

October 30, 2021

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing in support of Dennis O Nyachoti for the Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Scholarship. I have known Dennis since he started his master's degree at The University of Texas at El Paso over three years ago. Currently, Dennis is a 2<sup>nd</sup> year DrPH student in the health promotion and behavioral science program at UTHealth, and I serve as his faculty advisor. He is also a teaching assistant for the community health needs assessment (CHNA), a class I co-teach. I confirm that he has completed 19 credit hours with a current GPA of 3.666 and enrolled fulltime (10 credit hours) this fall semester.

During the first few weeks of working with Dennis during his master's program, I observed an impressive passion and commitment to his career in public health. He arrived in the US for his master's degree after several years of working in a public health career in Kenya. Time and again he demonstrated how he applies that experience to his graduate studies and integrates what he is learning in his graduate studies into a real-world perspective and application. Through his master's degree research, as well as work he did as part of a research assistantship, Dennis gained experience on a variety of research projects related to Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) initiatives in the Paso del Norte region. He was actively involved with health promotion program development, evaluation design, data collection, data analysis, and dissemination of results from numerous community projects. His master's thesis focused on cultivation and evaluation of a coalition of regional partners who delivered programs, outreach, and services in food retail settings in high-need neighborhoods in El Paso County. This coalition (the In-Store Program Coalition) was part of a larger regional effort, strategically designed through a needs assessment and stakeholder input, to address food access, availability, and affordability throughout the county. Dennis was invited to give an oral presentation about the overall project at the national Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) conference in the spring of 2020. He successfully defended his thesis, the evaluation of the In-Store Program Coalition, during the summer of 2020, and began his DrPH program at UTHealth in the fall of 2020.

Since starting his DrPH program, Dennis has strategically aligned his class projects with our Center's established community partners, focusing especially on his area of interest, food insecurity and program evaluation. For example, he partnered with a local food hub to write an evaluation plan of one of their programs. He also worked closely with me to develop a program planning and evaluation effort for a grant proposal. He led the program development component of the grant proposal, using what he has learned from his intervention mapping course to design a healthy eating program for children. Currently, Dennis is helping compile an evaluation report for a regional school health coalition (as part of his practicum experience)

that aims to increase physical activity and healthy eating among school going children. While staying actively engaged in these community projects, he has maintained excellent academic standing in all his courses in the DrPH program and has done an great job serving as the teaching assistant for our community health needs assessment course.

Throughout the time I have known Dennis, he has demonstrated a high level of competence with community engagement methodologies, as well as strong leadership skills when working with community members and partners. He has many strengths that ensure he will be successful in his overall career: he is very hard working, highly intelligent, reliable and responsible, kind and compassionate, relates well to people, and works well as part of a team. He has creative and innovative ideas for his graduate work and a passion for improving lives. With these combined qualities, I have no doubt he will have a high impact in his career. I am proud to be his faculty advisor.

It is without hesitation that I provide this strong letter of support for Dennis Nyachoti for the Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Scholarship.

Sincerely,



Leah D. Whigham, PhD, FTOS  
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Director, Center for Community Health Impact