Imani Whitfield - Common App and Duke questions (2026-27, Regular Decision)

Greensboro, NC · imani.whitfield.test@example.com · Applying to: Duke University undergraduate admission, 2026-27

This is a fictional applicant, written for this sample.

Profile

- Intended school: Trinity College of Arts & Sciences. Intended major: Environmental Science and Policy; possible minor in Statistics.
- Lives with mother (dental hygienist), grandmother and brother (age 13). First in family to apply to a private university.
- Languages: English (native), Spanish (intermediate).

Education, grades and tests

- Eastbrook High School, Greensboro, North Carolina (public, ~1,850 students, 389 seniors). Class of 2027.
- GPA 3.86 unweighted, 4.42 weighted. Rank 22 of 389.
- Senior courses: AP Environmental Science, AP Calculus AB, AP Statistics, AP English Literature, AP US Government, Spanish IV.
- AP exams: Human Geography (5), Biology (5), US History (4), English Language (4), Chemistry (3).
- Note on grades: C in AP Chemistry first semester of junior year (raised to B+ second semester).
- SAT 1440 (Evidence-Based Reading and Writing 710, Math 730).

Activities

1. **Independent project: bus stop heat mapping** (grades 11-12, summers 2025 and 2026, ~6 hrs/wk). Placed $9 temperature loggers at 14 Greensboro city bus stops, half with shelters and half without. Unshaded stops averaged 11°F hotter at 3 p.m. in July; the worst hit 118°F at the bench. Presented a 5-minute summary to a city transportation advisory meeting (Oct 2025). One stop on my list got a shelter in spring 2026; I don't know whether that was because of me.
2. **Line cook and cashier, Bev's Biscuit Kitchen** (grades 10-12, 15 hrs/wk school year, 25 hrs/wk summer, paid). Saturday and Sunday breakfast shifts starting at 6 a.m. Promoted to opening shift lead in summer 2026; train new hires on the biscuit station.
3. **Science Olympiad, co-captain** (grades 9-12, 4 hrs/wk). Events: Disease Detectives and Forensics. 4th place, Disease Detectives, Piedmont regional (2026). Run Thursday practice for 11 freshmen.

4. **Volunteer tree planter, Greenway Shade Collective** (grades 10-12, ~40 hrs/yr). Plant and water street trees in East Greensboro; led a 12-person crew in fall 2025.
5. **Crossword constructor, The Eastbrook Echo** (grades 10-12, 2 hrs/wk). One themed 15x15 puzzle per issue, 22 published.
6. **Peer tutor, Eastbrook Math Center** (grades 11-12, 2 hrs/wk). Algebra II and Precalculus.
7. **Family responsibilities** (grades 9-12, 5 hrs/wk). Drive grandmother to medical appointments; pick up brother from practice.
8. **Track and field, JV 400m** (grades 9-11). Did not make varsity; stopped after junior year to take more shifts.

Honors

- AP Scholar with Honor (2026)
- Science Olympiad Piedmont Regional, 4th place, Disease Detectives (2026)
- Eastbrook High School Environmental Science Department Award (2026)

Personal essay (prompt: a problem you'd like to solve)

My tenth-grade history class met in Mobile Unit 7, a trailer behind the gym. In September the thermostat on the wall read 88°F. Mr. Delgado taught the Reconstruction amendments with a box fan aimed at the front row and the door propped open with a chair. By fourth period, half of us had our heads on our desks, and I remember thinking that nobody would ever measure how much of the Fourteenth Amendment we lost to heat.

Then I started noticing heat everywhere. My grandmother takes the number 6 bus to her cardiologist, and the stop near our house is a pole and a bench on a stretch of asphalt with no tree for a block. She waits there in a church hat with a folded newspaper over her head. One afternoon in July she called me from the clinic to say she felt dizzy, and I left work early to drive her home. She was fine. I was furious, and not sure at whom.

I am not good at being furious without doing something, so I bought fourteen temperature loggers online with tip money, about $126 total, and zip-tied them under bus stop benches across the east side, seven with shelters and seven without. Two were stolen within a week. One got run over by a mower. I learned to label them with a note that said SCHOOL PROJECT, PLEASE LEAVE, which worked better than I expected.

After two summers I had about 40,000 readings and a spreadsheet my AP Stats teacher called "enthusiastic." The unshaded stops averaged 11 degrees hotter in the afternoon. The worst, by a dollar store on Phillips Avenue, hit 118°F on the bench itself. When I mapped them, the hot stops lined up almost exactly with the neighborhoods that have the fewest trees, which are the same neighborhoods where more riders are elderly or don't own a car.

I presented this at a city transportation advisory meeting in October 2025. I had five minutes and was the only person there under forty. A board member asked how much a shelter costs. I didn't know. That question has stuck with me more than any compliment, because it showed me the gap between

finding a problem and knowing what fixing it would take: money, permits, sidewalks wide enough to hold a shelter, someone deciding it matters.

I want to learn the second half. I want to understand why a tree gets planted on one street and not another, and how to make the case in numbers a city budget can't ignore. My grandmother still rides the 6. Her stop still has no shelter. I'm working on it.

Duke supplement

What is your sense of Duke as a university and a community, and why do you consider it a good match for you? (250 words)

Duke is fifty minutes down I-40 from my house, and I've driven past the exit my whole life without thinking it was for me. Last spring I finally took the tour, then spent an hour on my own in Duke Forest, which surprised me: a research university with 7,000 acres of trees where students actually collect data.

What draws me most is that Environmental Science and Policy is taught with the Nicholas School, so science and policy aren't in separate buildings. My heat project taught me I can measure a problem; it didn't teach me what a shelter costs or who decides. I want both. Bass Connections looks like the version of my bus stop project I couldn't do alone: a real team, faculty, a community partner, a year to get it right. I'd also apply to Data+ the summer after first year, because my spreadsheet deserves better than me.

I'm also drawn to the Duke Campus Farm, partly because I've spent two years planting trees with people who mostly aren't students, and I'd like to keep my hands in dirt.

I'd bring a habit of showing up early (6 a.m. biscuit shifts), a willingness to ask the obvious question at a meeting, and a weekly crossword for anyone who wants one. Duke feels close to home in a way that matters to me: the same heat, the same Piedmont, and problems I already know by name.

Optional: Share something meaningful about yourself that we may not know from the rest of your application. (250 words)

I write crossword puzzles. It started as a joke in tenth grade when the Echo needed filler, and now it's the part of my week I protect. A good themed puzzle is a small argument: every answer has to fit with every other answer, and if one corner fails, the whole grid fails. I've rebuilt the bottom-right corner of a puzzle six times because one word, ESNE, was too obscure for my readers. My best one, "Feeling the Heat," hid HOT SPOT, HEAT INDEX and SHADE TREE in the theme answers. Only two people noticed it was about my project. One was my grandmother.