My name is Brittany Jones. I am a second year Master of Public Health student and dietetic intern majoring in Health Promotion and Behavioral Science at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston, Texas. As a first-generation Hispanic who has experienced, both personally and professionally, the impact that food insecurity and lack of nutrition education can have on a community, I have dedicated my career to addressing the nutritional symptoms of poverty, while simultaneously advocating for nutrition equality, equity, and education within food insecure communities.

My commitment to addressing food insecurity through community resource provision, education, and advocacy began early in my undergraduate career. As an undergraduate I directed a nonprofit through Texas A&M University called The Move Initiative. As a director I created and conducted lessons at local elementary schools to teach students the importance of nutrition and physical activity while simultaneously developing a healthy relationship with the two.

Post-graduation I had the opportunity to become a nutrition educator at GEMS Summer Camp in San Antonio, Texas. Here I led hands-on nutrition classes for low-income middle and high school girls. During this time, I also was runner up for Miss Fiesta San Antonio where I used my platform to create awareness around food insecurity in my community and advocate for nutrition education in underserved communities. Additionally, I became a community investments coordinator at the San Antonio Food Bank where I coordinated all food drives and educated donors on the importance of addressing hunger in our local community. Lastly, I was a member of the AmeriCorps: Equal Heart COVID- 19 crisis response team. I was on the front lines, leading the mega food distributions when food insecurity was at its peak during the COVID-19 pandemic. I had the opportunity to work with The New York Times and The San Antonio Express News to shed light on the devasting rates on food insecurity across the country.

Currently, as a graduate student and dietetic intern, I have the opportunity to be a graduate assist, where I TA a Public Health Nutrition Practice course and a Garden for Health course. With this position, I am able to develop educational curriculum as well as co-lecture. Additionally, I have chosen to complete my Integrated Learning Experience (ILE) by developing and leading Lunch and Learns for all UTHealth faculty and staff. This population-based intervention aims to increase daily vegetable consumption in a convenient, simple, and appealing way. I have designed the recipes, class structure, and marketing material in this intervention. Lastly, I regularly attend webinars hosted by the Susan and Dell Center for Healthy Living. These webinars allow me to stay up to date with obesity prevention efforts and state public health policies that are being introduced.

Upon graduation I hope to obtain a position with the Houston Independent School district or the Houston Food Bank as a nutrition educator. I want to use this position to gain crucial experience as well as better understand the needs of the community. This time will also allow me to become a certified diabetes educator. Eventually, I would like to move up to a nutrition director position. My ultimate goal is to become CEO of a food bank or open a farm – to – table bakery and café that doubles as a teaching kitchen and garden for the community. I strive to be in a position where I do not just advocate for change but where I can actually be the change and create a world where food insecurity does not have to exist.

Nutrition equality, equity, and education is powerful yet scarce. Living in one of the world’s most developed nations, food deserts and preventable chronic diseases should not be so common. I firmly believe that basic cooking knowledge and access to nutritious food should be available to everyone and not a privilege that is only attainable by a few. I am dedicating my career to becoming community based Registered Dietitian that provides resources and opportunities to low-income populations, so that regardless of race or socioeconomic status one can live the healthiest life possible. I want to prove that eating healthy is not a chore or another “fad” but a chance to learn and try new things. Finally, I will use my credentials to advocate for nutrition policy that would require nutrition education in schools, as well as policy that will assist in breaking the poverty cycle.

Financially, I am solely responsible for all school tuition and living expenses. While my saving and working is able to assist with some of the daily expenses, to date, I am almost $60,000 in student debt. Receiving the Dr. Mary K. Beyrer Graduate Scholarship will assist in meeting the financial needs of increased rent and bring me one step closer to completing my graduate career. I kindly thank you for your consideration.