

Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Scholarship Application Essay

I am Dennis Nyachoti, a doctoral student at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) in the health promotion and behavioral sciences program. My passion for health promotion has a long history back in the days as a kid. I recall the day I accompanied my elder sister - Dr. Syprose Nyachoti – to be treated for malaria at a nearby health center back in the village in Kenya. Of course, and as many kids could, I was not fond of medications, especially injections. I felt very sorry for her. I wondered how I could help stop suffering from preventable diseases such as malaria. Luckily, twenty years later, I was working in the health promotion field. Interestingly, my sister introduced me to the public health course upon hearing about it at Jomo Kenyatta University, Kenya.

After the four-year program, I had an opportunity to work in different community health organizations, including non-profits and governmental institutions. I led various health promotion activities, especially sanitation and hygiene programs in Kenya. For instance, I created an emergency response team to end a cholera outbreak in five slums in Nairobi City. I was also involved in a global fund malaria prevention project (a project that gave me a legit opportunity to serve my village – where my passion for health promotion began several years ago). At the Kenya Red Cross, I initiated HIV/AIDS prevention program among youths and young adults living in slums by promoting condom use and encouraging abstinence.

A few years later, I decided to advance my studies. Having worked with colleagues who had pursued master's degree programs in the United States and saw how impactful they were, I thought it would be a noble idea to seek their advice and guidance on the best schools and programs. After consultations and applications, I secured admission at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) for a master's public health program. At UTEP, I was fortunate to volunteer and work as a research assistant under Dr. Leah Whigham's mentorship.

In my assistantship capacity, I helped design and evaluate the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) health promotion initiatives in the Paso del Norte region. For example, I evaluated a regional coalition aiming to increase access to healthy food among low-income families in El Paso (which was my master's thesis). I also participated in an internship program at the City of El Paso, where I developed different health promotion and education materials during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While working and studying at UTEP, I developed an interest in interdisciplinary public health practice. Thus, I decided to pursue a doctoral program in health promotion and behavioral sciences. Fortunately, Dr. Whigham moved to UTHealth as an associate professor. Therefore, I thought it was an opportune moment to apply and continue our health promotion work in the region under her mentorship. At UTHealth, besides my course work, I have also volunteered with local health organizations to help them design and evaluate health promotion programs. For example, recently, as part of my practicum, I have helped compile a regional school health coalition report. In this report, I proposed, among other recommendations, to adopt the RE-

AIM framework, which will be helpful to implement and evaluate school health programs and policies in the region and ensure healthy school-going children.

My future goals are to use my doctoral knowledge and skills to support community organizations delivering health promotion programs. In my experience, I have demonstrated my passion for offering technical assistance to health organizations, for example, by designing evaluation plans and promoting partnership initiatives such as coalitions in the region. I also believe children and youth are integral in developing health promotion initiatives. Thus, my goal will be to help community organizations recognize the need for promoting programs targeting the youth and advocate the active involvement of children. For instance, in a current project I am working on with Dr. Whigham, I will propose key improvements to elementary school kids' lesson plans to ensure effective program delivery and promotion of fruits and vegetable intake. I hope the Dr. Delbert Oberteuffer Scholarship Award will help me address my financial hardships to pay tuition fees and enroll next semester.

I appreciate your consideration.