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**Personal Statement, Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Scholarship**  
**Foundation for the Advancement of Health Education**

**Introduction**

When I think about how to characterize my current and future activities in the field of health promotion, I think there is a common question that my work has tried to answer – how do we build more compassionate systems? Whether it be in schools or healthcare settings, how do we create environments that foster inclusivity and well-being? The seeds of this interest began to grow in 2010 when I was working as a college research assistant on a study examining the benefits of a compassion meditation training program for children in the foster care system in Atlanta, GA. I was struck that a seemingly simple mental practice could lead to changes not only in psychological distress, but also physiological markers of stress and inflammation. I began to consider how behavioral interventions, like the compassion meditation program, could be leveraged and scaled. Over the past 11 years, I have pursued education, research, and work opportunities to gain skills in behavioral health theory, quantitative and qualitative research design and analysis, and teaching. Now as a PhD student in Behavioral, Social, and Health Education Sciences (BSHES) at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health, my research addresses implementation science and community-engaged approaches to adapting and scaling culturally responsive mindfulness and compassion-based interventions to promote maternal and child mental health.

**Previous and Current Academic Achievements & Activities in Health Promotion**

After graduating college *summa cum laude* with a degree in Philosophy, Neuroscience, and Psychology from Washington University in St. Louis, I began working as program coordinator at Emory University's Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics. In this role, I taught, implemented, and evaluated programs to promote social-emotional functioning. In particular, I received certification to teach Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT), an 8-week evidence-based compassion meditation program, which has been shown to reduce depression and improve immune functioning. In this capacity, I taught CBCT classes to young adults at Emory University as well as K-12 educators in the Atlanta area. I also helped develop and evaluate a new initiative at the Emory Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics known as Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning, an education curriculum designed to provide educators with tools to support developmentally-appropriate activities to foster skills in resilience, emotional regulation, and empathy. Through these two experiences, I gained first-hand knowledge about the benefits and challenges of working with communities to deliver and evaluate behavioral interventions to support the mental health of children and young adults. While these two interventions – CBCT and SEE Learning – focused primarily on individual health outcomes, I became increasingly interested in how such programs could be leveraged and scaled to create change at the level of organizations and communities. To pursue this goal, I decided I needed additional skills and methods training within the field of health promotion, and in 2017 I was awarded the Mary Ansley Miller Merit

Scholarship to pursue a Master's in Public Health (MPH) at Emory's Rollins School of Public Health.

As an MPH student, I was specifically interested in health behavior theory and research design and analysis. In collaboration with my MPH advisor, Dr. Ralph DiClemente, I spearheaded a project to apply health behavior theory principles and use construct mapping techniques to build a theoretical framework for the CBCT intervention, delineating hypothesized change mechanisms. The results of this project are now published in *Social Theory & Health*. I utilized this model as the theoretical frame for my master's thesis, which examined the impact of CBCT training on burnout among hospital chaplains. I presented my thesis research at the Georgia Public Health Association annual meeting and received the first-place award for student posters. I ultimately completed my MPH with a 4.00 GPA, and I was inducted into the Rollins chapter of the Delta Omega Honor Society where I served as Vice President of Scholarship.

In 2019, I was awarded the George W. Woodruff Fellowship from the Laney Graduate School at Emory, which honors outstanding candidates who hold promise to be exceptional leaders in their field, to continue my graduate studies as a PhD student in BSHES under the mentorship of Dr. Briana Woods-Jaeger, an expert in community-based research addressing health disparities and maternal and child health. As a result of working as a graduate research assistant on many of Dr. Woods-Jaeger's projects, my research interests have become increasingly focused on issues related to adapting and scaling culturally responsive mindfulness and compassion-based interventions to promote maternal and child mental health.

### **Advancing Health of Children and Youth**

I would like to highlight a few of the projects I have worked on as a PhD student to advance the health of children and youth. Beginning in 2020, I was a graduate research assistant on a study known as *Link for Equity*, which aimed to reduce school-based violence and racial microaggressions. I specifically managed our qualitative research evaluating a cultural humility and trauma-informed care intervention for school teachers, and I will be presenting the results of these analyses at the upcoming 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on the Science of Implementation & Dissemination. On a separate project, I had the opportunity to examine predictors of medical mistrust among youth of color during the COVID-19 pandemic. I found that financial stress due to COVID-19 as well as loneliness were significant predictors of medical mistrust among youth of color, and I published the findings of this research, including recommendations to address determinants of medical mistrust among youth, in *Translational Behavioral Medicine*.

This fall, I have joined two new projects focused on child health. The first is a CDC-funded project that is utilizing data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to examine the impact of economic policies, like minimum wage laws, on rates of child maltreatment. The second project, for which I am program coordinator, is a community-engaged project funded by United Healthcare to develop culturally-responsive strategies to support the mental health of Black pregnant women. This area of research particularly excites me because it is clear that maternal mental health has a significant impact on later childhood development and health outcomes. I hope to extend this work into my PhD dissertation where I plan to conduct a sequential mixed-methods implementation study to assess barriers and facilitators to integrating mindfulness-based services into obstetric clinics to better support the mental health of Black

pregnant women. Like Dr. Oberteuffer, I hold many research interests; this proposed work particularly excites me because it will allow me to bridge my interests in implementation science, mindfulness, health equity, and maternal and child health to hopefully advance strategies that provide integrative mental health care for pregnant women – a critical step towards creating a more compassionate healthcare systems that support the whole-person health of mothers and children.

### **Professional Goals in Health Education and Promotion**

Ultimately, I aim to become a behavioral health scientist in an academic setting whose research and teaching meaningfully contribute to advancing maternal and child health and well-being. I hope that my dissertation work will provide a foundation for a future body of research in this area. I feel strongly that in order to create meaningful change, research findings must be disseminated. I am proud at this stage in my career that I have authored 6 peer-reviewed articles (4 of which were first author papers) and 22 peer-reviewed presentations at national and regional conferences. I am very excited about the work that is ahead, but I am also keenly aware that I am indebted to my mentors and teachers who have supported and inspired me along the way. As I consider my future goals, I hope not only that my research will advance maternal and child mental health, but also that I personally can serve as a supportive mentor and teacher. A key takeaway from my work on creating compassionate systems is that it truly does take a village, and I hope to one day be a champion supporting the next generation of behavioral health scientists and practioners.