

Skylar Love

Personal Statement

Growing up in the small, low socioeconomic rural town Osceola, Arkansas, my parents were not afforded many of the luxuries most of us take for granted in today's day and age. Going to the doctor every time you feel sick, or even for a periodic checkup was something that my grandparents simply could not afford, as they held no higher than junior high school educations that resulted in dismally low paying jobs. Along with little money for doctor's visits, my grandparents were not afforded the valuable knowledge needed to live a healthy lifestyle, such as eating fruits and vegetables, eating sweets sparingly, and exercising regularly. This resulted in many childhood cases of diabetes and obesity, which later resulted in heart disease and premature deaths in adulthood. As I saw my family's health suffering simply because of lack of education and access to healthcare, I knew this was something I wanted to change.

While completing my undergraduate coursework at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, I realized that this was not only a problem in the African American community, but a problem in the Latin American community as well. Initially, I thought I wanted to study nursing, as I figured that was the most direct way to help people in my community, but later realized that patient care was not where my interests lie. After meeting with my advisor to discuss my various career goals and aspirations, we decided that Public Health was the perfect endeavor on which to embark. While completing my public health coursework, I also worked as an after-school teacher for a grant-funded afterschool program at a Title 1 school where most of my students were low income and Hispanic/Latino or Marshallese. Here, I was the lead teacher for the Indoor/Outdoor Sports club, where I regularly created health education

curriculum to an audience of eager and excited elementary school students. It was in this position that I realized my passion for youth and adolescent health, with a specific focus on minority youth, as they tend to have worse health outcomes when compared to their White, non-Hispanic peers.

After receiving my Bachelor's of Science in Public Health from the University of Arkansas in 2016, I accepted a position with the Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office housed at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff where I served as the Youth Tobacco Prevention Coordinator for "Live Free". "Live Free" focuses on educating the youth of the community on the negative effects of smoking and using tobacco products through various programs and activities, while retaining a focus on the 72209 zip code, a low-income area of the city of Little Rock where 65% of its inhabitants are Hispanic or African American. Along with educating the community, I did community scans, attended various community events, educated parents, did various media campaigns, promoted tobacco cessation, and regularly visited K-12 schools in the area to educate students on the dangers of tobacco use. While in this position, I realized that I didn't hold the necessary knowledge and skills to make the changes I wish to make in the Latin and African American community. After extensive research, I found the Health Education Master's program at Texas State University. Since Texas State is a Hispanic Serving Institution, I figured this would be the perfect place to continue my education. By attending an HSI, I believed I would gain valuable knowledge and experience beneficial to the success of my wanting to serve underrepresented populations and communities. Upon admission to the graduate program at Texas State, I was also chosen for a Graduate Assistant position with Health Promotion Services in the Student Health Center. In this position, along with various administrative duties, I was primarily responsible for

educating the campus community on healthy habits necessary for a successful college experience. To do so, I presented to countless college classrooms on health issues most specific to college students, including stress and time management, safe sex, and mental health.

During my last semester as a graduate student, I had the choice of pursuing an independent study, a thesis, or an internship as my culminating project. Given that I learn best by experience, I chose to intern with Communities in Schools, a school-based mentoring program aimed at mentoring youth labeled as “at risk”. At the elementary school where I was placed, over 90 percent of the student population was considered Hispanic/Latino and “at risk”. One of my many duties as the intern required weekly mentoring sessions with students enrolled in the program, which sometimes included providing academic help for students struggling in their classrooms. I was also responsible for creating a curriculum for a 3rd grade boys and 5th grade girls group that met once a week. In my boys group, we focused on topics like hygiene, emotional intelligence, and healthy relationships. My girls group focused on self-esteem, puberty, and healthy relationships. I thoroughly enjoyed my internship and having the opportunity to educate students on topics that aren’t typically discussed in a classroom setting.

Through the completion of my internship, I was able to see that my true passion lies within school health. I believe there is much more work and research to be conducted as it relates to minority adolescents and the lack of education they receive on topics such as healthy relationships, puberty, sexual health, and mental health. As a result of the absence of this crucial information, they have higher rates of interpersonal violence, dating violence, suicide, and teen pregnancy. As result, I applied and was accepted to the Health Education doctoral program at Texas A&M University. As a Research Assistant for my department, I am working with faculty

on the Comprehensive Healthcare Access Initiative Project, which aims to make healthcare more youth and adolescent-friendly. To do so, we have recruited an advisory group comprised of teens from around the U.S., so that we can not only hear their concerns and experiences, but pilot our ideas with them as well. By surrounding myself with some of the most brilliant minds studying school health and health education, I believe I will be more than ready to fulfill my ultimate goal of opening my own health consulting business. This business will have a specific focus on youth and adolescent health, visiting places like schools, afterschool programs, and community centers to deliver interactive, evidence-based health education to minority youth in need. By doing so, I hope to slowly, but surely, improve the health outcomes for the youth and families within those communities.