

Dear Selection Committee,

It gives me great pleasure to submit my application to be reviewed for the ‘Dr. Mary Beyrer Graduate Scholarship.’ In my essay prompt, I will discuss my future and educational plans and financial need; and professional meetings attended; and service, advocacy, and organizational memberships, as they relate to health education/promotion.

**Future educational and professional plans and discussion of financial need**

My pursuit of a doctorate in Public Health in Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences has always been focused on my long-term goal of becoming a Public Health leader. Effective leadership in Public Health requires us to consider the social determinants of health, in addition to the biological determinants. Evidence has repeatedly shown us that social determinants of health are the real drivers of the health disparities that we see today. For that reason, my doctoral program has taught me how to develop evidence-based interventions, how to implement them, and how to evaluate them, while simultaneously learning how to engage community members at each stage of the process. For those reasons, I aspire to become a leading researcher at an academic institution and mentor/teacher to first-generation students.

In the short term, I aim to apply to future post-doctoral programs that are focused on Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and Community-engaged research. This is important to me because my dissertation uses similar processes. For example, one of my dissertation studies focuses on understanding older Latinos’ individual and environmental reasons for engaging, or not engaging, in physical activity. For my second dissertation study, I am working to conduct 5 participatory workshops with youth. During the participatory workshops, youth will engage with me as *co-investigators* in a series of organized topics related to healthy living within their community. Topics include geospatial mapping of existing physical activity assets, future vision mapping, and qualitative analysis. In the final workshop, youth will share their research findings with a panel of community health and public health representatives, with the goal of advocating for change in their community.

Being a first-generation doctoral student has come with many challenges, the most significant being financial need. Because the university that I attend does not offer a fully funded doctoral program, I have had to fund my program through scholarships, internships, externships,

fellowships, and student loans. If awarded this scholarship, I would use the money to pay for my tuition, cost of living, or registration fees for a professional conference.

**Professional meetings attended and organizational membership, and service and advocacy**

I am actively involved in the health promotion/health education community! During 2021, I have attended organizational conferences, for which some organizations I am also a member of: Culturally Responsive Evaluation Association Annual Conference (September; not a member), Texas Evaluation Network Annual Conference (September), and American Public Health Association Annual Conference (October), the American Evaluation Association Annual Conference (November); Society for Public Health Education (have yet to attend a conference). Additionally, I have taken a leadership role in the following two organizations: The American Evaluation Association (AEA) and Capacity Catalyst.

In my role at the AEA, I am a Graduate Education Diversity Intern (GEDI) for the 2021 – 2022 school year. The GEDI program is a cohort-based experience and training opportunity for students who are from traditionally under-represented groups in the field of evaluation. The GEDI program aims to expand the pool of graduate students of color, stimulate evaluative thinking in under-representative communities, and deepen the profession's capacity to work in racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse settings. As part of my GEDI internship, I am working with a health foundation in California to lead an evaluation of a health coalition that is working to increase vaccine uptake and health equity in their region.

In my leadership role at Capacity Catalyst – a nonprofit in Austin, TX that connects students and early career professionals who have research and evaluation skills to nonprofits who lack the time and technical skills – I am a Board Member and Extern Alumnus. Board members are responsible for voting on topics that are listed on the quarterly agenda and to also provide guidance to the Executive Director. During my externship with Capacity Catalyst, I worked on an evaluation of a health program that was aimed at increasing healthy food choices for African American mothers in Travis County, TX.

Service and advocacy to the field of health promotion/education are important to me. Earlier this year, I was an abstract reviewer for the 2022 Society for Public Health Education Annual Conference. I was responsible for reviewing six abstracts related to Social Justice and Health Equity. Another example of my service to the health promotion/education field is the time I spent as a volunteer for the *Chronic Disease Working* group, as part of the larger Community

Luna, Elena  
Application for the Dr. Mary K. Beyrer Graduate Scholarship

Health Improvement Plan for Travis County. Our current initiative is a review of the findings for a physical activity media campaign.

Health promotion/education advocacy is another important part of my journey towards becoming a public health leader. During my tenure as a doctoral student, I have volunteered my time and research skills with MEASURE – a nonprofit in Austin, TX that is working to create equitable data plans that can then be used to challenge social justice issues. Part of my work with MEASURE was the creation of the *Austin COVID-19 Community Feedback Survey*, which gathered data from local organizations about what resources they need to provide equitable responses during the COVID-19 pandemic - and the accompanying *Black paper/report*. The *Black paper/report* was disseminated on MEASURE's website and shared across the Austin community.

Another advocacy project that I have worked on was the *Park use, Health, and Needs of Park Users During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. In my role as the Principal Investigator, I wanted to understand how parks were being used during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they supported the physical and mental health of park users. The findings of that research study indicated that parks are 'essential spaces' for safe interactions and physical activity during the pandemic. These findings were shared as part of a report with the funder – Austin Parks Foundation, who responded by providing the recommended safety protections for park users, including hand washing stations and signage about COVID-19 at parks across Travis County, TX.

In conclusion, I do feel that this application highlights my commitment to the field of health promotion/education. I have joined several professional organizations and attend multiple conferences related to our field of study. I have provided service to the field, by way of volunteering my time as an abstract reviewer, working group member for the Travis County Community Health Improvement, and advocate for the advancement of health equity at MEASURE and Capacity Catalyst. I appreciate the committees' time and attention and will look forward to future scholarship opportunities.

Thanks!

-Elena Luna.