking about how there are social and financial capability deficiencies and how the ability to deal with uncertainty is also a capability. This commentary is very important, but he is not able to include the fact that there are capability deficiencies and unfreedoms under his account. Then Deresiewicz says, "college is an opportunity not only to discover but to reshape who you are, there are limits to the extent to which you can do it." (118) His view of college shows how there are some sort of limit that every student reaches, but he is unable to point to what those restrictions are efficiently. Sen would say that the effect of privilege is evident because financial resources can give some individuals access to better capability enhancing opportunities. Students with more resources or financial capabilities will have additional training that teaches them how to "jump higher hoops"

and have better college prospects. In certain ways Sen and Deresiewicz seem have similar messages, but Sen's account is able to include all of these components of freedom and capabilities in a more fluid manner. Sen's account also shows how it is a capability deficiency issue rather than an admissions issue, so a solution would have to have a capability approach.

The focus on capabilities is a better measure to show how much impact a student might be able to make and how much they would be able to benefit and give back to the institution. This would refocus the aim of education from achievements to capabilities. If the admissions system would be able to adopt "the capabilities approach," then there would be a significant decrease in the existing positional arms race for education and would decrease the unfreedom of admission that excludes those who are unable to afford the additional "training" to succeed. Even though this change is important, it is not going to impact all of the other problems that occur within a college campus. There are also other institutions, like career services, within a college campus that would benefit a refocus on capabilities. When it comes to choosing what to do and what steps to take next, there is a lack of definition on how to get the jobs outside of consulting and banking. This problem found within recruiting also adds another layer to why students follow the path of consulting and banking, which cannot be fixed with an admissions overhaul. *Excellent Sheep* has deep insights from student anecdotes Deresiewicz compiles, but there the author is unable to find the common thread. Deresiewicz is focusing on a single capability (creating a "soul" by straying away from the use of outcomes) when a student needs more than just that.

A large limitation of Deresiewicz's account, is that he does not realize that he is narrowly focusing on the improvement of a single capability--allowing students to see what they have reason to value. He also does not acknowledge the strengths of the current system. He states that there are some students that serendipitously manage to truly find their passion in college, but discredits the institution. There are many opportunities built in liberal arts institutions such as clubs and organizations, research institutes, and conversations with peers and staff that allow for the internal growth of a person. As a Claremont McKenna College student, I can speak from first-hand experience that there are many events and opportunities that result in this increase awareness that Deresiewicz seems to point to. It might not be directly trying to instill into students the value of a liberal arts education and to make students explore careers outside of consulting and finance, but students end up having these realizations by themselves. For instance, when I went to the Sophomore Leadership Experience (SLE) at the beginning of my sophomore year, we were divided in small groups for guided discussions. In some of these guided conversations, we were purposely asked questions that would invite us to be vulnerable with each other. One of questions was: what is something that you value that a lot of people at CMC do not know you value? I answered that I used to be more passionate about painting and dedicated a lot of my time to that. My peers had a wide range of answers varying from music to their relationship with family. These discussions demonstrated to me that my peers do have a lot more in their minds that simply a job or outcomes. Another example is my experience at In-Lend Fund, a nonprofit that helps low income entrepreneurs through consulting services and microfinance. I joined this club during my freshman year without really knowing what was going on. I just knew from

my high school experience that I liked the idea of economic development and I was familiar with Kiva, the organization that In-Lend Fund partners with to give 0% interest loans. To a certain extent, joining In-Lend Fund was a "gold star". I wanted to be part of an impactful group that was somewhat impressive in a resume after being rejected from Model United Nations. Ultimately, I gained a lot more than just that "gold star". I was able to help a local Mexican woman start her side business to improve her standard of living, which was so much more than what I thought I could accomplish my first year of college. I met a lot of people that became close friends and inspiring mentors to me. This experience, even though it was just a gold star I was trying to gain, led to more than just that. Deresiewicz does not even acknowledge the fact that gold stars are also capabilities that are needed to be a marketable candidate for whatever career I want in the future. These are the types of experiences that a student needs to be able to realize what they value on their lives. Deresiewicz simply points out the flaws in the system when there are benefits in the current system. It is actually necessary for students to be involved in more than just academics to be able to develop the capabilities they need to be able to pursue the careers they have reason to value.

Under Sen's terms, my experience in In-Lend Fund is a capability expanding experience rather than simply a "gold star". Through that experience, I was able to gain different capabilities such as: creating friends with upperclassman mentors, learning how to work with low-income small business owners, and pitching services to strangers. These are all experiences that led to my personal growth and were steps that made me into the person that I am today. Sen's account is able to give a more insightful analysis of what types of capabilities are enhanced through the student's decision. Deresiewicz

underwrites all decisions as students attempting to jump hoops, which is not a completely fair picture. Deresiewicz says how "liberal arts graduates are so highly valued in the workforce, and why it almost doesn't matter what you study" (Deresiewicz 151). This statement seems to touch on Sen's idea that students are successful because they have a broad set of capabilities. Deresiewicz even quotes *The Wall Street Journal* where an article states that "critical thinking, communication and problem-solving skills as more important than a candidate's undergraduate major" (Deresiewicz 151). Therefore, Deresiewicz seems to acknowledge the need for a greater set of capabilities, yet he does not acknowledge that the current system in elite colleges are doing that through extracurricular activities and on-campus jobs. His set of solutions do not directly solve the disparate set of problems he discusses throughout his book. Sen would understand the need for a broad set of capabilities to be prepared for whatever the student desires to pursue once they are able to identify what is the life that they have reason to value. Under the Sen framework, the "soul" is having the freedom to live the life that they have reason to value and there are capabilities that allow individuals to exercise that freedom. So if students have the necessary capabilities, they will be able to live the said life that they have reason to value.

When Deresiewicz's account is reframed in the Sen's capability account, it is able to summarize all of the problem points with a common denominator. All of the different issues such as the inability to access a network, the inability to understand the life a student has a reason to value, and the inability to recognize the opportunities beyond college, can be understood in terms of capabilities and the lack thereof. Thus, there is a clearer image of the weaknesses in Deresiewicz's account. Similar to the case of the

United States and Burundi in chapter one, different colleges have different priorities to become better. Some colleges might have a very developed Career Services center, but do not have a great Dean of Students office that makes students feel emotionally supported in their journey. Some colleges might have excellent opportunities for research for undergraduate students, but lack the tools to assist students that want to pursue alternative career paths-whatever that means to that specific institution. This account fairly portrays the strengths and weaknesses of every college rather than making a statement that wrongly paints a picture that every college fails in the same way. One of the problems Deresiewicz does a good job portraying is that students lack vision and passion, and the fact that the system might have made them this way. But he is unable to summarize what capabilities those students are lacking, which is the way it should be because every college has a different set of difficulties. Thus, Sen can neatly consolidate the diverse problems across college campuses through capability deficiencies and unfreedoms.

Chapter 3: Sen Style Policy Recommendation

Now that Sen's framework has been explained and applied to Deresiewicz's account to demonstrate the weaknesses in it, we can answer the question "What would Sen do?". Similar to what he does for his account in developmental economics, he would recommend first to tackle the unfreedoms that would help the people that need it the most. The focus on those who suffer from the greatest unfreedoms would extend the capabilities of those that need it the most by lifting an unfreedom that exists in the system. Once these unfreedoms are lifted, Sen would identify what the next set of highly impactful unfreedoms are in the system and try to make the current system better. Sen has an incremental approach, which seeks to improve the system marginally. There is an underlying assumption that there are always measures that will make someone better off because there is no specific end goal in development. This means that there are always institutional and infrastructure improvements that can be made to lift unfreedoms that exist within a society.

Given the previous discussion, two methods go hand-in-hand through which a college can improve and develop. The first is to focus on capabilities to measure what a student can do instead of narrowly focusing on outcomes. The second is to decrease the number of unfreedoms that prevent students from enhancing their capabilities. The types of unfreedoms that individuals face have to be decreased in order to create more equal opportunities. The mechanism through which change occurs permanently is via institutions. In a country, there is tangible change when a government invests in the improvement of a system. There have to be "robust institutions" that can efficiently

deliver what the institution is meant to do. This gives the agency back to the individual, now that the institutions of a country can transparently state and accomplish what they are supposed to do. When this occurs, there is development in a nation. Similarly, in a college environment there are institutions such as the Admissions office, the Dean of Students office, Counseling, etc. that support and affect student's college life and capability enhancement.

In order to build a Sen-inspired recommendation for college campuses, I will be using Claremont Mckenna College as a case study due to my familiarity with the college as I attend this college. I take a particular college because Sen's framework works in a case by case as there is no magical set of policies that will fix the weaknesses of every college. Like countries, every college has a different set of unfreedoms that are hindering the capability development and the amount of freedom of the student body. Successful policies on one campus can be adapted to another college with adjustments depending on the campus culture and idiosyncrasies when applicable. The following policy recommendations are simply from unfreedoms that I have noticed in my experience at the institution. There are far more unfreedoms that I might not be able to capture due to the differences in my experience at Claremont McKenna College.

Susan Layden is the current Associate Dean of Students of Academic Success at Claremont McKenna College who recently moved from Skidmore College, where she worked at the Skidmore College Opportunity Program. Her work at Skidmore College was primarily to create access for first generation and underserved student communities. One of her achievements at Skidmore was to improve financial aid packages to include a credit to the highly aided student's account for class books. Financial aid packages are

esoteric and hard to navigate. Even though they are supposed to include money to finance books, they do not give students checks for this purpose. This resulted in students in high need of class books, who are probably from underprivileged backgrounds and less rigorous high schools, to not buy books. This is a clear example of what unfreedom for a student on high financial aid is in a college environment because students are unable to access a resource. Once the system changed to include a credit to the student's accounts, they were able to buy their books for classes. According to Layden, this policy increased students' GPA by an average of 0.5. This policy marginally improved the financial aid package at Skidmore, but by no means made it perfect. There are still improvements that can be made, but it was able to lift an unfreedom that was barring students from enjoying a substantive freedom. It is important to note that this was an unfreedom to those that could not access books prior to the change in policy. A more privileged student who could afford the books, but who did not buy the books anyways is not impacted by this unfreedom. The privileged student has the freedom to purchase the books, but chose to not do so. If they do not receive good grades as a result, it is not due to the systemic inability to access the resources but due to their choice. Thus, seemingly small modifications in policy have the ability to highly impact the capabilities of those facing unfreedom. At CMC, there is a similar problem with financial aid packages and it is unclear for high-need students whether or not they have a book stipend. There is no designated portion of their financial aid package specifically dedicated for academic resources. This is an example of how a lack of financial capabilities disables a student from enhancing their capabilities to learn. The fact that the lack of financial capabilities disable a student from expanding their own capabilities reinforces the importance of the

interconnected nature of capabilities. This interconnection also shows how there are external factors that create unfreedoms, which, in turn, impact the development of the person. Financial resources disable students, but colleges have the resources to ensure that students can access the appropriate resources for class. CMC would benefit from creating a system that lifts the unfreedom of accessing appropriate school materials by either providing the necessary textbooks in class or creating a similar system where those in need are able to purchase their own copy of the books. Because Sen focuses on lifting unfreedoms, there is no correct way to development. It is important to keep in mind that development is an ongoing process, and small changes in the financial aid system are merely incremental policies that create freedom.

Another issue related to financial aid packages is the ability to find impactful work-study jobs on campus is also a problem at CMC, as Layden pointed out. Most of the federal work-study jobs that students on financial aid are eligible for are office jobs and at the Athenaeum as a server. There are also research positions available that also are eligible for work-study, but professors tend to pick their favorite students that are "mini-me's" of them rather than those that need the position more. (Layden) Because students tend to gravitate towards what they are familiar with, low-income students will gravitate towards the office jobs rather than the research positions available. According to Layden's study, the kitchen jobs paid well and the kitchen staff often became their family away from home. Staff members attended to the student's game, performances, and opened up their homes for the students during shorter breaks. Both jobs come with pay, but the research position provides marketable higher level capabilities and creates a relationship with a professor who can write a letter of recommendation for future jobs

and graduate school. Both research and kitchen jobs allow students to develop social capabilities because they create relationships with people. But, the research position further enhances more academic capabilities while the kitchen job only enhances social capabilities. At Skidmore, they changed the hiring process to obligate faculty and staff members to reserve certain competitive positions to just be filled by work-study students. This policy gave low income and first generation students the freedom to apply and see all of their options before they apply for jobs without knowing the entire context.

At CMC there is no priority for work-study students, who are required to work to pay for a part of the tuition. On top of that, students who do not need work-study are easily able to take these office jobs that usually allow students to work a greater number of hours per week than other on campus jobs. At CMC, there is a greater culture to be part of prestigious research institutions rather than being a research assistant to a specific professor. Similar to the professors, the student leadership in the clubs and organizations tend to recruit those students that are most similar to them. In the first week of classes the upperclassman start recruiting the first years to join their clubs, only to bombard them with difficult applications and interview processes. The consulting and finance clubs as well as research institutes start their applications too early and recruit students who are at the top of an already elite pool. The club leaders usually hire the first years who already have a robust set of skills, which tend to be those that come from privileged educational backgrounds. It is an unfreedom, because the current system greatly puts those that do not have the institutional knowledge or have upperclassman friends in the first couple weeks of school at a heavy disadvantage. Those who do have the institutional knowledge are those students who could afford to come for overnight visits prior to attending CMC,

those who became friends with their orientation leaders, those who have high school friends who attend the college, etc. The lack of social capabilities at the beginning of the student's first year can drastically change an underclassman experience at CMC, which stops those who would benefit the most from the prestigious positions from obtaining them. A way to eliminate the unfreedom to follow what everyone else is doing, is by first allowing students to get acclimated to the college environment before they apply to clubs. It also allows students to meet more upperclassman before they commit their time to certain organizations. If all clubs start recruiting in the Spring semester, then all the students will be exposed to the same information at the same time and make a more informed choice about their time investments. It would also make the recruiting process more fair, since no club will be trying to recruit before another club takes the "best" first years. Instead, clubs and organizations should be encouraged to create preview programs in order to allow first years to see what each club is actually about and give students time to think what clubs allow them to grow and expand their capabilities. This solution would level the number of social capabilities that the student body at large has, which would create better opportunities to expand their capabilities as a student.

Another institution that needs great change at CMC is Student Health Services and Monsour Counseling. As a consortium resource, being shared with the other Claremont Colleges, it is often harder to change policy. Monsour Counseling and Student Health Services at the Claremont Consortium are both infamous among students for being unable to provide adequate care of students. It has been historically ineffective and has had that reputation ever since I started my first year here in 2014. Now, three years later there has been marginal improvements at best at Monsour. One of these

improvements is shorter waiting periods for counseling appointments, but it still ranges from 2-3 weeks at some points of the semester. There are off-campus counseling options, but you need a referral from this campus service to be able to get insurance coverage and be initially diagnosed. Monsour also only guarantees eight sessions per semester for every student for free. They will make exceptions if necessary, but if a student needs more sessions, they will be referred to off-campus therapists as well. Regarding health care, student health is also infamous for giving misdiagnoses. In many cases, students are referred to the emergency room or off-campus, but the student has to front the cost and then get reimbursed through the insurance system. As a result, those students that do not have the financial capabilities have to settle for mediocre and lacking care. The inaccessible nature of mental and physical health on a college campus, especially where there are students that are going to through mental crises for the first time in their lives will cripple a once capable student. Health is a preconditional capability necessary for a person to be able to function at their 100% in their everyday activities. The inability to access appropriate healthcare is an unfreedom within a college environment. Especially because it will stop students from being able to expand their other capabilities effectively.

Overall, the solutions given above might seem disconnected at first; however, the purpose of a Sen-style development model is that there are unfreedoms detected and they are solved as you go. The accumulation of all of these improvements is going to continuously create more freedom for the individual and allow them to pursue the life that they have reason to value. It is important to be able to recognize that these small changes that enhance the capabilities of individuals together will make the college better over time. Access to financial resources and health are the two examples that Sen uses in

his account of *Development as Freedom* because they truly hinder an individual from being able to do things. A student with depression or mononucleosis that is not properly treated will not be able to function at the level that a student that is not affected by these things is. Similar to how an illiterate woman would not be able to function as well in society compared to a literate woman in a developing nation as mentioned in the first chapter. I am not able to go through every capability that a college campus can improve in this chapter, but the examples above provide a framework of how to tackle the capability deficiencies that exist in a college campus.

Conclusion

Through this thesis I defined about Sen's capability approach and demonstrated how it can truly be a better way to understand the development of colleges. This framework is powerful because it gives us insights on the strengths and weaknesses of an institution. It also sheds light to various problem points in the elite American college system, which have to do with financial capabilities and health. I hope that understanding everything through the language of capabilities is able to create a more fruitful conversation regarding capability deficiencies and how to tackle them. It is a problem that impacts all students, and can be changed with Sen's capability approach in mind.

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