

November 8, 2021

Dear Dr. Mary K. Beyrer Graduate Student Scholarship Award Selection Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to introduce myself. I am Megan Williams - a second-year doctoral student and graduate assistant in the Department of Health Science at the University of Alabama (UA). My doctoral focus is sexual and reproductive health in adolescents, especially in college students. More specifically, my concentration has been to explore barriers to sexual health services on college campuses and the identification of methods to prevent sexually transmitted infections.

In addition to a full course load and independent research, for the 2021-2022 academic year I serve as the instructor for two University of Alabama courses: “*Introduction to Public Health (HHE 273)*” and “*Sexuality and Society*”. For these courses I am solely responsible for developing and presenting engaging lectures, creating appropriate assessments, and mentoring students. Students in my HHE 273 class are often at the beginning of their public health careers so I convey information that will benefit their undergraduate and career decisions. My students often ask to meet individually to discuss career path options and seek advice on how to obtain internships and employment opportunities in our field. Being able to develop a deeper relationship with these students and help guide the next generation of public health professionals is a role I highly value.

I am grateful for my UA graduate assistantship as it pays for out of state tuition costs and includes a stipend for teaching and completing research. However, it only partially covers my monthly living expenses. To help me meet my financial obligations I teach the “*Sexuality and Society*” course offered through a different UA department. While this class allows me the opportunity to teach what I am passionate about, it unfortunately diverts my attention from my own doctoral research and studies. The Mary K. Beyrer Graduate Student Scholarship would help offset my unfunded expenses and allow me to be more dedicated to my remaining doctoral requirements.

To stay up to date with the most current information in public health and my research area, I am a member of multiple professional organizations including the American Public Health Association (APHA), the Society for Public Health Educators (SOPHE) and the American College Health Association (ACHA). In APHA, I am a member of the Sexual and Reproductive Health section and the Student Assembly. I was awarded a PHEHP Student Award my research on interventions to reduce STIs in college students and was able to present it at the APHA Annual Conference this October. I was also able to be a moderator for the Student Assembly Maternal and Child Health Poster session. Prior to the APHA conference I was afforded the opportunity to be a Student Section abstract reviewer.

My involvement with SOPHE includes attendance at their national conference online the past two years. I was able to attend this year through receipt of their 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholarship award. I am also an abstract reviewer for SOPHE's upcoming 2022 Annual Conference.

This past June I attended the American College Health Association's national conference for the first time. Furthermore, I was fortunate to be an awardee of the AHCA Student Travel Fund which helped meet my travel cost. At ACHA's conference I received pertinent information about programming methods to target college students and I plan to attend this conference regularly.

My membership in health education organizations includes my own university - University of Alabama (UA). This is my second year as a member of the Eta Sigma Gamma Delta Xi chapter and our sister organization, Hands in Health. I am co-chair of the research sub-committee and I also serve in an officer position as secretary of our executive board. Being one of the few doctoral students involved with this organization (and on the executive committee), I help to lead meetings and help younger members develop leadership skills.

My membership in this chapter requires a minimum of 15 hours of service per semester. This service can involve organizing and attending professional development events, planning, and attending general body and research committee meetings and any advocacy efforts our chapter supports. In addition to supporting the work of our advocacy sub-committee, I strive to stay current with health education advocacy initiatives through social media where I actively attempt to share current events and petition for help from others. I am also involved with the Alabama Campaign for Adolescent Sexual Health initiative which disseminates information about sexual health legislation in Alabama via email and I show my support for improving access to sexual health services as merited.

My research co-chair position involves leading and coordinating tasks regarding our evaluation of the Smoke Free Policy on UA's campus which is currently in the data collection phase. It is my goal that we publish and present the results at a local or national conference in 2022. I am also responsible for directing a new project our chapter has initiated to analyze changes in mental health and sleep in college students before and after COVID using data from the ACHA's National College Health Assessment.

My service to UA also includes providing health education through guest lectures on sexual health for other instructors and presentations such as my discussion titled "Prioritizing Mental Health in College Students" delivered to members of the Alpha Gamma Delta Sorority in September 2021. Furthermore, I was a judge for the Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Conference this past spring. This was an excellent opportunity to learn about projects undergraduate students were involved in and allowed me to broaden my contribution to UA.

My passion for sexual and reproductive health began during my Master of Public Health program at East Carolina University. During this program, I served in roles as a graduate assistant and program coordinator for the North Carolina School Health Training Center (NCSHTC) where I worked under multiple grants organizing and implementing educational

sessions that trained health education teachers in North Carolina (NC) how to teach various sexuality curricula. During this time, I attended over 14 professional development opportunities ranging from the Racial Equity Institute, ETR Masterful Facilitation: Best Practices for Engaging Adult Learners and trainings for certain sexuality education curricula and programs. During my masters I was also a graduate assistant for Health 1000 (an undergraduate personal health course) where I was the instructor of record. In conjunction with the NCHSTC, I helped develop, train other graduate assistants on, implement and evaluate the College Project, a 5-session classroom-based sexuality education curricula distributed in HLTH 1000 classes. For my contributions to this project and my role as a HLTH 1000 GA, I was the inaugural recipient of the Debra Tavasso Most Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award.

My involvement in health education extends to the state level where I completed an internship at the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiatives. My role included reviewing Office of Adolescent Health assessments on LGBTQ Inclusivity, Positive Youth Development and Trauma Informed Approach and making recommendations for improvement to REACH agency coordinators. I hope to explore disparities of sexual health outcomes for LGBTQ youth in the future, specifically access to care on college campuses.

After I receive my doctorate, it is my intention to continue working in public health, specifically in sexual and reproductive health. Within this area, I want to focus on preventing STIs and pregnancy in adolescents and college students through education and research. My long-term goal is to create a sexuality education curriculum for young athletes that includes anatomy and physiology, communication and relationships, puberty (including menstruation), gender and sexual diversity and safer sex practices (including contraception). I intend to begin my post-doctorate career either in a post-doctorate fellowship or as a university professor and contribute to the triad of teaching, research, and community service. I would welcome the opportunity to serve as a health educator in student health and wellness at a university or in a sexual/reproductive health organization implementing and evaluating sexual health curricula.

Regardless of where I end up working, I plan to be involved with the American Public Health Association and/or SOPHE (in the sexual/reproductive health sections) in a leadership role (either as a student representative or in other capacities once I'm in a professional position).

For these reasons referenced above, I ask for your consideration of my contributions to the field of health education and that I show promise of advancing our field in the future. I appreciate your consideration of my application and look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Megan Williams".

Megan Williams, MPH, CHES®  
Doctoral Student & Graduate Assistant  
Department of Health Science  
The University of Alabama