

Cooper Hallam  
12th grade  
Skyview High school  
Billings MT

What drives you?

In a world with so many different opportunities this can be a difficult question to answer. Some may be motivated by making money, while others may be driven by a need to help others. I am driven by the need to set my future self-up for success.

Every young adult wants success no matter how it manifests in their lives and how they strive to achieve it. I also want to be successful but I was dealt a card at birth that will inevitably require me to have a greater drive than most. My freshman year of high school I was diagnosed with a rare eye condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa. It was passed down to me from my grandfather. It is slowly causing me to lose my vision until complete blindness sets in. Based on the current status of my disease, the eye specialists believe total blindness could occur by the time I'm 30 years old. Currently, I have little to no night vision and my peripheral eyesight is diminished.

Preparing myself for college I had to make the difficult decision of whether to pursue a future in a career field that would be more conducive to one who eventually will be blind or choose to follow my dream of becoming an engineer. My family and I had extensive conversations about which route to take and in the end I made the decision to not let my disability dictate my life and follow my dreams and pursue a career as an engineer.

Blind engineers are few and far between. In order to succeed as a blind engineer, I will have to push myself throughout college and into my early years as an engineer. During this time frame I will have to adapt my lifestyle and transform my engineering tasks/career into those that can be successfully accomplished as a blind man. My dream of being a successful blind engineer is why I will be attending a prestigious STEM college, Colorado School of Mines, to learn the skills needed to be a great engineer. My drive will ensure I am as successful as my sighted colleagues.

The next 10 years of my life will be the most critical in shaping my future. The thought of losing my vision is in the forefront of my mind with every life decision I make. It is this thought that drives me to be the best version of myself I can possibly be in order to ensure my future success.